Team Teaching and CLIL Methodology

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Abstract

This paper investigates team teaching within the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) methodology in lower secondary education in Italy, focusing on the collaboration between language and content subject teachers in designing and implementing CLIL pathways.

The discussion begins with an overview of the CLIL methodology's emergence in the plurilingual and pluricultural European context, with particular attention to its application in Italian schools.

Next, the paper focuses on the training of CLIL teachers in Italy and on the collaboration between language teacher and subject teacher, forming the so-called team teaching CLIL.

An illustrative example of a CLIL module, co-developed by English, Art, and History teachers, from an Italian lower secondary school, is provided, and the opinions of the teachers involved, gathered through interviews, are briefly presented regarding the educational pathway undertaken. These reflections offer insights into the educational process and the challenges encountered.

The paper concludes by deriving methodological recommendations for CLIL teacher training, emphasizing the importance of effective collaboration between content and language teachers for the successful implementation of CLIL methodology.

Keywords: CLIL methodology, Team teaching, Teaching foreign languages, Teacher training

1. Introduction

This paper examines team teaching in CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) methodology within the context of lower secondary education in Italy, with the aim of understanding the role of language and content subject teachers in designing CLIL educational pathways by exemplifying an English-language CLIL module.

We begin by discussing the emergence of the CLIL methodology within the plurilingual and pluricultural environment that characterizes the European context, and we focus on the use of this methodology in Italian schools system. Next, we address the training of CLIL teachers in Italy and highlight the importance of collaboration between content subject teachers and foreign language teachers, who together form the so-called CLIL team teaching.

Then we provide an example of a CLIL module, designed and implemented collaboratively by a CLIL team teaching consisting of English, Art, and History teachers from an Italian lower secondary school. Finally, we briefly present the opinions of the teachers involved in the implementation of the CLIL module, gathered through interviews, regarding the educational pathway undertaken.

From the description of activities and the teachers' reflection, we aim to derive methodological suggestions for the CLIL teacher's training and the effective implementation of the CLIL methodology in the Italian school system, emphasizing the importance of collaboration between content subject teachers and language teachers.

2. CLIL Methodology in the Italian School System

The advent of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism in the language policies of the Council of Europe has led to the development of so-called pluralistic approaches, which aim to integrate multiple languages, or varieties, and cultures into teaching activities and curricular planning (Candelier *et al.,* 2012). The pluralistic approaches take into account and enhance the plurilingual repertoire of each learner and exploit students' metalinguistic awareness and their plurilingual experiences to acquire one or more target languages (Cenoz & Gorter, 2013).

In this perspective, the concept of Content and Language Integrated Learning and its acronym CLIL was introduced. The term was coined in 1994 by David Marsh and Anne Maljers to describe a teaching methodology aimed at promoting the development of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism through the integrated teaching of non-linguistic content in an additional language, i.e. a second or a foreign language (Marsh, 1994).

The acronym CLIL, which has easily become popular in the field of language teaching, is considered as "a generic 'umbrella term', encompassing a wide range of initiatives in which the learning of second/foreign languages and other subjects has a joint curricular role in education" (Marsh & Marsland, 1999: 9). In this regard, we refer to the vehicular use of the foreign language, in which the language serves as both a medium and a tool for the transmission and acquisition of disciplinary knowledge (Coyle *et al.,* 2010).

The CLIL methodology offers numerous advantages, as it fosters the development of linguistic-communicative skills and disciplinary competences within an engaging and

motivating context. This approach is widely referenced in European educational policy documents as one of the key strategies to promote plurilingualism, as well as to innovate and improve foreign language teaching.

The effectiveness of the CLIL methodology in enhancing language competence primarily stems from increased exposure to the foreign language. CLIL lessons provide students with more frequent and intensive contact with the foreign language, supplementing traditional language lessons. Additionally, CLIL offers higher quality exposure to the language due to the use of more authentic language materials, content, and interaction. Unlike traditional language classes, where materials may be "pseudo-real", CLIL employs real-world content, fostering genuine language use (Wolff, 1997: 11). This authenticity enhances cognitive and emotional engagement, while the complexity and variety of texts and activities promote richer linguistic and conceptual learning. Furthermore, the use of foreign language in CLIL ensures greater mutual comprehension, with teacher-student interactions facilitating meaning negotiation, which aids language acquisition (Coonan, 2012; Coyle *et al.*, 2010; Dalton-Puffer, 2008).

In the past three decades, in line with European recommendations, interest in CLIL has spread across the educational systems of various countries, including Italy (European Commission, 2017): since the mid-1990s, experimental programs involving the teaching of disciplinary content in a foreign language have been implemented in Italian schools.

Legislative frameworks, such as the Presidential Decree n. 275 on school autonomy, have provided flexibility for Italian schools to introduce interdisciplinary and foreign language instruction (DPR, 1999). In addition, the Ministry of Education Guidelines emphasize the benefits of learning multiple languages and integrating them into the study of other subjects (MIUR, 2007). These guidelines provide the flexibility for individual institutions to autonomously establish disciplinary teaching programs in a foreign language.

Since 2010, with the Presidential Decree n.89, CLIL was introduced into the Italian school system and became mandatory in the final year of high schools and technical institutes, and starting from the third year, in language high schools (DPR, 2010).

Regarding other school levels, such as preschool, primary, and lower secondary schools, no specific regulation is yet available to make CLIL mandatory. However, as reported by the Ministry of Education, schools of every level have initiated experiments with content delivered in a foreign language based on their didactic autonomy.

In a study on foreign language teaching in Italy published by INDIRE – the National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research – it was noted that CLIL is most widespread in upper secondary schools, largely due to compliance with regulatory requirements (Cinganotto *et al*., 2022). However, there are also teaching experiences at other educational levels. The National Curriculum Guidelines for early childhood and primary and lower secondary school also recognize the potential of using foreign languages to teach disciplinary content, aligning with the broader goals of multilingual and intercultural education (MIUR, 2012).

In addition, to support CLIL's development, networks of schools have been created, sharing best practices and resources while providing teacher training. Initiatives like the "CLIL Excellence" and "E-CLIL" projects promote the use of digital tools and innovative teaching methods. These projects, endorsed by the Ministry of Education, aim to foster interdisciplinary CLIL modules and encourage collaboration between language and non-language subject teachers. The formation of these networks has expanded the CLIL methodology's reach, ensuring its continued growth in Italian schools (Gilardoni, 2022) (Note 1).

2.1 CLIL Teachers' Training in Italy

The introduction of the CLIL methodology requires the acquisition of new skills by content subject teachers, who are involved in CLIL programs; these teachers are called "non-language subject teachers" to mean teachers who teach subjects other than foreign languages. These educators must develop linguistic competences to teach their subjects in a foreign language, in addition to mastering specific methodological strategies to facilitate the integrated learning of language and content. As a result, training courses have been established at universities and other institutions, aimed at equipping non-language subject teachers with the required competences.

The Ministerial Decree n.6 stipulates that the CLIL teacher must not only possess disciplinary and linguistic skills, but also methodological and didactic skills (MIUR, 2012). This emphasizes the centrality of the methodological aspect in the creation and implementation of CLIL courses, which must be consistent with the classroom context and disciplinary objectives and appropriate to the language level of the students. Furthermore, the same decree states that training courses are intended for teachers qualified to teach in upper secondary schools, where CLIL instruction is mandatory by law. However, there is also provision for offering courses for lower secondary schools, as specified by the Presidential Decree n. 275 emphasizing that CLIL is also a valid approach in lower educational levels (DPR, 1999).

From a teacher training perspective, the Ministry's 2016-2019 Teacher Training Plan underscored the importance of implementing CLIL methodology programs across all school levels, with the aim of expanding the educational offering through the delivery of content in a foreign language in primary and secondary school classes (MIUR, 2016).

As of the Ministerial Decree n.1511, teachers of the different school levels of non-linguistic disciplines have the opportunity to access training courses for teaching content in foreign languages in order to acquire new skills (MIUR, 2022). This also allows teachers in primary and lower secondary schools to train and specialize.

In the referenced documents, as well as in *The CLIL Teacher's Competences Grid and The European Framework for CLIL Teacher Education* (2010), a European document aimed at providing "a set of principles and ideas for designing CLIL professional development curricula", the profile of the CLIL teacher is outlined through a series of descriptors that capture the essential skills and competences required to effectively implement the integrated teaching of language and content (Marsh *et al.,* 2010: 3). The skills identified concern the

linguistic, disciplinary, methodological and IT fields.

The CLIL teacher is required to have a foreign language proficiency at the C1 level of the CEFR. In addition, they must possess linguistic competences adequate for managing disciplinary materials in the foreign language and demonstrate mastery of the subject microlanguage. The quality of instruction is therefore closely tied to the teachers' linguistic competence, as they must be able to use the language flexibly to adapt their discourse to the diverse needs of students. Specifically, the ability to strategically employ the foreign language is crucial in ensuring the accessibility of disciplinary content (Coonan, 2012).

In the disciplinary domain, the CLIL teacher must be able "to identify the appropriate content to be taught and obstacles to content learning" and to apply disciplinary knowledge in alignment with the educational framework outlined by the curricula of the relevant school subjects (Marsh *et al*., 2010: 19).

Additional competences include the ability to independently design a CLIL curriculum, utilizing methodologies and strategies aimed at promoting learning through the foreign language and making content subjects accessible to learners by adapting teaching practices to accommodate students' diverse needs and language competences.

According to Barbero (2012), assessment is given significant importance in the CLIL framework, as teachers play a crucial role in aligning specific learning goals with appropriate tools and strategies: they identify students' prior knowledge and facilitate reflection on learning objectives. Through the use of both formative and summative assessments, CLIL teachers support the development of content knowledge, language proficiency, and learning skills. Additionally, they incorporate self-assessment and peer-assessment techniques to foster learner autonomy and address potential challenges in assessment, ensuring that evaluation is both fair and effective.

Finally, CLIL teachers are expected to possess the skills necessary to design and source teaching materials, as well as to create learning activities for students, including the effective use of digital tools and IT.

The outlined requirements clearly emphasize the importance and centrality of methodological and didactic competence among subject teachers engaged in CLIL programs, who are expected to manage, guide, and assess the integrated learning of both language and content.

In addition to the listed characteristics, the CLIL teacher must also be capable of develop cooperative networks among colleagues aimed at selecting, creating, adapting, and providing access to learning materials or developing educational resources, as well as facilitating access to learning environments (Marsh *et al.,* 2010).

2.2 The Collaboration Between Language Teacher and Subject Teacher: The Team Teaching in CLIL

Team teaching refers to the collaboration between two or more teachers in the planning or delivery of content (Davis, 1995). Some definitions of the term are broader, encompassing the ways in which teachers exchange ideas, discuss, and cooperate, leading to professional

growth (De Maurissens, 2018; Härkki *et al*., 2022).

We can affirm that, depending on the team members' teaching styles, the planned educational objectives, and the predetermined time frames, the organization of teaching, approaches, and methods used can vary.

In the school context, team teaching is often employed because it integrates the diverse knowledge and skills of teachers, promotes interdisciplinary teaching, and overcomes a fragmented view of knowledge (Menegale, 2014).

From the students' perspective, the literature highlights that team teaching is perceived as beneficial for increasing motivation and fostering active participation in the classroom (Khoirul *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, students report feeling more comfortable during the learning experience, with a consequent reduction in the perception of monotony in studying (Maija, 2023). For this reason, in CLIL methodology, collaboration between the content subject teacher and the foreign language teacher, who acts as a support, is common. They harmonize their methods, styles, and teaching techniques to ensure effective teaching and professional development (De Maurissens, 2018).

Both European documents and Italian CLIL regulations describe team teaching as a factor that can positively contribute to lesson planning and delivery, even though it is not mandatory (Marsh *et al*., 2011). The CLIL Transitional Norms for High Schools and Technical Institutes highlight that the synergies between subject and language teachers can provide valuable and essential tools for analyzing the class profile in relation to linguistic and communicative competences and for shared planning that fully responds to students' educational needs, as well as suggesting CLIL teaching techniques and methods (MIUR, 2014). Additionally, these documents emphasize the importance of cooperation between subject and language teachers in CLIL course planning, as well as with any conversation assistants or linguistic experts, if present.

Menegale (2014) outlines the essential conditions for effective team teaching in the CLIL context, arguing first that it is crucial for the team to be self-selected by the teachers rather than imposed by the school administration. The author suggests that team collaboration requires strong affinity among members, developed through a deep understanding of oneself and colleagues. Reflection on individual characteristics helps identify the team's strengths and weaknesses, improving collaboration.

The decision to engage in team teaching is influenced by the teachers' willingness to question their own teaching styles, modify strategies, and collaborate with a colleague. Moreover, it is crucial for teachers to have an interest in each other's subjects to ensure productive collaboration. After forming the team, it is necessary for the teachers to define roles for planning and delivering lessons, clarifying who handles specific tasks and how classroom co-presence is managed. Establishing mutual support and flexibility in roles is vital to avoid issues and ensure effective collaboration.

According to De Maurissens (2018), three areas of exchange emerge from CLIL team teaching: teaching methods and techniques, teaching styles, and professional development.

The author argues that teachers in the team move away from the traditional 'one teacher, one classroom' approach and adopt more collaborative and innovative methodologies, such as lab-based teaching, peer-to-peer learning, and debate. This approach requires teachers to confront and harmonize their teaching practices, balancing individual perspectives with cooperative ones.

Each teacher in the team teaching CLIL, by contributing their teaching expertise and the characteristics of their subject area, helps make the teaching process effective and complete. The CLIL team collaborates in lesson planning, selecting topics, setting disciplinary and/or linguistic objectives, designing activities and teaching materials, and, finally, in assessment.

It is evident that working in teams with colleagues can also present challenges. Among the primary obstacles identified by researchers in recent studies on team teaching are the practical difficulties associated with the method, stemming from educators' limited understanding of how to effectively teach collaboratively (Maija, 2023). For this reason, proper training and the sharing of experiences are essential. While differences in teaching styles may be relevant, they should be openly discussed and addressed through careful listening, negotiation, and compromise, without forgetting that the ultimate goal is to create a stimulating and innovative learning environment for students (Härkki *et al.,* 2022).

3. A CLIL Module for the Secondary Lower School: An Experience of Team Teaching

In this section, we present the proposal for a CLIL educational pathway designed and implemented by a team of subject and foreign language teachers within the context of a lower secondary school in Italy. The team teaching experience took place during the 2022/23 school year with various classes of students aged 12 to 13, whose level of communicative linguistic competence in English ranged from A2 to B1 (Note 2).

The proposal involved instructional modules developed by a team of History, Art, and English teachers and delivered in the classroom using the CLIL methodology. The CLIL module, consisting of 13 hours of classroom activities and language lab activities, culminated in a school trip connected to the historical and artistic themes addressed in class.

3.1 The Organization of the Educational Pathway and Learning Activities

The work of the team teaching CLIL began with the definition of the educational objectives and the topics to be addressed in class or in the laboratory, relating to the different disciplines involved.

In History, the objectives included understanding the key spatiotemporal and sociocultural coordinates of the Victorian era, the British Empire, and the Second Industrial Revolution, whereas for Art, the learning objectives focused on exploring the characteristics of the 19th-century industrial city and learning the basic functions of SketchUp, a software used for creating 3D models.

As for the linguistic-communicative objectives, the English teacher involved aimed to expand the vocabulary related to the discussed topics, develop the ability to express cause and effect, review the use of the simple past tense, and introduce a topic in British culture and literature:

the English author Charles Dickens.

The teaching materials used were diverse in nature. During the explanation phase, Canva presentations with images and keywords were created as a visual aid to highlight fundamental concepts. The activities also involved extensive use of online resources, including the SketchUp software, YouTube, the Wordwall website (for quizzes).

The pathway, entirely conducted in English, was organized as follows: four hours of introductory lessons on the historical and cultural context; two hours of practical laboratory work using the SketchUp software; two hours dedicated to creating a model of an industrial village on the computer; one hour of group review activities; and four hours of assessment through oral presentations in English.

The lessons on the historical and cultural context, conducted in the classroom, began with a warm-up phase designed to engage students and provide the necessary vocabulary for the topic. This phase included various teaching techniques, such as brainstorming with the help of images and matching specific terms with their translations to help students memorize specialized vocabulary.

The central phase of each lesson involved an explanation period, supported by Canva presentations to guide student comprehension. The teachers actively involved the students during the explanation through various types of questions. On the one hand, questions were aimed at drawing attention to lexical or content-related aspects; on the other hand, questions were used to stimulate students' opinions and reflections.

At the end of each lesson, the teacher administered a brief oral quiz on the topics covered, conducted collaboratively and playfully.

The lesson on Charles Dickens included the reading of an excerpt from *Hard Times*, in which the author describes the fictional city of Coketown. The passage, which presents a language level complex for the students' linguistic-communicative abilities, was read and translated collectively with the support of the teacher. Students were then invited to reflect briefly on the text, guided by the teacher's questions, identifying the characteristics of the industrial city: these characteristics were later used as guidelines for creating the model of an industrial village using the SketchUp software.

As for the laboratory activities, the basic functionalities of SketchUp were first introduced, and then the students created models of an industrial village using the software, with the aim of digitally reproducing the city of Coketown as described by Charles Dickens.

The evaluation phase was preceded by one hour of review, during which students worked in groups to create posters with keywords and images. Each group focused on a specific topic and briefly presented their work. Finally, an oral assessment of the acquired knowledge was conducted, also in English. This evaluation method was chosen considering the good level of most students, which allowed them to express themselves in English, summarizing the key points of the work and the topics addressed, albeit with simple sentences.

At the conclusion of the CLIL teaching activities, a school trip was organized to Crespi

d'Adda, an Italian former industrial and workers' village, now a UNESCO World Heritage site. Thanks to the visit to Crespi d'Adda, the students were able to observe in a real-world context some of the peculiar aspects of the industrial village that had been discussed during the classroom lessons.

3.2 The Teachers' Point of View

The teachers involved in the design and implementation of the CLIL module were asked, following the experience, to respond to several questions in order to highlight the outcomes achieved and any challenges encountered.

Firstly, all the teachers involved reported having achieved the knowledge and skill objectives identified during the planning phase, and they observed a positive response from students towards the educational proposals. This outcome was attributed to the opportunity for students to approach certain topics from a multidisciplinary perspective, the use of diverse teaching activities, and the integration of technological resources that stimulated students' interest and active participation, thereby facilitating the learning of historical, artistic and literary content and English language skills.

Teacher interviews also revealed that the overall level of student participation in the activities was good: the experimentation with different teaching methods and the use of various tools provided a practical and accessible approach, even for students with greater difficulties in studying and maintaining attention.

Another positive aspect of the experience highlighted by the interviewees was the collaboration among teachers in implementing an interdisciplinary program, which generated enthusiasm among both colleagues and students. In this regard, from the teachers' perspective, the contribution of the language teacher to the CLIL methodology has proven to be particularly valuable, both in the planning phase with subject teachers and in the implementation and management of activities. Specifically, the presence of the language teacher is crucial in supporting colleagues in adopting appropriate strategies to facilitate content comprehension and to address any linguistic difficulties students may encounter.

With regard to challenges, the teachers cited difficulties in conveying highly specialized content in a foreign language, while students with less developed English skills struggled with understanding the texts and actively participating in classroom activities.

4. Concluding Remarks

In this paper, through the presentation of a didactic pathway and an interview with the teachers, an example of the application of the CLIL methodology and team teaching CLIL in the context of a lower secondary school was provided. Based on the teachers' feedback, it emerged that the proposal of a CLIL educational pathway was positively received by both students and teachers, leading to the effective implementation of team teaching between language and content subject teachers.

Although the experience described is limited to a specific context, it allows for some reflections that may help identify key aspects for teacher training and effective instructional design in the CLIL framework within lower secondary education.

The team teaching CLIL approach proved central to the success of the project, as it enabled the interdisciplinary nature of the historical, artistic, and literary topics addressed to be fully appreciated. Thanks to the constant support of the language teacher, the activities could be tailored to the students' language proficiency. All teachers, despite their different specializations and characteristics, contributed to the teaching activities in various ways, fostering constructive and rewarding collaboration: the team teaching CLIL aims to encourage the exchange and reinforcement of skills between teachers of different subjects.

The variety of activities proposed and shared, the development of collaborative learning, the integration of technologies, and the use of a task-based methodology were the results of a team effort that allowed teachers to develop mutual methodological awareness in managing various activities. The ability to collaborate with the language teacher should, therefore, be considered part of the skills and training of CLIL teachers.

In terms of teacher training, it is essential to collect examples of best practices in team teaching CLIL, so that this collaborative teaching approach can be adequately integrated into the application of the CLIL methodology.

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Notes

Note 1. Refer to the section dedicated to the project presentation on the website of the regional network "Excellence in CLIL in Primary Education", available at the following link: https://www.clilexcellence.edu.it/web/metodologia/progetto-clil-excellence/ (last accessed: 18/9/2024).

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