

CLIL Teaching at Primary School Level and the Academia/Practice Interface: Some Preliminary Considerations

*Paola Catenaccio - Cinzia Giglioni **

doi: 10.7359/791-2016-cate

Keywords: CLIL, primary school, foreign language education.

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on some key aspects of and enabling conditions for the introduction of CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning – in primary schools in Italy. Having been the object of highly successful pilot projects in the past, CLIL at primary school level is at the moment neither mandatory nor regulated, but debate around its potential benefits has been widespread for some years and has recently been given renewed momentum in the wake of the launch of the latest school reform (*La Buona Scuola*, or ‘The Good School’) in 2014 (see below). Among the pledges made when presenting the reform, the improvement of foreign language (mostly English) competences of Italian students has been given particular emphasis, with CLIL being mentioned as a suitable methodology to achieve this aim. It may, therefore, be expected that in the next few years the demand for CLIL teaching in early education will increase substantially. For it to be met, it is essential that suitably competent and trained teachers be available. As a result, an overview of existing and desirable teacher language competences (and of the means whereby such competences can be taught/acquired) is needed, particularly in view of the introduction of policy measures that involve a widespread introduction of CLIL at primary school level.

* While both authors are jointly responsible for the general design of this study, the Introduction (§ 1) and the conclusions (§ 6), Paola Catenaccio has authored in particular § 2 and § 3, and Cinzia Giglioni has authored § 4 and § 5.

The interest in CLIL is indeed not new in Italy. In fact, over the last couple of decades, Italy (and more specifically Northern Italy)¹ has been at the forefront of a small but steadily growing movement for the introduction of Content and Language Integrated Learning at all levels of schooling. The recent introduction of new legislation mandating that CLIL be employed in teaching part of at least one curricular subject in the final year of all secondary schools (which has just started to be implemented) has thrust English-language medium instruction into the limelight, but projects involving CLIL-based instruction started in the 1990s, when two new types of high school, the *Liceo Linguistico Europeo* and the *Liceo Classico Europeo* were launched by the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research². EU funding and the substantial delegation of control from local education authorities to individual schools laid the foundations for new teaching practices (Langé 2014, 15). The regulatory framework upon which the new *Licei* were based – *Regolamento recante norme in materia di autonomia delle istituzioni scolastiche* (Presidential Decree nr. 275 of 08/03/1999) – has since supported further CLIL experimentation at both secondary and primary school level. In Lombardy, for instance, a widely publicised project was funded in 2000 (<http://old.istruzione.lombardia.it/progetti/lingue/alilclil.htm>), which involved the introduction of CLIL (also known in Italian as *ALI - Apprendimento Linguistico Integrato* – ‘Integrated Language Learning’) in both primary and secondary schools, with attendant training programmes and initiatives. In 2007, a report was published on the outcomes of the project (<http://www.progettolingue.net/alilclil/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/rapporto-monitoraggio-clil-20075.pdf>) highlighting its benefits and generalised appeal for all stakeholders involved.

Despite these reportedly positive results, CLIL projects remained limited in scope and did not result in increased, albeit voluntary, imple-

¹ While CLIL projects have been implemented in various schools across the country, some of the most influential ones have been carried out in Northern regions. Examples of these are the ALI-CLIL project (Lombardy, 2001 onwards); *Lingua, Cultura e Scienze in lingua straniera* (Piedmont, 2001-2004); *Progetto Tutor Europeo* (Emilia Romagna, 2003 onwards); *Apprendo in Lingua 2* (Veneto, 2002-2004).

² The *Liceo Linguistico Europeo* was first established as a pilot project in 1992/1993 and was aimed at non-state language-focused high schools. The project involved the teaching of at least one curricular subject in a foreign language in the three final years. The *Liceo Classico Europeo* was also established in 1992 and implemented in 17 schools. The pilot added the teaching of two foreign languages throughout the entire curriculum of state classics-based high schools and involved, beside CLIL teaching, special residential programmes for students.

mentation of CLIL methodology across the curriculum, let alone in the introduction of specific training programmes for teachers, especially for those working in primary and middle (junior secondary) school. However, following the pilot projects, a number of elementary schools in Milan have continued to implement CLIL-based policies, spearheading a small but highly motivated group of teachers/headmasters favouring the early introduction of foreign-medium instruction in education.

The enthusiasm for CLIL notwithstanding (see Crandall 1998; Coonan 2005), teacher training remains an issue (Di Martino and Di Sabato 2012), especially at the lower levels of schooling (Ludbrooke 2008). Training programmes (to be delivered by universities) have been recently designed for high school teachers pursuant to DM 139/11, but all other orders of schooling have been left out, and even though research is starting to address the issue (Aiello, Di Martino, and Di Sabato 2015), it remains unclear what skills (language-related as well as methodology-based) teachers should possess to be put in charge of CLIL projects. In particular, primary education seems to have been especially neglected, not as regards CLIL, but more in general in respect of English teaching, which is no longer entrusted to 'specialised' teachers (i.e., teachers especially appointed to teach English) but rather to teachers of other subjects who have indeed received additional language training³, thereby becoming qualified to teach English in addition to their regular specialties, but whose primary teaching subject is not English. Moreover, while English has indeed been included for a while among the subjects to be studied by all prospective primary school teachers as part of their academic curriculum, which would seem to offer a solution to the in the near future, not enough appears to be done to encourage the development of skills that can serve as a stepping stone for further, more specific training.

In the face of budgetary constraints which cause institutional reluctance to provide suitable training for English teaching (particularly for English Medium Instruction – EMI), English remains a priority in education, at least ideally. But to what extent does this emphasis on English translate into practice – at the level of teacher education and training, and in terms of actual implementation? What competences in English are primary school teachers required to have, and how are they informed or alerted in any way about the challenges and opportunities of teaching in English as a medium of instruction? And where English Medium Instruc-

³ These additional qualifications are obtained through ad hoc training courses consisting of a limited number of hours of exposure to the language to be taught.

tion is implemented, what competences do teachers entrusted with it possess, and what kind of training do they receive?

In light of the above, this chapter reports on the content and focus of English language courses offered within the framework of MA courses preparing for primary language teaching, with special attention paid to expected outcomes in view of further English teaching and possibly EMI specialisation. The findings are then compared with the results of interviews carried out with teachers involved in a CLIL project implemented in a primary school, with a view to identifying gaps in the academia-practice interface and putting forward tentative proposals to fill them.

2. CLIL IN PRIMARY EDUCATION – A GROWING AREA OF RESEARCH AND IMPLEMENTATION

The interest in CLIL has grown exponentially since the turn of the millennium, especially in Europe, where a number of actions were taken by the European Commission to promote multilingualism through a variety of means, which included (though were by no means limited to) CLIL (see Marsh 2012 for an overview). The attractiveness of the CLIL proposition is testified by the exponential increase, during the same years, in both teaching projects involving CLIL and in scholarly research on the topic. The latter has mainly focused on classroom observation, with the primary aim of clarifying the underlying principles of CLIL and identifying best practices; mostly, such research has insisted on the benefits of the approach, with criticisms having been few and far between, often (though not always) only passingly mentioned in broader, generally positive, accounts of CLIL practices (cf. Marsh et al. 2000; Dalton-Puffer 2007; Seikkula-Leino 2007; Lasagabaster and Sierra 2009; Bruton 2011).

Much CLIL-related literature, especially in the early days of CLIL, focused on high-school pupils, with considerably less attention devoted to pre-school and primary school teaching. Soon, however, the potential of CLIL for young learners started to be explored. An early example of research on CLIL in primary schools was reported in Crandall (1998), to be followed a few years later by Kaufman and Crandall (2005). Several other works followed suit (see, amongst others, Serra 2007; Dafouz and Guerrini 2009; Grieveson and Superfine 2012; Yamano 2013; Pladevall-Ballester 2015) as early language learning programmes became established in several countries. In Europe the ProCLIL project was launched in 2006 within the framework of the COMENIUS programme with the aim of investigating the implementation and effectiveness of CLIL as a pedagogical procedure in primary and pre-primary

education, and to launch CLIL modules in four countries (Cyprus, Germany, Spain, and Turkey). A report was later published (Ioannou-Georgiou and Pavlou 2011), which provides very interesting insights into the issue, complete with practical suggestions for both teaching and assessment methods.

In order to fully understand the implications of the introduction of CLIL from the early stages of education, it is worth reiterating its underlying principles, which have been variously defined in the literature, but upon which there is fairly widespread consensus. A frequently quoted definition is the following one by Marsh (2002, 15):

CLIL refers to situations where subjects, or parts of subjects, are taught through a foreign language with dual-focussed aims, namely the learning of content, and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language.

Empirical evidence from existing projects has shown that this ambitious aim is not easily achieved. Indeed, the tension underlying the endeavour is visible in the above-mentioned ProCLIL report (2011), where it is stated that

- educational achievement generally is better where instruction is in the first or stronger language of pupils;
- educational achievement in a second or foreign language is successful where there is well-resourced attention to curriculum structuring and children's development in two languages (L1 and L2) (Kiely 2011, 21).

As this excerpt highlights, choosing a CLIL approach entails potential drawbacks which must be carefully managed if the method is to be successfully implemented. More importantly, it dispels the idea that CLIL may be a solution to all language learning needs, while emphasizing the need for a holistic approach which takes into consideration multiple learning objectives. In the case of young learners (particularly primary school pupils), whose linguistic competences in their first language are still under development, and whose prior knowledge of the topics introduced may be very limited, the difficulties intrinsic to the implementation of CLIL approaches are compounded by the academic sophistication (in relation to the age of the learners) of the contents. Although there appears to be no evidence that CLIL instruction impedes subject-content learning, at least at primary level (cf. Van de Craen et al. 2007; Van de Craen, Ceuleers, and Mondt 2007, with reference to maths), nor that it slows language development in the learners' first language (cf. Bialystok 2004, with reference to bilingual children), the challenge of conveying both language and content instruction to very young learners is undoubtedly considerable and may be expected to require advanced teacher competences in foreign language teaching, besides the obvious subject competences and related language skills.

2.1. *CLIL teachers' competences: needs assessment and pilot training results*

In order to successfully implement CLIL methodologies, therefore, it is vital that suitable training programmes be in place so that prospective teachers are adequately instructed in all the necessary skills. This is the very point made by Lasagabaster and Sierra (2009, 371) when commenting on the effort required to implement CLIL at primary school level in Spain, a country that invested considerable energy and resources in establishing viable CLIL projects. As the two scholars highlight,

[i]t is [...] necessary to provide future teachers with training not only in the specific subjects but also in the methodology that will allow them to teach these subjects effectively in a foreign language. The different regional educational authorities endeavour to make up for this lack of training among in-service teachers through specific measures, such as methodology courses, language courses in English-speaking countries, or seminars and conferences in which experts participate. However, the future needs of CLIL programmes demand a more planned course of action concerning both teacher formation and in-service teacher support.

This need is acknowledged in the *European Framework for CLIL Teacher Education* published by the European Centre for Modern Languages in 2011, where it is stated that

teachers undertaking CLIL will need to be prepared to develop multiple types of expertise: among others, in the content subject; in a language; in best practice in teaching and learning; in the integration of the previous three; and, in the integration of CLIL within an educational institution. (Marsh et al. 2011, 5)

Obvious as these considerations may seem, they belie in fact the complexity of the tasks involved in CLIL teaching. The multiple types of expertise required are rarely all mastered by teachers, nor are they easily acquired (see Pavesi 2002; Serragiotto 2008). Moreover, if some demand specific negotiating abilities (see, for instance the last one mentioned in the quote above), or require considerable professional experience and metatheoretical awareness, others – namely, expertise in the content subject and in a language – are in fact essential pre-requisites. Nor is the language component limited to a working knowledge of the language itself. In fact, as Marsh et al. (2011, 221) highlight, CLIL teachers must be able to “support continuous language growth through a repertoire of didactic strategies (e.g., Zone of Proximal Development, error awareness and correction, first language

transfer and interference, translanguaging, anti-plateauing strategies and modelling)” which go well beyond the average repertoires deployed in content teaching, and which must be developed with targeted training.

As CLIL approaches have become more popular worldwide, the number of CLIL teacher training courses has increased. In the Anglo-Saxon world, traditional providers of EFL teacher training – ranging from the British Council, which has been actively involved in a number of projects in different countries from their very onset, to many universities and colleges – have broadened their offer to include CLIL-specific options which have met with considerable success. Interestingly enough, existing training programmes differ widely as to the language competences required of the teacher wishing to specialise in CLIL. While advanced competences are often deemed necessary (and in some cases, a C1 certification is mandatory – cf. Schwab-Berger 2015, 12), it is not unusual for training centres to accept would-be CLIL teachers whose level of English is not above B1. There seems, in other words, to be a contradiction between the competences which are deemed desirable and those which are in fact deemed acceptable. This, as we shall see, has serious implications when approaching the implementation phase of CLIL projects.

Training programmes have also been established by educational authorities in several countries. So far, in many of them – Italy being a prime example – teacher training has been effected within the context of pilot studies or special projects, many of which have become models of best practice. Examples of this are the training programmes developed by Gisella Langé (Inspector for Language Teachers) and Laretta D’Angelo from 2000 onwards in the Lombardy area in Italy. As part of the project, in-service training for teachers of various foreign languages both on site and on line was provided, and two large scale EC-funded projects were run which implemented the CLIL methodologies in a number of primary and lower secondary schools. The project started with face-to-face training, but it soon moved to a web-based platform. The ALI-Clilonline project was designed for both language teachers and subject teachers, and aimed to introduce in-service teachers to online resources suited to the creation of CLIL didactic modules. The first edition of the online course was so successful that two more were organised (with increasing levels of specialisation) at the teachers’ request. Over the five-year period during which it was implemented, the project provided training for about 250 in-service teachers (MIUR 2005, 87-88).

With the institutionalisation of CLIL practices in many countries, however, the need has arisen to move on from experimentation to more

permanent forms of education. As a result, educational institutions in these countries are increasingly under pressure to provide prospective teachers with the skills required to carry out their ever more demanding jobs. As CLIL implementation moves from piloting to (ideally at least) mainstream, it becomes necessary to build CLIL education within national teacher training systems. At the forefront of this challenging task are the universities, which, as the main providers of teacher education, must design programmes aimed, in the short term, at teacher re-training and specialisation, and, in the medium to long term, at building CLIL training directly into the curriculum – either as an option or as a mandatory component, depending on the extent to which CLIL methodologies are to be integrated in the national school curriculum.

3. EARLY FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND CLIL IN ITALY

These issues have recently become particularly pressing in Italy, a country where foreign language proficiency (especially English) is notoriously low. As mentioned above, pilot studies centered on CLIL were implemented starting from the late 1990s, especially in Northern Italy, but previous experimentation can be dated back to 1975/1976 with the ILSSE project (*Insegnamento Lingue Straniere nella Scuola Elementare* – ‘Foreign Language Teaching in Primary Schools’). Italy was the first among ‘big’ European countries to make foreign language education mandatory in primary school. The CLIL approach was given fresh momentum, albeit not in the sphere of early education, in 2010, when the Ministry for Education, University and Research mandated that as of the 2014/2015 school year CLIL-based approaches must be used to teach at least one of the subjects in the last year of high school (see MIUR 2010). In 2014 a new initiative – *La Buona Scuola*, or ‘The Good School’ – was launched (see MIUR 2014a) in which CLIL was heralded as the harbinger of a new age of learning.

The emphasis on foreign language (especially English) learning as a pillar of modern education is not new. In fact, in Italy English was established as a compulsory subject from year 1 in primary school in 2003 (Law 53/2003). However, since then standard foreign-language teaching has not led, despite expectations, to major improvements in foreign language proficiency. It is probably also as a consequence of the less-than-exciting results of the introduction of early language teaching that new approaches have been sought, not least because of the promising outcomes of the

CLIL projects referred to above (see § 1), which were carried out mainly in Northern Italy starting from the 1990s (Langé 2011). The official website of the Ministry of Education, University and Research (<http://www.labuonascuola.gov.it>) enthuses about CLIL:

It is essential that a part of what children learn is conveyed directly in foreign languages, enhancing their learning at primary school. There is a methodology that has been proven to be successful (CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning). Its implementation, which will already be mandatory for the fifth year of secondary and polytechnic schools from next academic year (transitional rules, academic year 2014-2015), should be significantly extended also to primary and junior secondary school. (https://labuonascuola.gov.it/documenti/lbs_web.pdf, 94)

Despite the best of intentions, though, Italian legislation is still sketchy, and state-of-the art data are unavailable. To date, the CLIL methodology has been introduced in primary school on an experimental and voluntary basis and has not as yet been framed in a specific legislation. Furthermore, none of the many regional school offices – *Uffici Scolastici Regionali* – questioned during a quick survey conducted by the authors at the beginning of 2014 academic year to probe the current status of CLIL in the region – were able to provide solid data concerning CLIL penetration percentage. In fact, the *CLIL Ministry Report*, dated March 2014 (reporting on school year 2012/2013), only deals with secondary schools, failing to mention explicitly any of the experimental and pilot projects implemented.

The still sketchy CLIL-related primary school legislation and data have different implications: on the one hand, they have contributed to further fostering CLIL enthusiasm (at least among policy makers), giving supporters of the CLIL methodologies a chance to put CLIL syllabi to the test; on the other hand, they have puzzled many teachers and school administrators, who have often found themselves at a loss for resources and materials (not to speak of competences). The lack of a well-defined strategy seems to be confirmed, albeit empirically, also by the remarks of a sales representative at MacMillan, a publisher that has tried to fill the gap in materials (making available online a certain amount of resources for both primary and secondary school) and has been pro-active in collaborating with the authors of the present chapter:

I'm not sure exactly how many schools are doing CLIL in Lombardy. From what I have heard speaking with teachers, there are many ways to approach CLIL. Some schools will take a school subject and teach it in English all year, while other schools will organize lessons periodically for a number of different

subjects. Furthermore, some schools which are supposed to begin teaching CLIL courses have told me that they don't plan on doing it at all this year, as they don't feel ready, or that they lack the necessary resources or that the teachers don't have the linguistic preparation [...]. (Casimir Kukielka – Mac-Millan Sales Representative – Personal communication)

Nonetheless, with the significant exception of many teachers, stakeholders (policymakers, parents and even children) all seem to have great expectations, most of them centred on students improving significantly their foreign language competence – subject knowledge becoming somewhat secondary to this primary aim (cf. Pladevall-Ballester 2015). Expectations associated with CLIL appear to be fuelled by a widespread dissatisfaction with the outcomes of school-based foreign language learning and a stereotypical view of foreign language lessons as a series of mechanistic grammar drills. CLIL is regularly referred to as an educational environment where naturalistic language learning can take place, implying that the best kind of language learning proceeds without formal instruction (Dalton-Puffer, Nikula, and Smit 2010, 16).

In the official report of one of the most recent and extensive CLIL-based projects in Lombardy, the BEI project (see Cavalieri and Sternieri, this volume), the words of a 3-grader are worth quoting: “If I go on like this, by the time I am 16 I am going to be a bilingual” (Bondi et al. 2014, 12). Generally speaking, students involved in CLIL-based projects are typically aware of the innovative educational context they find themselves in, and most of the time they are proud to be the receivers of a cutting edge methodology; the same can be said for school administrators.

At the other end of the scale, teachers' attitudes, as revealed by qualitative interviews carried out by the authors with practicing teachers, range from prudent enthusiasm to criticism, mainly in consideration of two factors: the greater workload a CLIL-based syllabus means for them, and their feeling of inadequacy due to their tendency to be critical in assessing their own language skills. This general impression is confirmed by literature reporting on previous, mostly successful, CLIL experiments conducted in several countries, most notably Spain and Italy. A case in point is that of a Spanish teacher who reported what happened when the English department she worked for decided to pilot a CLIL programme: some of her colleagues referred to it as “science-fiction”, even though a syllabus partially taught in Valencian and partly in Spanish had been regularly delivered in their school (Mehisto, Marsh, and Frigols 2008, 24). A general feeling of inadequacy and heightened workload is also reported in a number of Italian studies based on pilot projects, including the BEI project mentioned

in the introduction to this chapter and discussed by Cavalieri and Sternieri (this volume). In a recent monitoring survey (MIUR 2014b, 29), teachers involved in CLIL secondary school (*Licei Linguistici*) activities put emphasis on the need for extra training and especially focused on methodological and language proficiency.

The BEI report quoted above (Bondi et al. 2014) contains crucial information about the perceived needs of the primary school teachers involved in the project. Among them language courses are shortlisted, particularly in consideration of the teachers' self-reported general language competences. On the occasion of qualitative interviews with practicing teachers conducted for the purpose of the present research, a sense of incapacity in handling the challenge prevailed – even when enthusiasm was shown – and calls for further language training were voiced with an emphasis on general English rather than on the domain specific features of the language required to teach (which teachers seem not to be aware of). In fact, so consistent appears to be the mention of a need for enhanced language competences in the existing reports on previous projects, that language training cannot but be defined as a key priority for teachers – and as such should also be considered by providers of teacher education.

4. CLIL IMPLEMENTATION AND REQUIRED TEACHER LANGUAGE COMPETENCES

As highlighted above, therefore, a key pre-requisite for CLIL-based teaching is the possession of adequate language skills. Whatever intensity (see Cummis 2000, 68), length of exposure and specific syllabus organisation (see Barbero e Clegg 2005, 56) is chosen for a CLIL-based project, the teachers' language competences are a pivotal factor. But what level of English is deemed necessary for CLIL teachers in Italy?

According to the Italian Ministry Decree (Decreto Direttoriale) dated 2012 (from DM nr. 249/10 issued on 10/09/2010) C1 English level was supposed to be a prerequisite for secondary school CLIL teachers. One year later, in 2013, the decree operating notes downgraded teachers' language level to B1 (or, in the words of the notes, *assimilabile* – 'equal to', presumably lacking an official certification of the same). This downgrading suggests that, even at secondary school level, teacher language competence is one of the main issues, and policy makers and academia, as well as prac-

ticing and prospective teachers, have so far had to make do with the (currently limited) resources they have.

This is a typical problem when educational innovation outpaces teacher education provision. But if the problem is keenly felt among high-school teachers, it is even more pressing at primary school level. As CLIL programmes in Italy have expanded from secondary to junior and primary school, the number of teachers with suitable language proficiency (B2) has been found to be extremely limited.

Compounding the problem is the fact that at the moment there appears to be no provision or recommendation as to what language level primary school teachers to be employed in CLIL implementation ought to possess. It is assumed teachers should be confident enough in language use to convey discipline-specific contents. On the one hand, a C1 level requirement might appear to be needed, in the words of the Italian Ministry for Education, who made the point during a radio interview aired in September 2014 (Radio Due), that the introduction of CLIL at primary school level required highly trained teachers. On that occasion she defined CLIL as a challenge, stressing the importance of appropriate teacher training, and thereby hinting at the possible implementation of specific programmes addressed to all primary school teachers. On the other hand, the most recently published educational targets for prospective school teachers, listed in the Ministry Decree nr. 249 dated 10/09/2010, establish that “teacher training is aimed at qualifying teachers and developing their subject knowledge and their psycho-pedagogical, methodological, and organizational skills”, with no mention made of foreign language education, let alone CLIL. It is fair to say that the programming document establishing the prospective introduction of CLIL is subsequent to the decree; nonetheless, the disconnect between current educational objectives and future needs is quite obvious, especially when one considers that the 2010 Decree had the aim of completely overhauling the syllabus for primary teacher training.

The 5 year Primary Education Degree (*ciclo unico* – combined BA and MA programme) started in academic year 2011/2012. From a quick survey of Italian 5 year Primary Education Degree RADs (*Regolamento di Autonomia Didattica*, covering the syllabus for each course) it emerges that the standard course organisation, following the Ministry guidelines, requires students to study English for a total of 10 ECTS. The *Deans Conference* established that these ECTS should be obtained through ‘Laboratory activities’, which generally involve a higher number of teaching hours than courses proper. Two extra ECTS are awarded for obtaining a B2 language level qualification.

As can be seen, the objectives are quite modest, and hardly sufficient to guarantee a knowledge of English suited to CLIL implementation, though ultimate definitions of ‘appropriate’ foreign language level don’t seem to have been achieved.

Initial data obtained through a survey carried out by one of the authors would appear to suggest that the competences of prospective primary school teachers are indeed fairly low when they begin university, and have only marginally improved after completing the course offered by their institution. The data were obtained by administering a DIALANG test to students enrolled in the Primary Education Degree offered by the University of Aosta, where one of the authors is in charge of English language instruction. Available for fourteen languages, DIALANG is a free-to-use language diagnosis system developed by many European higher education institutions which reports students’ competences in reading, writing, listening, grammar and vocabulary against the Common European Framework for language learning. The test was administered to assess the entry level of the 58 students involved. The data – which are only partial, and should therefore be taken with caution – suggest that while about a third of the students tested have B1 level competences (approx. 34%), many are placed below this threshold (over 40%), and only 3% have a C1 language level (*Tab. 1*).

The limited size of the sample makes generalisations impossible. However, it does indicate that it is difficult to make assumptions about the starting level English of prospective teachers and, therefore, to envisage an exit level adequate to the demands of CLIL-based teaching.

Table 1. – DIALANG TEST for Primary Education Degree students at University of Aosta (a.y. 2013/2014).

LANGUAGE LEVEL	STUDENTS	%
A1	7	12,07
A2	17	29,31
B1	20	34,48
B2	12	20,69
C1	2	3,45
C2	0	0,00

5. TENTATIVE PROPOSALS FOR PRIMARY EDUCATION TEACHERS

Valle d'Aosta as a single sample cannot, of course, be considered representative, but it prompts further investigation. Research should involve a wider range of Italian universities and an extended language level assessment should be carried out with primary education degree course students, the aim of the investigation being to evaluate the adequacy of universities' programmes to meet the needs of CLIL education.

As originally stated by the Italian Prime Minister when presenting CLIL methodology as part of the innovative programme for the Italian school system, and as described by practicing teachers involved in CLIL-based projects in primary schools, B2/C1 seems to be the target language level for successful primary school teachers operating in a CLIL environment.

If academia wants to play a role in the CLIL educational scenario, a radical rethink of primary education degree courses – in terms of university credits, language level entry tests and syllabus – is needed. At the moment, a primary education degree course is conceived with a total number of 300 credits distributed over 5 years. Of these, 80 credits focus on educational psychology and teaching methodology, 142 are dedicated to disciplinary subjects, 32 are set aside for special needs, 24 for training and 9 are devoted to the final dissertation. English is listed among the disciplinary subjects with 10 credits allocated. A redistribution of credits and a tailored lecture/lab ratio would meet language learning needs and at the same time recognise the nature of foreign language as a skill as well as a discipline.

Entry tests and language certifications may also be given a greater role than they have at the moment. Setting the entry level at a reasonable standard (at least B1) may enable teachers and administrators to design more effective degree courses with B2/C1 as a realistic target language level for students, while remedial courses might be considered to support underperforming students.

Finally, syllabus revision should be taken into consideration. This would entail, for example, shifting the focus to foreign language teaching methodology for very young learners, as it does not seem to be always included in the present primary education degree course. Ad hoc resources and materials should also be presented to and tested by prospective teachers within their academic training.

Participants in CLIL-based pilot projects and institutional informants both in Lombardy and Valle d'Aosta have repeatedly referred to the need for adequate material for primary school teachers. Meeting this need

appears to be the crux of the matter for both prospective and longer-serving teachers, a top priority for academic courses on the one hand, and for professional training courses on the other. In times of budgetary restrictions, with an allocated budget (DM 821/13) of 2,485,000 euro per 18,000 teachers (namely 138 euro per person), providing teachers with ad hoc resources might be the answer for CLIL main stakeholders: students and teachers. Customised materials, tailored to students' age and interests, and designed for non-specialised teachers, would also provide language training for those teachers. At the moment, primary school teachers are involved in CLIL activities on a voluntary basis. User-friendly resources and ready-made materials might result not only in effective foreign language teaching but also in teachers' language improvement, therefore reinforcing their motivation and participation.

One of the two authors of the present paper has been appointed member of a board of technical advisors for primary school teachers' CLIL training programmes in the Val d'Aosta region. According to her personal experience, materials need to have specific characteristics to underpin successful CLIL teaching. As also exemplified in Tavani (this volume), CLIL materials for Italian teachers do not seem to be adequate for the CLIL methodology challenge.

In order to be in line with their didactic purposes, CLIL materials need specific characteristics that may be described using what we can call the 4 R method: CLIL materials need to be reliable, ready-made, readable-through and rewarding. Reliability entails the reputation of the institution and people responsible for quality control processes, and at the same time it involves website stability: teachers need to know they can access the materials when in need. Ready-made materials, possibly supported by audio tracks, are likely to be first chosen on the part of busy teachers who will simply be in charge of reading them through following detailed teachers' notes and providing handouts to students. Eventually, such a structured path will be perceived as rewarding by both actors involved in the educational process: education providers get extra language training, while education receivers get high quality teaching. The 4 R are believed to represent guidelines when designing, assembling and circulating resources for CLIL courses, and they are expected to lead to standardisation of the above mentioned resources, providing a reliable guide even for the most hesitant teacher and therefore boosting their confidence in class. The 4 R could make a whole difference for effective primary school foreign language teaching, compensating for a four-decade-long history of poor results on the one hand, and for teachers' (usually low) foreign language level on the other hand.

The provision of foreign language skills has proven to be expensive, difficult to monitor, and time consuming to improve on a national scale. Institutions, for their part, still seem vague when it comes to describing the foreign language pre-requisites for educators involved in CLIL projects. Focus on resources might provide a twofold result: more effective CLIL teaching for students and better trained teachers in the primary school scenario, a still relatively unexplored area in which Italy has the opportunity to provide a model of good practice.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Foreign languages, and especially English, have been high on the agenda of Italian Education Ministers for over 15 years, and have been deemed essential for academic and professional success for considerably longer, as testified by the flourishing language school market in the country. The most recent school reform, *La Buona Scuola*, recommends that foreign language teaching be effected as much as possible through CLIL based methodologies, which should be deployed not only in high schools (as already mandated in previous legislation, effective from the 2014/2015 school year), but from the very start of primary education.

While the enthusiasm felt by legislators and, it would appear on the basis of empirical observation, much of the public (though not equally shared by teachers and school principals) may appear excessive, the results of the pilot studies conducted in Italy over the last fifteen years suggest that it is not misplaced, and that indeed there may be much to be gained (not least in terms of students' motivation and active participation) from broadening the experiment. This new deal for primary level foreign language teaching, however, can only be successfully implemented if qualified teachers are found – or existing teachers are (re)trained – in CLIL-specific methodologies.

Up to date CLIL piloting has typically been carried out by volunteer teachers who (ideally) already possessed the required language level (though not the methodological competences). With the upcoming changes which the latest school reform will introduce over the next few years, all teachers will need to be able, at least in principle, to contribute to CLIL-based programmes. This means that they must be provided with the necessary skills and competences prior to their taking up service – i.e., presumably, in the course of their training.

This is where universities have a crucial role to play. University syllabi for prospective primary school teachers must ensure that students receive adequate language instruction as a pre-requisite for CLIL implementation (whether they are going to be CLIL teachers or not: CLIL as a methodology involves the entire teaching team, and it is crucial that all staff participate actively), and that they are given the opportunity to take CLIL methodology courses as electives. This is an ambitious goal, and involves challenges that universities must hasten to address if the fledgling school reform is to be successful. Changes in university syllabi, however, take time, and the number of variables involved is very high. While it is to be hoped that strengthening primary school students' foreign language competences will eventually lead to a general improvement that will also impact on the amount of foreign language instruction required at tertiary level, reducing it accordingly, this cannot but be a medium- to long-term goal. In the meantime, suitable strategies must be found to ensure that CLIL teaching is successful. To this end, the availability of suitable ready-made lesson plans is critical. Materials that focus on both content and key (meta)linguistic points should be made available to teachers: in this way the dual goal of CLIL-based teaching – integrating content and language – can be achieved even in less-than-optimal conditions. The special projects funded by some local institutions (such as the BEI project) may be a starting point. It is hoped that these efforts serve as inspiration to maximise the potential of CLIL implementation while making it possible to avoid the pitfalls which have too often beset many laudable initiatives in the past.

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