David Marsh is a leading expert in CLIL. Following David’s presentation at the 2008 Directors’ Conference on ‘The impact of CLIL in Europe’, I contacted him to find out more.

**Ed:** What is CLIL? Does it cover a single educational approach or many?

**DM:** Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is an educational approach where some content learning (like a topic on global climate, or a subject) is taught in an additional language (such as English language in Korea). It is a single educational approach which involves very different models. In other words, the foundation is the same, but they way in which it is carried out differs – and this depends on what educators want to achieve in a given place and time. It is an innovation, but based on putting together long-standing chunks of good educational practice into special packages.

**Ed:** What are the aims of CLIL?

**DM:** The aims depend on the model used. These may be subtle, as in helping youngsters understand the point of learning a language and developing in the youngsters a positive ‘can do’ attitude towards themselves as language learners. This is crucial in places like Spain and Japan where English is often remote from the real lives of young people. They may be more obvious such as developing advanced language skills. They may be ‘subliminal’ in getting teachers to change teaching practice (content and language teachers), or socially-oriented, in boosting levels of harmony between inter-ethnic groups. In 2001, we carried out a research survey in Europe and were surprised by the range of aims. These can be seen at www.clilcompendium.com

**Ed:** What are the main advantages of CLIL?

**DM:** Positive attitude changes in learners towards learning a language, and towards themselves as language learners. This is a profound advantage. Then there is the question – why? Why are the results so good? We are now thinking that this relates mainly to the emotional dimension of learners; the ways in which CLIL connects them to their own ‘worlds’ using multi-mode technology; and the impact on the brain when language learning becomes ‘acquisitional’, and not just ‘intentional’.

**Ed:** Does CLIL make bilingualism in mainstream education a realistic and achievable aim?

**DM:** Yes, and trilingualism in some very special environments such as in Spain. Back in 1991, when we were exploring ways of giving foreign language learning a boost (in Europe), we faced a problem. Certain languages invited excellent methodologies and materials (English) – whilst others were drab and boring for young people; and educational systems were reluctant to give language learning more time in the curriculum, and so on. And at that time we were toying with using the term Bilingual Education and not CLIL. But bilingual is a loaded word and
is frequently understood differently across countries and educators. The question ‘how long is a piece of string?’ comes to mind when asked whether or not a person is bilingual. Partial language competence is a very important concept now in education, and with this in mind, it is possible to mainstream CLIL, and it is happening right now.

Ed: What is the role of the students’ first language in the CLIL classroom?
DM: It is paramount – and when we look at the little research available we can see reports that exposure to CLIL enhances the first language. This is probably due to the development of metalinguistic awareness. But, remember that CLIL is not just ‘teaching in a foreign language’ – which is a trend surfacing all over the world with English. CLIL involves doing this using specific methodologies and expertise, and these accommodate the first language.

Ed: How much or little of the curriculum needs to be taught in the target language for it to qualify as CLIL?
DM: There is no minimum percentage – it is a question of what happens in the classroom. Small exposure to CLIL, e.g. English language lessons plus one subject (or much of one subject) taught through English can give surprisingly good results.

Ed: What is the youngest age group to have been taught with CLIL? Has it been used with pre-schoolers?
DM: Yes, but remember that good early language learning often follows the same principles as CLIL even if it is called ‘language learning’. In primary and secondary, these principles may be put aside, and this is where the potential of CLIL kicks in.

Ed: What are the implications for first language development?
DM: It depends on which language and where. This is one reason why there are CLIL model variants. For example science and maths in English in Malaysia – now involving over 5m students, has invited a strong debate over potential damage to the Malay language. But back in the 1970s the same argument was raging – and it related to the complexity of concepts in Malay and English when approaching the sciences.

English is a powerful, viral language and in some parts of the world we can see how it acts as a ‘killer language’ (Tove Skuttnab-Kangas). But it is organic – and this gives it power. For a long time France has attempted, through centralised power, to control dimensions of French language creation and usage. This frequently doesn’t work because people and languages are organic – language doesn’t respond well to laws and directives.

CLIL accommodates both first and second language where possible. There is a problem with classrooms which comprise wide linguistic diversity in terms of first languages. But the first languages would be under threat in these cases, with or without CLIL.

As I already mentioned we are getting very positive reports from some European countries that exposure to CLIL strengthens the first language.

Ed: To what extent has CLIL been adopted into the primary school curriculum?
DM: There is much stress at present on early language learning. The boom of the last decade has meant many families purchasing early language exposure to English for their children. Some educational systems have responded to this, others have not. Primary, lower secondary and vocational education, are fertile grounds for CLIL.

Ed: How diverse has the application been in secondary schools?
DM: Very diverse – from nearly 100% in English, through to 5%. The problems arise in higher secondary if examination systems do not recognise learning through a foreign language. Examination bodies act as gate-keepers which affect many types of educational innovation, including CLIL.

Ed: Are there any examples of English-speaking countries adopting CLIL in mainstream education to promote language learning?
DM: Canada is the classic with variants of immersion. Some bilingual education in the USA is close to CLIL. Australia, and now the UK are shifting towards CLIL for learning foreign languages. There is also discussion about CLIL as a concept to further support the teaching of English to migrant children in the UK.

Ed: Do students need a particular level of English to attend a particular class or do teachers have to deal with mixed proficiency classes?

DM: Teachers usually find themselves dealing with mixed-ability classes in terms of language proficiency, and other factors. This is one reason why CLIL methods reach out to cover a broad range of learning style preferences.

Ed: Could a lack of proficiency result in a reduced understanding of the subject?

DM: Yes, but this is the case with the first language. The use of constructivist methodologies, and scaffolding, helps to overcome this situation.

Ed: Do students ever feel frustrated with their inability to communicate in the other language and to be themselves?

DM: I’m sure this happens. I remember once being in a Tanzanian school where children caught speaking languages other than English were sent to stand under the ‘punishment tree’. Likewise I recall a Canadian immersion class in which the adult teacher would not speak in the first language to very young pupils, but used a puppet whenever this became necessary. Each of these is highly undesirable. If you use force, then you will fail in the long-term, especially with the bulk of a student cohort.

When you look at good CLIL methods you will see ‘trans-languaging’ used, which is the systematic use of more than one language. This is one mechanism to diminish such frustration.

Ed: What is the balance between content and language development in the design of a CLIL course?

DM: Content drives CLIL. This is an essential concept, and it is one which often differentiates CLIL from approaches like content-based language education. The balance may differ according to the model, or even according to what is being done in a specific class. It is the blend that matters, not the time attributed to each.

Ed: What other aspects need to be considered? How important are areas like methodology and culture?

DM: These are both integral to course design.

Ed: How is a CLIL subject assessed? Is the language or the subject knowledge assessed?

DM: It depends – a variety of approaches are used depending on the main aims. In some cases there is only formative assessment, and in others there are large-scale tests in the CLIL vehicular language.

Ed: Have any universities adopted CLIL?

DM: Universities are rarely exemplary change agents. There is now a lot of interest in CLIL in higher education across the world for three main reasons. Firstly, the often rapid adoption of English as medium of instruction for degree programmes is causing stress amongst higher education employees. Secondly, the need for these same people to be more pro-active in communicating through English and facing changes in the traditional way of working (e.g. joining international teams for research and development, and using the new technologies as means of communication); and thirdly, the demand of teacher education in CLIL. Does CLIL have any bearing on the first two points here? Yes, but only to some extent. It is very significant for teacher education, however, both initial and in-service. Then there is research on CLIL – a new journal has been founded at www.icrj.eu and major publishers now have research-based publications on CLIL in the pipeline.
Ed: What are the driving forces behind these developments?
DM: Globalisation, globalisation, globalisation. It was Kofi Annan who said that arguing against globalization is like arguing against the laws of gravity – I think the same can now be said of CLIL. It is no longer an idea, a fashion, it is a reality. The socio-economic drivers are very strong.

Ed: Regarding teachers and lecturers, do they need to do a double degree (in their subject and the other language) to become CLIL professionals?
DM: Such degrees are very rare, and often they don’t actually mean that the person has CLIL expertise. You can learn two areas separately and not understand what the type of integration as found in CLIL really means. There is a range of ways of specialising in CLIL in addition to other forms of professional development which are increasingly available.

Ed: Is there greater financial reward for teachers for these extra skills and knowledge?
DM: Usually yes – either financial, or through less teaching hours. CLIL teachers are becoming increasingly attractive and can command better remuneration conditions in certain countries.

Ed: I imagine teachers that are not proficient in the other language may find themselves unable to discuss certain topics or respond to unplanned questions. What strategies are there for dealing with issues like this?
DM: There are a whole range of strategies for handling this sort of situation – often done through team-work. Sometimes, this can actually mean teachers being involved with CLIL who have very limited proficiency in the target language, and who actually use that language in equally limited measure. Cooperation and teamwork can lead to very interesting outcomes in education.

Ed: How do you see CLIL developing over the next ten years?
DM: The uptake of English as medium of instruction will probably contract globally because of the economic situation. But I would guess that we will see expansion of CLIL in both the public and private sectors, particularly as people see the need to leverage quality.

Ed: What opportunities does CLIL hold for an organisation like International House?
DM: As I mentioned before CLIL may not be the ‘ultimate communicative methodology’ but it is going to become an ever greater part of education in the future. This means the possibility of a range of opportunities for major language providers like International House. Frankly, I’m surprised that this hasn’t been picked up on earlier. One reason is probably because CLIL is not an off-the-shelf solution – at the start it is messy – but then so are most forms of breakthrough innovation. I was trained at International House London in the early days of 106 Piccadilly. IH was at the forefront of languages innovation then – is it still? One message I gave at the IH conference in Dublin (2008) was how this opens opportunities for an organisation like International House. The shift towards teaching through the medium of English is massive, and is not likely to diminish too much with the current economic collapse. There is great potential for language education organisations like IH to forge closer links with subject teaching providers, and carve out new markets.

Ed: What can teachers do to find out more about CLIL?
DM: Onestopclil.com is very good for information and materials. www.ccn-clil.eu is soon going to be very good for professional networking. www.clilconsortium.jyu.fi is a small site with information on some of the key experts working now on CLIL.
Author’s Bio:
David Marsh has worked on multilingualism & bilingual education since the 1980s. Now based in Finland, he has extensive experience of teacher development, capacity-building, research and consultancy in a range of different countries in Africa, Europe and Asia. He was part of the team which conducted groundwork leading to the launch of the term CLIL in 1994. He is currently leading an international research team which examines the impact of multilingualism on creativity. During 2008-2010, he acts as Strategic Director for CCN (Europe), and handles various educational development and research initiatives in the European Union & East Asia.