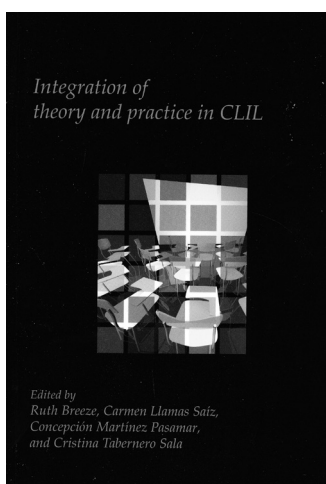


Integration of theory and practice in CLIL

Breeze, R.; Llamas, C.; Martínez Pasamar, C. and Taberero, C. (2014).
Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi.

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Not so long ago, publications about CLIL were focused on supporting its implementation and convincing educational stakeholders to embrace its principles as an effective pedagogical approach. Advantages and benefits were still proposed without no empirical basis, and teachers had to imagine how a CLIL lesson could be conducted. Nowadays, early experiences in Europe are producing reliable results regarding the impact of this implementation. It is now the time to check whether the purported benefits CLIL promised have become true. *Integration of theory and practice in CLIL* by Breeze et al. (2014) contributes to an essential body of literature interested in reflecting on the impact of CLIL with the main aim of improving its implementation. The volume is divided into two parts: the first revolves around technical and theoretical issues, and the second deals with experimental analysis and case studies.

The first chapter is authored by Prof. Halbach (Universidad de Alcalá, Spain), who makes a necessary reflection on the role that EFL subjects should have in CLIL programmes. Her position goes beyond making a case for collaboration between content and language teachers to calling for a revision of contents and strategies for a more literacy-oriented practice in the EFL subject. In my opinion, this may be the Trojan Horse of CLIL, as many schools have changed their methodology to become more active, communicative and learner-centred in content subjects, whereas EFL still remains in the grammar/vocabulary area.

Ahern (Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain) explores the roots of CLIL by 'delving' into the history of foreign language teaching, and exploring the whys and wherefores of CLIL, and the reasons why it has been established as a main pedagogical approach. The author discusses how CLIL has catered for the need to provide 'content' to the teaching of a language, which serves not only to contextualise the use of language, but also as a primary focus for both teachers and learners. Ahern then highlights the need to

emphasise the role of language in CLIL and to train teachers to develop it appropriately, especially in Primary Education “where the foundations are laid in learning” (30). For this purpose, the use of ready-made programmes and pedagogies, such as the genre-based approach, is proposed as a way to improve CLIL practice.

From the perspective of communicative competences and their importance in the development of successful learning in CLIL contexts, Zarobe (Universidad del País Vasco, Spain) and Zenozt (Universidad Pública de Navarra, Spain) revise the importance of strategy training in reading through empirical research, while also stating that reading is a neglected area which needs to be highlighted in CLIL contexts. More importantly, they highlight the role CLIL can have in improving educational quality, not only in terms of linguistic development, but also in demonstrating a rich repertoire of learning strategies or knowing and using multicultural skills.

Surmont et al. (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium) deal with the tricky question of evaluating students in CLIL programmes. Their reflection is supported by recent studies which show that not all communicative competences are equally favoured in CLIL contexts, as oral production seems to be the most developed. Also, they highlight the cognitive dimension of CLIL, as it is generally ‘undervalued’. One of the most striking conclusions is that language gifted students are not especially benefited by CLIL, whereas the not so gifted are. In my view, this may be caused by the use of scaffolding techniques, which enable less able students to reach the goals established for the whole group by giving them opportunities to learn in a variety of ways. This finding will go against those who claim that CLIL has been designed just for elite groups of students who are generally talented.

The second section of the volume is opened with a chapter written by Rumlich (Universität Duisburg- Essen, Germany). It reports on a quasi-experimental longitudinal experiment with 1300 CLIL and non-CLIL students. The author claims that the CLIL population in Germany is self-selected prior to entry, and that similar studies indicate a “head start of the CLIL group with respect to language proficiency and affective-motivational learner characteristics” (83). Results show that CLIL students’ interest is higher than non-CLIL students and that girls display more interest than boys.

Pérez-Ibáñez (Moses Brown School, Providence, USA) argues that task-based and problem-based learning can be effectively used to design CLIL strategies and justifies their use by providing an example. The author establishes a bridge between methodologies which can fit into the CLIL scheme because they demand students to adopt an active role in their learning process, and contextualise language in a communicative environment. In general terms, the chapter contributes to this idea of CLIL as an ‘umbrella term’ which can encompass different methodologies. In the same line, Jiménez et al. (Universidad de Navarra, Spain) present two case studies in secondary education to demonstrate how the use of some innovative techniques, namely drama and situated writing match, can have a positive role in the CLIL classroom.

Lasagabaster (Universidad del País Vasco, Spain) discusses whether a teacher's background influences students' foreign language learning. To study this aspect, he presents the case study of two teachers, a content teacher and a CLIL teacher, and measures their impact on the students' motivation and perception about their language improvement. Results show that the students' motivation is not influenced by the teacher's background. However, the students perceived that the CLIL teacher was more aware of language in class, but did not claim any specific improvement in their communicative competence because of this. In the conclusions, the author highlights an important aspect which has been subject to debate in other publications in the area, regarding the importance of making teachers' theories explicit, and paying attention to language form in class.

Breeze (Universidad de Navarra) is interested in studying students' listening and coping strategies at university and their influence on academic performance. She reports on an empirical study carried out with students taking English-Medium programmes in Law and Medicine at the Universidad de Navarra. The results show a significant correlation between the listening scores and the grades students obtained, although some caution is shown when saying that "language is not the only factor that determines academic success" (156). Also, listening scores influenced student satisfaction and their perception of being able to cope with the subject. As one of the main conclusions, Breeze proposes a B2 CEFR level as the cut-off point to allow entry in a bilingual programme, while also indicating specific areas which maybe cause difficulties when planning a lecture, thereby pointing to the need of more strategic training.

Barbero and González (Universidad de Cantabria) describe the creation of a Language Policy Plan at the Universidad de Cantabria. In their research, they interview Primary and Secondary teachers to gather information about the key issues in CLIL practice. With the information obtained from these participants, the authors present a "Decalogue" which they have applied to train teachers working at tertiary level. One of the most interesting aspects of this chapter is that it considers the links between different educational levels and how the experience of teachers working on one stage can be of use for teachers in a different educational area, thereby highlighting the idea of 'building bridges' across educational stages.

All in all, this volume covers a wider range of aspects, but also indicates areas which are now opening as interesting future research lines which need to be explored further. This is the case of the role of English language subjects in CLIL programmes, or the need for reinforcing and integrating learning strategies as part of the teaching content in CLIL subjects across all educational levels. In any case, this volume is a testimony that CLIL is not taken for granted, and that efforts are made to improve their implementation in the classroom as well as to clarify theoretical aspects which help us identify it in practice. As CLIL programmes advance in Europe, further publications similar to this one will appear in the following months, as the CLIL story continues to evolve.