Special Issue on

CLIL IMPLEMENTATION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CONTEXTS: EXPLORING CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

Volume One

Introduction

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This RPLT Special Issue aims to bring to 'dialogue' different perspectives on research issues related to Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) as an educational challenge. It addresses issues in the area of CLIL both at a national, in Greece, and international level, and deals with concerns, which are relevant to a range of stakeholders, namely educational policy makers, researchers, teachers, material developers. The contributors of this issue report and discuss challenges of CLIL application in diverse contexts, insights in various research undertakings, and issues related to the provision of education and training for CLIL teachers. It is important that understanding the perspectives and responding to the challenges of CLIL method offer potentially powerful new ways for successful and effective implementation at all educational levels.

Taking into consideration Marsh, Marsland and Stenberg, (2001) who maintain that CLIL is about using languages to learn, think and develop as well as the relatively recent birth of this major trend in education which shelters a variety of practices, we decided to place equal emphasis on theoretical and practical routes of CLIL in both European and Greek contexts. It is for this reason that this RPLTL special issue, dedicated to CLIL, is intended to complement issues considered from a theoretical as well as from an empirical and practical point of view, in two volumes.

The first volume aspires to offer a comprehensive view of CLIL, as an innovative method in European and Greek contexts, along with perspectives to content learning, language use and plurilingual awareness in CLIL context, as well as teachers' beliefs about learning in CLIL

classrooms in both primary and secondary educational settings. To this end, Prof Marina Mathaioudakis, Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics at the Aristotle University, provides readers with her insights into the challenges and benefits of implementing the CLIL approach at a global level and talks about her personal experience with CLIL implementation in Greek educational context. She touches upon issues related to CLIL resources, materials and CLIL assessment and highlights the main problems CLIL teachers seem to encounter.

 CLIL has much in common with other language-led approaches such as the Canadian immersion education, content-based instruction (CBI) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Tedick & Cammarata, 2012). As supported by Bovellan (2014), the principles of immersion education and CBI have influenced the teaching of content through a foreign language which has become more common in Europe in the last decades. As a generic term CLIL "refers to any educational situation in which an additional language […] is used for the teaching and learning of subjects other than the language itself" (Marsh and Lange, in Wolff, 2005, p. 11). CLIL method includes a dual focus on language learning and cognition, the construction of safe and enriching learning environments, the use of authentic materials, the enhancement of cooperation among students and teachers (Hammond, 2001) and the promotion of active learning and scaffolding to enhance autonomous learning as Peter van de Craen and Jill Surmont stress in their paper "*Innovative education and CLIL*".

CLIL integrates four interrelated *principles* for effective classroom practice, the '4Cs Framework' (Coyle 2008, p.1) according to which a successful CLIL lesson should focus on the following: 1) 'content', referring to subject matter, 2) 'communication', placing emphasis on appropriate language use, 3) 'cognition', related to the development of learning and thinking processes, and 4) 'culture' lying at the core of this conceptual framework as it enhances awareness of otherness and self and develops pluricultural understanding and global citizenship (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010). In response to Coyle's (2008) '4Cs Framework', Meyer (2010) developed the 'CLIL pyramid model, which includes the following dimensions: a) multifocal lesson planning, b) higher order thinking skills, c) scaffolding skills and strategies, d) multi-modal input, which caters for individual learning styles and accommodates multiple intelligences, e) flexibility concerning modes of interaction, f) intercultural communication (Salaberri Ramiro & Sánchez Pérez, 2012, p. 5, in Griva, Chostelidou & Semoglou, 2015).

As argued in European Commission (2003, p. 8), CLIL is regarded to have highly contributed to the goals of the European Union towards developing multilingual citizens (European Commission, 2003, p. 8), therefore the European Commission (EC) have promoted CLIL as an innovative and efficient tool to develop plurilingual competence among European citizens (EC, 1995). Although CLIL can be realized in any language, in the European context, the most popular language in which CLIL is undertaken is English due to its function as a lingua franca (Juan-Garau, 2008, in Papadopoulos & Griva, 2014).

According to Coyle (2007), CLIL approach has been followed in many countries across the world and as stated in Eyrydice (2012, p 39) "in nearly all European countries, certain schools offer a form of education provision, according to which, non-language subjects are taught either through two different languages or through a single language which is 'foreign' according to the curriculum". Applicable to all levels of education, the forms it can take vary from few hour cross-curricular projects to several month courses (Griva & Kasvikis, 2015). Introducing CLIL approach at all educational levels has been recorded as one of the priorities of EU in acknowledgement of its considerable beneficial aspects (European Commission,

2003, p.8, in Griva, Chostelidou & Panteli, 2014). Greece, however, is one of the few European countries which do not take this kind of provision.

Although CLIL approach has not been officially introduced to the Greek school system as yet, there has been a large number of CLIL pilot projects implemented and researched by schools and dedicated teachers who design CLIL projects and courses on the basis of the demands of their own unique educational/teaching settings as Holmes (2005) suggests. Prof Marina Mathaioudakis, *in her interview,* provides us with her insights into the challenges and benefits of implementing CLIL approach. While talking about her personal experience with CLIL implementation in Greek educational context she reports that in Greece, CLIL has started making its way as an educational challenge in primary and secondary education, in the past 5-7 years.

With a large number of *benefits* recorded, Marsh and Frigols (2007, p 33) view CLIL as "a catalyst for change in language education" as Peter van de Craen and Jill Surmont also support in their paper "*Innovative education and CLIL*". These benefits include improvement in learners' speaking skills (Dalton-Puffer & Smit, 2007; Korosidou & Griva, 2016), great gains in relation to receptive and productive lexicon, specifically with regard to academic vocabulary (Dalton-Puffer & Smit, 2007; Lasagabaster, 2008) and enhancement of students' cognitive skills and reading comprehension ability (Tsai & Shang, 2010).

Furthermore, considerable positive effects on language learning and knowledge acquisition in particular subject areas have been reported in the last decades, according to Lasagabaster (2008). More specifically, students attending CLIL classes seem to significantly improve in content knowledge of a particular school subject (Stoller, 2004, Serra, 2007). Also, students are provided with opportunities for being exposed in an authentic learning environment (Troncale, 2002), and this is likely to result in their higher motivation through their willingness to be involved and participate. Nataša Bakić-Mirić and Davronzhon Erkinovich Gaipov offer insights into how authentic learning situations help students achieve maximum learning performance in English for Specific Purposes in their paper "*Open to Interpretation: Multiple Intelligences Teaching Approach in English for Specific Purposes*". Moreover, Aleka Anastasiadou and Konstantina Iliopoulou reveal that CLIL fends for all learning styles and Multiple Intelligences in addition to building subject knowledge and enhancement of a second/foreign language mastery, in their contribution *"Reconceptualising schooling: Implementing CLIL to cater for all types of Multiple Intelligences"*.

Finally, a significant advantage of introducing CLIL is brought about with regard to students' cultural awareness (Griva & Kasvikis,2015; Pavlou & Ioannou, 2008; Judith, 2010), as they come in touch with cultural elements and have the opportunity to "build intercultural knowledge and understanding" (Gimeno, et al., 2013) through their participation in culture-based topic projects. There has been a great interest in enhancing multilingualism and multiculturalism in current European society and CLIL, having emerged since the millennium as a major trend in education, is proposed, to this end, as a valuable educational approach (Järvinen, 2007, p.254). Aine Furlong and Merces Bernaus address the issue of culture dimension in the CLIL classroom and bring out the value of CLIL and plurilingualism integrated approach in instructional contexts, in their contribution "*CLIL as a plurilingual approach or the language of real life and language as carrier of culture*".

Despite the numerous benefits of adopting CLIL approach there seems to be a great deal of hesitation and uncertainty on the part of the teachers due to a number of *discouraging factors* which include its complexity, the issue of who is to teach CLIL, the teacher overload,

since there is shortage of CLIL materials and finally CLIL assessment as the manifold possibilities to arrange it need to be still explored (Johnstone, 2000). An interesting perspective of CLIL assessment is offered by Makrina Zafiri and Keti Zouganeli in their article "*Toward an understanding of Content and Language Integrated Learning Assessment (CLILA) in Greek Primary Schools*" where they propose the development of an assessment framework which encompasses CLIL assessment and methods that exploit existing resources in both Greece and Europe. Findings of research conducted by Eugenia Iskos and Camilla Ralls, offered in their contribution "*Application of CLIL for very young learners of English: What are the teachers doing at a private school in Greece*?" reveal that barriers to CLIL for the teachers are mostly a need for collaboration with others as well as time and planning, and indicate that CLIL is an integral part of their teaching practices for very young learners*.

There is finally the problem of insufficient understanding of content through the medium of foreign language and the requirement on the part of the teacher for both language and subject knowledge. Research findings on various aspects of CLIL teacher language and the discourse characteristics of CLIL teacher language are offered by Mary Spratt in "*CLIL teachers and their language use*" where she makes recommendations for CLIL teacher language training as part of their professional development. To cope with the aforementioned problems the *CLIL teacher* is in need of special training due to the demand for planning CLIL lessons which "requires a different approach from tried and tested practice embedded in either subject disciplines or foreign language study" (Coyle, 2006, p.11). CLIL training, as discussed by Mehisto, Frigols and Marsh (2008, pp.232-236), includes the enhancement of CLIL teacher ability to create rich and supportive target-language environments. Discussing the profile of CLIL instructor in Greece, Marina Mathaioudakis and Thomai Alexiou highlight the need for teacher education programmes in their contribution "*Sketching the profile of the CLIL instructor in Greece*".

Niemi (2004, p.190, in Bovelann, 2014) maintains that there is a significant connection between teaching materials and learning results therefore the teacher's role in designing them is vital. The difficult challenge that CLIL teacher is confronted with lies in the balance required between the content and language as there is shortage of relevant materials and resources. As highlighted by Prof Marina Mathaioudakis, *in her interview*, the main problems that teachers seem to encounter are the lack of CLIL teaching material and the absence of training. Additionally, further research on CLIL materials is suggested, from a design and a task perspective (Coyle et al. 2010, p. 147). CLIL training also aims at enabling teachers to make input comprehensible, to effectively use teacher-talk, to promote student's comprehensible output and attend to diverse students' needs (Mehisto, Frigols & Marsh, 2008, pp. 232-236).

At this point, we express our belief that the aforementioned discouraging conditions can be overcome with the contribution and support of educational authorities in the light of related research studies and therefore we have undertaken this special RPLTL issue on CLIL. We also believe that there is a significant future for CLIL development in both European and Greek contexts. Peter van de Craen and Jill Surmont in "*Innovative education and CLIL*" argue that CLIL is considered to be an important driver for educational change as, since the mid-nineties, it has been introduced in Europe as a reaction to poor results regarding language teaching and learning, aiming to promote the internationalization of education which is one of the CLIL classroom goals.

Concluding, it is expected that through the publication of this RPLTL special issue on CLIL, we can contribute to a further in-depth understanding of CLIL. The contributions provide

perspectives from different angles to the above concerns, since they highlight some key issues in CLIL, demonstrate that this method could be fruitful to language development and content knowledge for various purposes in different contexts, stressing, however, the need for teacher training and raising at the same time important questions about the identifiable ways and limits CLIL needs to have in manifesting itself. We hope that these studies will prove useful to researchers and practitioners, send strong messages to policymakers in education and inspire future research in this direction in Greece and elsewhere.

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