

# LANG matters

*We start* this school year looking once more at the theme of content-based learning covered in the last issue of LANG Matters. For those of you who may be wondering why we've decided to devote so much space to the subject, the reason is the introduction of CLIL (*Content and Language Integrated Learning* – another way of saying content-based learning) into the last year of liceo and the extra fifth year of anyone who wants to attend an IFTS. In language schools, a subject is to be taught in English right from the first year of the secondo biennio.

Our opening article by Prof. Carmel Mary Coonan of the University Ca' Foscari in Venice examines **some practical issues involved in the introduction of CLIL into Italian schools** and is followed by an article, first published on the Guardian website, **discussing CBL in a rather critical key**. Is it really the solution to L2 learning problems? From this, we go on to look at a closely related topic, **ESP, English for special (or sometimes specific) purposes**. Teachers are often expected to teach very specific vocabulary fields using materials which are increasingly technical and specialised, and may even find themselves working in vastly different areas from one year to the next as they change schools. Kieran O'Malley's excellent article on the subject should provide some encouragement for those of you who have to face this kind of problem.

An example of an interesting project for the liceo scientifico demonstrates what can be done **linking literature and science**, while **our reform section looks at work with the new UDA** done at a school in Gravina.

The magazine's new section on reforms has led to us receiving a lot of mail on the subject, but unfortunately we do not have the space at the moment to be able to publish your letters. Please do continue to write to us, however, on whatever topic arises: we feel it is important to hear your points of view and are trying to find a solution that will allow more debate!

*Anna Fresco*  
LANG Publications Project Editor  
Scuola secondaria di I grado  
Scuola superiore

*Heather Bedell*  
Editor LANG Matters

## C O N T E N T S

- ▶ CLIL 2
- ▶ CBL 5
- ▶ ESP 7
- ▶ How to link literature and science 10
- ▶ Riforma: the new UDA 12

# CLIL just a new buzz words?

by Carmel Mary Coonan

Is CLIL becoming the new buzz word for the foreign language teaching profession? Well, maybe not... yet, but the danger is there. It is appearing with ever more frequency (both in Italy and in Europe) and the danger is that it may be used, and applied, without adequate awareness of its characteristics and of the decisions and conditions required for a CLIL experience to be a success. In other words, CLIL experiences run the danger of being emptied of their potential. CLIL might even get itself a bad name! Now this, of course, is something that I and many others working in the field like me would not like. The strengths of CLIL need to be protected from a facile view that sees it as an easy option, a fast route for foreign language competence (swapping languages occasionally will do the trick might be the general gist). CLIL, however, is by no means an easy option, but it is an option that, if thought out well, brings quality not only to the student's learning but also to the school, and to the teachers in particular.

CLIL, an acronym for *Content and Language Integrated Learning*, was devised in the late 1990's<sup>1</sup> to refer to situations of foreign-language (henceforth FL) medium teaching and learning. It highlights a very important issue that the simple expression 'foreign language medium teaching' does not, namely that **the non-language content and that the foreign language be learnt contemporaneously**, the one through the other. It highlights the dual nature of the learning experience. This requires attention, as it does not follow that the FL be learnt merely by students being exposed to it (we have the Canadian immersion studies as evidence of this). Nor does it follow that the content be learnt either – just think of the problems (comprehension and production) that using a foreign language to learn brings with it.

Although CLIL refers to situations in which two (or more) languages are used as mediums in the school curriculum, such programmes belong to the Language Across the Curriculum philosophy that developed in Great Britain in the 1980's.

This philosophy distributes the onus of language development (the language of the school) across the whole curriculum. Thus, just as a geography or history teacher must take responsibility for the quality of language use related to his subject and ensure correctness and functional appropriateness and effectiveness, so the CLIL teacher will do the same – without actually teaching the language in the way that the (foreign) language teacher is expected to do. This totally acceptable idea brings with it, however, a host of issues that must be addressed if the CLIL promise is to be kept. These include:

- willingness (and skill) to work in a team and, if required, to team teach;
- understanding of criteria for language switch, language roles, if a bilingual mode is adopted;<sup>2</sup>
- willingness to change and adapt teaching style in order to create a language-enhanced environment for language growth, and to introduce an experiential dimension that will ensure better conditions for content learning;
- willingness to take a new look at content in order to open up new perspectives on it (a European dimension for example);
- skill in planning to suit the local context and in monitoring for efficacy and acceptability.

In brief, **CLIL represents a new learning (and teaching) environment from the point of view of both the language and the content**: in order for the potential inherent in CLIL to be released

<sup>1</sup> See the time line in "Document de travail", *The Changing European Classroom – Potential of Plurilingual Education*, Luxembourg, 09-11 march 2005, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> The trend now is not to teach a school subject but a module or several modules of that subject in a foreign language. Whatever the case, however, a principled decision has to be made about the presence or otherwise of the school language during the course of the module/school subject. The choice can either be to exclude the presence of the normal school language (in which case there is a monolingual delivery of the content) or to allow the use of the normal school language (in which case there is a bilingual delivery of the content). It is important to establish the role/function of the normal school language in the CLIL module, however, in order to have a clear idea of the amount of time actually 'occupied' by the LS.

careful thought needs to be given to all of the above and more. The introduction of an additional medium language alongside the normal language of the school<sup>3</sup> cannot be considered merely in terms of an 'adjunct' – an appendix, so to speak, tacked on to add 'lustre' to an existing state of affairs. This introduction creates reverberations throughout the whole system according to the 'weight' of the CLIL experience for the school and for the student: what are the goals (why does the school wish to embark with CLIL?)? What content and why?

How does it relate to what is already taught in the school language? What materials are to be used? Do they exist? If so, how to adapt them? If not, how to create them? Who is the teacher? How do the students react to the content teacher using another language? Who chooses the students and for what reasons? Can they opt out? If so, what provision is made for them? Is time made available for co-planning? What are the costs? What is the role of the families? How do the rest of the school staff view the CLIL issue? What expectations are there? What outcomes are envisaged? etc.

Given the complexity and effort needing to be put into the creation of a quality CLIL programme<sup>4</sup> what is it that is driving schools in Italy<sup>5</sup> (and in Europe) to implement them? There are several factors that have led to policy decisions and initiatives at both European and national levels.

There is a strong awareness that the generations of today and tomorrow have a different mindset; their expectations are different; what is (and will be) expected of them is different; they will operate more and more in a global dimension, being immersed in and exploiting the diverse technologies. Essential for these new generations is a **multilingual/plurilingual and intercultural competence** where English is already a given fact



and a focus must now necessarily fall on a second foreign language. Schools and universities must adapt to meet this new challenge. What was suited to children born in the fifties, sixties and seventies is now inadequate. The competence expected of the (small number of) students yesterday is of a different nature for the very large numbers of today (and tomorrow).

**Today competence is measured in levels and in the quality of those levels.** Students need to go beyond BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) – the final aim (ever reached?) of communicative approach teachers to CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency)<sup>6</sup> – a higher order competence, a language for learning, in keeping with the aims of the *White Paper* (1995). In response to this changing orientation, the European Commission

<sup>3</sup> The 'weight' of the language will depend on the length of the experience for the student within the school year, over the school years as well as on the presence of the normal school language within the CLIL programme.

<sup>4</sup> CLIL as a concept encapsulates the very notion itself of quality. However it is possible to have bad quality CLIL programmes if the many issues involved are not considered.

<sup>5</sup> The exact extension of the phenomena in Italy is not known. Most CLIL programmes are taking place at the upper secondary school level, and, excluding the special statute regions, in all regions of the north (Veneto - cf. the MIUR-financed 'Apprendo in LS' training and research programme involving the Laboratorio CLIL of the Università Ca' Foscari, the USR Veneto and IRRE Veneto -, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Lombardia, Piemonte, Emilia Romagna) and Calabria in the south, some CLIL programmes are underway. At a European level a survey has been conducted by Eurydice (2005) where it is stated that: "Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) exists in most countries, but only a minority of pupils currently benefit from this promising methodology".

<sup>6</sup> The distinction is made by Cummins, cf. Baker, 1996. p. 151-154.

has developed initiatives like **Comenius** and **Leonardo**. It has promoted an *Action Plan* where CLIL is seen as a promising tool for the promotion of better language teaching and better foreign language learning (cf. in particular actions 1.2.4 – 1.2.7) and in promoting the objectives of the *Education and Training Programme 2010*, as can be seen from the “Progress Report” December 2004, where it is recommended that: “National authorities should encourage a generalisation of content and language integrated learning (CLIL) by defining the standards of teacher qualification and supporting the preparation of appropriate teaching materials” (p.23).

At the national level, schools are supported in their moves by the law on school autonomy (article 4, comma 3), as well as through the indications provided by the (now defunct) *Progetto 2000*. Above all, however, there is a new drive for CLIL especially on the part of high schools. They are gradually becoming aware of the need to find more time in the school curriculum for foreign languages and realising that CLIL might just fit the bill. Those involved in the preparation of the ‘Nuovi Ordinamenti’ for the Secondary School (latest version of the

legislation, 11 April, 2005<sup>7</sup>) are also persuaded of this possibility specifying that CLIL will figure in the final year of the Licei (except the Classico).

As can be seen, the CLIL question is gathering momentum and is about to enter Italian schools in a more official guise than has been hitherto the case. Thought must now be given to establishing effective strategies for the training of those who, through this legislation, will be involved.

## Bibliography

- European Commission (1995) *White Paper: Teaching & Learning. Towards a Learning Society*. Brussels.
- EURYDICE (2005) *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe*, European Commission, Brussels.
- Directorate-General for Education and Culture (2002) *Education and Training in Europe: Diverse Systems, Shared Goals for 2010*, European Commission, Luxembourg.
- Commission of European Communities (2003) *Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan 2004-2006*.
- European Commission., (2004) *Implementation of the Education and Training 2010, Working Group “Languages”: Progress Report 2004*, Brussels.
- Coonan, C.M. (2002) *La lingua straniera veicolare*, UTET Libreria, Torino.
- Baker, C. (1996) *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, Multilingual Matters, Clevedon.

<sup>7</sup> Consult <http://www.edscuola.it> for updated information on all issues concerning the Italian school system and the reform.

## SITOGRAPHY

### Key legislation

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lang/key/legislation\\_en.html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lang/key/legislation_en.html)

### Key studies

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lang/key/studies\\_en.html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lang/key/studies_en.html)

### Modern Languages Centre in Graz (Council of Europe)

<http://www.ecml.at/>

### Council of Europe: Languages

[http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural\\_co-operation/education/Languages/](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_co-operation/education/Languages/)

### EURYDICE

<http://www.eurydice.org/>

### Programme Education and Training 2010

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/doc/official/keydoc/2002/progobj\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/doc/official/keydoc/2002/progobj_en.pdf)

Carmel Mary Coonan is Associate Professor at the Dipartimento di Scienze del Linguaggio of Università Ca' Foscari in Venice and is Coordinator of the Foreign Language Unit at the SSIS Veneto. She has been working for many years in the field of bilingual education and CLIL participating in European projects on the topic and running training courses at the university since 1997. She runs the Laboratorio CLIL set up to train teachers in CLIL (now an on-line course), to conduct research and run seminars on the diverse aspects of CLIL.

[coonanm@unive.it](mailto:coonanm@unive.it)

[labclil@unive.it](mailto:labclil@unive.it)

# Surviving in ESP

by Kieran O'Malley

## Problems of teaching ESP

Trying to teach a language course in any specialist technical field can be quite a frightening prospect, especially when you are doing it for the first time. You probably do not know the subject very well and may not know anything about it at all. Much of the material you have to deal with – technical descriptions and processes, datasheets etc. – looks alien and sometimes almost completely incomprehensible. You may also face a different set of problems from the students themselves. Although they will have already studied English for several years, they will inevitably have continuing difficulties in their understanding and use of the language: gaps in grammar, comprehension problems in reading and listening, inability to express ideas, etc. However, the fact that they have already “done” the basics of English may make them reluctant to go over the same ground again, doing the same old exercises. They clearly need to improve their language skills, but they also need a fresh approach, giving them a sense that they have moved on.

In addition, some students will be very focussed on the professional skills and knowledge that they want to acquire and may regard other parts of the course, such as foreign languages, as only secondary elements or even distractions from their primary interest and goal.

## Integrating language skills and professional studies

In order to retain the interest of students it is essential to make the work in the foreign language relevant to the more specifically professional studies that they are involved in at the same time. There are obvious ways in which this can be done with regard to the four skills.

**The receptive skills of reading and listening can be centred around the fundamental concepts and processes of the particular technical field.**

They should also deal with other types of material of a more practical nature that students are likely to encounter in the course of their professional lives (handbooks, written and spoken instructions, short lectures, interviews with

experts, product descriptions, catalogue, entries etc.). In most technical fields English has become the predominant language and so it should not be difficult for students to see the relevance of what they are practising to their future careers. Similarly practice of **the productive skills of speaking and writing should be based, as far as possible, on the types of tasks that students may actually be required to carry out during their working lives** (for example, providing explanations, giving instructions, writing short reports, reading and summarizing key ideas, transferring information from English to Italian and vice versa).

**The study of grammar can also be made more relevant by careful selection of the type of structure to be analysed and practised and the context in which this is done.**

The principal focus should be on the types of structure and language which are of particular relevance to technical and scientific use. These might include, for example, structures relating to cause and effect, purpose, obligation and necessity, comparison, probability and conditional



sentences. Particular attention could be paid to subjects such as the expression of numbers, mathematical symbols, dimensions and measurements, word formation and compound nouns (e.g. *information storage system, microchip design technology*). Students can immediately grasp the importance of learning how to understand and use this type of language in their own chosen fields.

The impression should not be given that students are being fed a series of random grammar points; nor should these points be dealt with in an abstract way. Instead **language structures should be presented in specifically chosen contexts where they appear naturally and where their practical usefulness is immediately apparent.** The passive, for example, could be introduced and practised in the context of describing a process, (for example the generation of electricity in a power station). Students will instinctively feel the “need” to use the passive to describe what is happening. The language of obligation and prohibition could be linked to the subject of safety precautions in the handling of electricity, where it is natural to use structures involving *must, must not, have to*, etc.



### Dealing with difficult technical material

Inevitably, at times, the teacher of ESP is going to have to confront material which is intrinsically difficult because of the jargon used and the lack of background knowledge which is taken for granted by the author of the material. There are several things which can be done to ease the problem.

◆ **Work in cooperation with the teachers of the technical subjects.** These specialists will often be able to provide simple explanations of technical concepts and clear up problems and doubts that the language teacher may have over specific details. It may even be possible to organize joint language-technical lessons to handle particularly difficult subject matter. In any case it is important to find out from technical teachers what areas of study classes have already covered to avoid confronting them with a completely new subject, which they may know nothing about, in the foreign language. As a general principle, it is better that students should encounter potentially difficult technical topics first in their mother tongue.

◆ **Encourage students to help with the teaching.** It is almost certainly a mistake to pretend to the class that you know more about the technical subject than you really do. They will very quickly find out the truth and have less respect for you as a result. However, there is no need for any pretence. You are the language expert; nobody expects you to know about the technical side. Acknowledge students' superiority in this area and let them know that there are times when you need their help. You may even find that you can develop techniques to take advantage of your ignorance and draw students into playing a more active role in the lesson, reversing the teacher-student relationship. When you ask students for explanations, it can be a genuine request for clarification of something you do not understand, not the usual artificial interrogation when you already know the answer. Students help you by providing information, you help them by enabling them to express it in a foreign language. This spirit of mutual assistance could create a new atmosphere in the classroom and perhaps lead to a greater sense of student autonomy as well as more cooperation among the students themselves.

### Connecting to the wider world

Teaching ESP is not limited to technical concepts and highly specialized materials, however important they may be. Technical subjects, like electronics, telecommunications or civil engineering, do not exist in isolation; they are part of the wider world and have an important impact upon it. **Newspapers and magazines** are full of articles about the latest breakthroughs in technology, the effects of computers on society, how mobile phones are changing our living habits, and so on. Although sometimes quite technical (depending on the publication), these news articles are not written for specialists, but for the general reader. They **can provide ESP teachers**

with an excellent means of engaging students in analysis and discussion of a variety of aspects of their technical subject but this time from a much broader perspective. The topics are relevant and of interest to the student; the language employed is a standard form of English, much more accessible to both student and teacher.



and experiments but tend to ignore the thinkers who were responsible for them and the situations, often dramatic, in which they occurred.

An ESP course can enhance students' understanding of fundamental ideas by "humanizing" them, revealing something of the personalities behind them. English is in a particularly advantageous position since many breakthroughs have taken place in English-speaking countries and there are contemporary eye-witness accounts of what happened (for example, the inventions of television, the transistor and the integrated circuit; the development of radio and the Internet; the discovery of DNA).

It is also possible to introduce a certain amount of literature into ESP courses without losing the sense of relevancy. Many novels and short stories, especially science fiction, contain passages dealing with the impact of technology on individual people and society as a whole. This can lead to interesting discussion in a similar way to the newspaper articles mentioned above.



There are several other sources of interesting material that an ESP teacher can draw on. The technical books focus on concepts



The article that follows pick up on this theme and describes a project which links physics with the study of a literary text.

Kieran O'Malley is a well-known author of language courses and texts of civiltà. Author for LANG Edizioni of *Gateway to Electricity, Electronics and Telecommunication*, he is currently preparing the new edition to be published in January 2006.



# Lang

Edizioni is pleased to offer details of the TESOL-Italy XXX National Convention to be held in Rome.

#### Contributors to this issue

Carmel Mary Coonan  
Kieran O'Malley  
Lia Perillo  
Maria Alberta Sacchetti  
Kari Smith

#### Editor

Heather Bedell  
e-mail: bedellh@lu.unisi.ch

#### Assistant Editor

Michela Melchiori

#### Design

Silvia Razzini

#### Photographic sources

Archivio Paravia  
Bruno Mondadori Editori

#### Printed by

Grafiche Mek, Milano

#### LANG Edizioni

PBM Editori spa  
Corso Trapani 16  
10139 Torino  
Fax 01175021502

## TESOL - Italy XXX National Convention

September 23rd - 24th, 2005  
Faculty of Engineering  
University of Rome "La Sapienza"  
Via Eudossiana, 18 - 00184 ROMA

# A fresh start

*Encouraging Innovation and Evaluating Change  
Taking First Steps in Language Learning and Teaching  
Promoting Learning through Assessment  
Connecting English Language to Content*

#### TESOL - Italy

via Boncompagni, 2 - 00187 Rome

telephone 06 4674-2432 - fax 06 674-2478

www.tesol.it

e-mail: tesol@usis.it



For details of activities planned for your area, please consult the LANG website or contact the Teacher Support Network in your region.

LANG Website: [www.langedizioni.com](http://www.langedizioni.com)

11

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Home address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ CAP \_\_\_\_\_

School name and address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ CAP \_\_\_\_\_

Topics I would like to read about \_\_\_\_\_

e-mail address \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone number \_\_\_\_\_

Course book I use \_\_\_\_\_

Supplementary materials used \_\_\_\_\_

I would like a LANG agent to visit me at school    YES                      NO

Ai sensi della Legge 675/96, con la presente vi autorizzo esplicitamente al trattamento dei miei dati personali unicamente ai fini amministrativi per l'invio dei materiali di LANG Edizioni al mio indirizzo.

Post or Fax to:  
PBM spa - LANG Matters - Corso Trapani 16 - 10139 Torino - Tel. 0117502111 - Fax 01175021502

RI 0424 07619G

