

CLIL as a catalyst for change: the case of the Ikastolas

Based on the Ikastolas' experience in multilingual education and CLIL, this article intends to reflect on and discuss how CLIL projects can turn into a catalyst for change that goes beyond the well-known benefits for Foreign and L2 language teaching.

The Ikastola network first adopted the CLIL approach in the year 2000, when faced with the challenge of teaching Social Sciences through English to students aged 14-16 who were taking part in the multilingual project 'Eleanitz-English'. The success of this CLIL experience, in terms of its English and Social Science learning outcomes, has set in motion a process of reflection and change that is spreading the CLIL approach to mainstream content teaching, teacher training and the linguistic policies of the regional school network.

Moreover, as a result of this innovative process, CLIL-like activities are being introduced into some of the didactic materials used to teach through the L1, some features from the teacher-training model developed for CLIL teachers are being incorporated into the regular in-service training offered by the network, and issues regarding the "threats" of multilingualism to minority or lesser-used languages such as Basque are being reconsidered.

1. The Languages of the Ikastolas

In the 1960s, the Ikastolas were created in order to ensure quality mother-tongue education to Basque-speaking children. Within a few years, however, Spanish and French-speaking families began to enrol their children in the Ikastolas, turning them into immersion programmes for Spanish and French-speaking children.

It soon became apparent that promoting the use of a minority language such as Basque beyond the school context was a difficult goal to achieve. Students attained a good level of academic language but there was no generalisation or transfer of that language into informal contexts outside or even within the school itself. The use of the Basque language in society did not grow in proportion to the number of new Basque speakers created by the educational system. In order to bridge that gap and to promote the use of Basque outside the classroom setting, in 1980 the Ikastola network created *Euskaraz Bizi*¹ (Gorostidi, 1991). With this programme, motivational campaigns, extra-curricular and leisure activities, etc. were organised for students, teachers and families.

In 1990, the Ikastolas reviewed and widened their linguistic objectives so that multilingualism, and not so much bilingualism, became the new aim. Within this context, the *Eleanitz-English (Multilingual-English)* project was created in order to fulfil the multilingual requirements derived from being part of the European Union. *Eleanitz-English* involved the early introduction of English (L3) at the age of 4 with the objective of learning a whole school subject through this language during the last two years of compulsory education (ages 14-16) (Arzamendi et al., 2003). Nowadays, there are around 75 Ikastolas involved in the *Eleanitz-*

¹ *Euskaraz Bizi* means *Live in Basque*.

English project, 42 of which are implementing a CLIL programme aimed at teaching Social Sciences through English.

By the year 2000, the Ikastola network felt the need to create a tool that would give coherence to all the different language-related projects (i.e. *Euskaraz Bizi*, *Eleanitz-English*, etc.) implemented until then. This tool became known as *The Ikastola Language Project* and is intended to help the Ikastolas to develop a multilingual school model that will foster multilingualism without compromising the recovery and promotion of the Basque language (Elorza and Muñoa, 2008; Confederation of Ikastolas of the Basque Country, 2009).

This article will focus on one of the projects that the Ikastolas are implementing in order to develop that multilingual school model: a CLIL project called ‘SSLIC’ (Social Science and Language Integrated Curriculum). This project is carried out during the final stages of the *Eleanitz-English* project and it consists of teaching Social Sciences only through English in the last two years of compulsory education (ages 14-16).

In the following pages, and based on the Ikastolas’ 10-year experience implementing SSLIC, we will discuss how this experience has set in motion a process of reflection and change which is spreading the benefits of CLIL to the teaching and learning of Social Sciences within the Ikastolas. We will, therefore, not only identify which aspects or characteristics of the Ikastolas’ CLIL project have triggered such a process, but also which actual educational changes have derived from each of those triggers.

2. SSLIC evaluation results

The acronym SSLIC stands for “Social Science and Language Integrated Curriculum” and it refers to a CLIL project which requires that all students, regardless of their command of English or Social Sciences, learn Social Sciences through English instead of through Basque, the main instruction language of the Ikastolas. .

Since SSLIC students do not receive additional Social Science instruction in Basque, SSLIC is not only aimed at developing those students’ linguistic competence in English; it should also achieve the objectives of Social Sciences as a school subject *per se*. As a result, SSLIC students study the same curriculum as if they were studying Social Sciences in Basque.

Due to the mixed-ability profile of the students involved in SSLIC, the objectives and contents of the English classes have been adapted to support the language needs derived from studying Social Sciences through that language (in addition to the content and language integration approach of the Social Science curriculum).

The implementation of this CLIL programme raised various issues among parents, educators and students. On the one hand, there were some concerns closely related to CLIL in general, such as:

- Will the CLIL programme ensure that students reach the Social Science objectives stated by the official curriculum for that age range?
- Will the development of the students’ competence in English be positively affected by SSLIC?

On the other hand, teaching a school subject through English raised some issues specifically linked to the sociolinguistic situation of Basque. That is to say, serious concerns appeared regarding the negative effects that multilingualism in general, and teaching a school subject through English in particular, might have on the students’ communicative competence in Basque, a minority language with varying degrees of linguistic vitality and whose revitalisation is one of the main objectives of the Ikastolas.

In order to answer those questions, in the spring of 2002, the Ikastolas evaluated the Social Science knowledge and level of English attained by the first SSLIC promotion, an evaluation that was carried out by the University of the Basque Country (UPV-EHU)².

Those same tests were given to a control group consisting of students who had studied the same Social Science contents, with the same textbooks, but in Basque. In order to evaluate the effects that using English as a medium of instruction might have on the development of Basque competence, the test was done in Basque, even though this decision may have limited the overall performance of those students who had studied the subject through English.

There were two additional characteristics that differentiated the SSLIC groups and the control group:

- Students within the SSLIC groups had started learning English at the age of four, whereas the control group had been introduced to that language at eight.
- Teachers involved in the SSLIC groups had received stronger pedagogical support since they had received intensive in-service training and a set of didactic materials designed specifically for the CLIL project they were required to implement.

The Social Science test consisted of two sections:

- A set of questions aimed at assessing the comprehension and assimilation of the most important Social Science concepts assigned by the official curriculum for that age range. These questions did not require lengthy or substantial production on the part of the students.
- A set of questions designed to assess the students' ability to express themselves in their own words, using the appropriate Social Science terminology and concepts, and the subject contents studied during the school year. These questions required more substantial linguistic productions and a higher cognitive effort on the part of the students.

As Figure 1 shows, students who had studied Social Sciences through English had not only assimilated the most important subject contents (see the 'basic' columns) but they also obtained higher results in the more complex set of questions (see the 'superior' columns). The results also show that these students were able to express the contents they had been studying through English in Basque, which seems to suggest that their communicative competence in the minority language had not been negatively affected by the project.

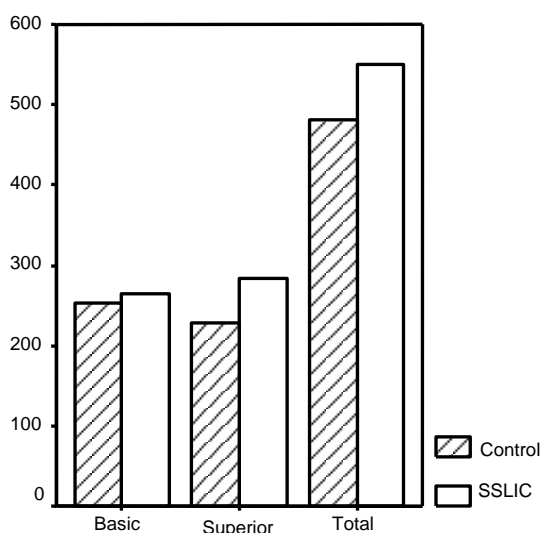


Figure 1: Evaluation results for Social Sciences

² A more detailed description of this evaluation can be found at Muñoa (2011) and Arzamendi et al. (2003)

During the same year, those same (experimental) students sat an English test whose results (see Figure 2) showed that their English level was much higher than that of the control group. In addition, 70% of a random sample of the students involved in the CLIL project obtained a pass in the Grade 7 certificate from the Trinity College (Grade examinations in spoken English for speakers of other languages). Both tests would seem to show the linguistic benefits of the *Eleanitz-English* project in place at the Ikastolas.

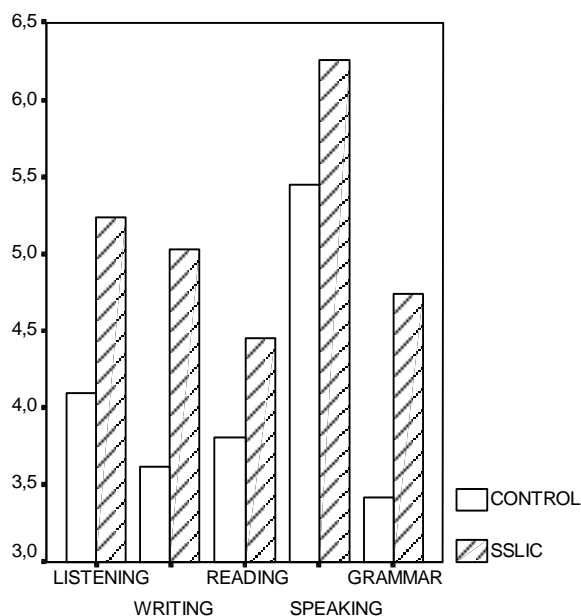


Figure 2: Evaluation results for English.

These evaluation results not only showed that the learning benefits attained by the programme were worth the invested energy and resources, but they also had wider implications which might be of interest not only to CLIL practitioners but also to those concerned with the maintenance and recovery of minority languages.

In terms of the implications that CLIL might have for the maintenance and recovery of the minority language, evaluation results suggest that a multilingual curriculum can be implemented without limiting students' competence in the minority language. As mentioned before, SSLIC students took the Social Science evaluation test in Basque even though they had studied that subject only through English. Despite that, SSLIC students' results were better than those of the control group, which seems to suggest that using English as the medium of instruction for Social Science during the last two years of compulsory education does not affect students' ability in using the minority language to express subject-related concepts.

These results were consistent with a previous longitudinal evaluation carried out by the Ikastolas and The University of the Basque Country (UPV-EHU) in order to measure whether the early introduction of English (at age 4) had any effect in the development of students' communicative competence in Basque and Spanish. This evaluation was carried out through a period of ten years, and it showed that the introduction of English at age 4 had no effect on the students' competence in either Basque or Spanish, since the students who had started learning English at age 4 and the students who had started at age 8 showed very similar degrees of mastery of Basque and Spanish (Elorza and Muñoa, 2008). Similar results, suggesting that students' communicative competence in Basque is not negatively affected by either the early introduction of English or the use of English to teach some school contents, have also been obtained by Cenoz (1998) and Lasgabaster (2008), among others.

Although more research needs to be done regarding the effects of CLIL on the development of L1 and L2 (Sierra, Gallardo del Puerto and Ruiz de Zarobe, 2011), the experience of the Ikastolas suggests that multilingual education can be successfully implemented, even in those cases where one of the languages involved is a minority language. The consistency of evaluation results is helping many parents, educators and students to better understand the potential benefits of being multilingual, as well as to overcome the idea of multilingualism being a threat to the revitalization of Basque.

The fact that students studying Social Science through English obtained better results than students studying Social Science in Basque (the main language of instruction for the Ikastolas), resulted in a process of reflection within the team of material writers and teacher trainers involved in SSLIC. In the following sections we will discuss how that process is affecting not only the didactic materials the network creates to teach Social Sciences in Basque but also the in-service teacher training offered to those Social Science teachers who teach their subject in Basque.

3. The effect of CLIL on mainstream Social Science materials

The better Social Science results obtained by our CLIL students are consistent with research based on other CLIL programmes implemented both in the Basque Autonomous Community (i.e. Alonso et al., 2008; Ruiz de Zarobe, 2008; Ruiz de Zarobe, 2011; Ruiz de Zarobe and Lasagabaster, 2010) and in other European countries (Baetens Beardsmore, 2008) since that research also suggest that students tend to perform better in the target language of CLIL programmes than in their L1. Even if the better results achieved by CLIL students might be explained by the role that CLIL type programmes seem to have in promoting the development of cognitive skills (Baetens Beardsmore, 2008), the team of material writers and teacher trainers of the Ikastola network felt that part of the explanation might lie in the characteristics of the CLIL didactic materials and the in-service training offered to CLIL teachers.

As a first step, the team of materials writers and teacher trainers who work for the Ikastolas' network compared the didactic materials used to teach Social Sciences in Basque to the Social Science materials which had been created for the CLIL project.

That comparison revealed that the didactic materials commonly used to teach Social Sciences through Basque relied too heavily on what is known as “assumptive teaching” (Clegg 2003). In other words, those materials “assumed” that students already possessed certain language and learning skills that were a necessary condition for learning the subject, and as a consequence did not work on them. As a result, the materials included very few activities which required students to talk/write about what they were learning, very little guidance towards reading and information processing, and minimal orientation regarding the linguistic register required by Social Sciences.

The CLIL materials, on the other hand, assumed very little, since their objectives were to make the subject available to students with varying degrees of English as well as to improve those students' communicative competence in English. This fact had forced material writers to use a higher amount and a wider range of activities aimed at working on the linguistic and cognitive needs of the Social Sciences. These included activities to foster oral and written communication by requiring students to talk and write about the concepts or topics they were learning; activities aimed at working on reading strategies; activities that fostered student thinking; and activities which guided students' oral and written production. In short, CLIL activities worked on those aspects that had been “assumed” as already known, or not really necessary, by mainstream SS materials.

These findings, along with the fact that Basque is both a minority and a second language for many of the students, led the team of writers to insert more CLIL-like activities into the Social Science materials that were currently used to teach that subject in Basque. Moreover,

the team considered that integrating content and language when teaching through Basque would also be beneficial to those students whose L1 was Basque, since academic language has very specific characteristics. Teachers and materials writers are not always aware of these characteristics and assume that having Basque as an L1 implies mastering both the informal and the formal-academic registers of the language. However, exposure to academic or formal language outside school depends on various factors such as the socio-cultural background of families, and therefore, that exposure is not always guaranteed. Thus, inserting CLIL activity types was seen as a way of offering our students better support to cope with the cognitive and linguistic demands of learning, be it through their L1 or L2.

Based on the activity typology that had been identified in the CLIL materials, material writers decided to include the following activity types in the Social Science materials commonly used to teach that subject in Basque:

3.1. Activities aimed at fostering students' oral and written communication

In this category, the CLIL materials included activities that required students to define a series of concepts and then read them out to a classmate, who, in turn, would have to guess the concept being defined; "odd man out" activities involving subject-specific concepts, etc. In order to complete these tasks successfully, students needed to understand the concept to be defined or refuted, be familiar with the subject-specific vocabulary, and be able to construct content-appropriate and linguistically accurate definitions or refutations.

Since the objective of these activities is to use communication to construct and to consolidate Social Science concepts and their inherent linguistic features (and to develop students' communication skills), they were considered beneficial to subject learning in general. This is why they were subsequently transferred to the mainstream Social Science syllabus.

3.2. Activities aimed at developing reading strategies

The CLIL materials included a substantial amount of activities aimed at helping students to develop reading strategies. The approach to often dense and complex texts consisted of giving students tasks that needed to be completed with the help of the written text; in other words, reading would not be an objective *per se* but a tool to complete a given task. This way, the importance of reading for an aim was stressed, and students were guided so they could develop the appropriate strategies depending on the specific reading objective. Since the team of material writers felt that mainstream Social Science materials needed to work on reading strategies in more depth, these kinds of activities were also transferred to the L1 materials.

3.3. Activities to make students think for themselves

The objective of these activities was to *make students think*. Besides being crucial for significant learning to happen, they offered multiple opportunities for language work. These activities usually require the application of what has been learned to new situations, or to infer implicit information from the data or the knowledge at hand. For example, if faced with a time-line of scientists and their main contributions to science, students could be asked to classify them into rationalists or naturalists. Students will have to infer the information they need (methods, areas of research...) from the information given in the time-line. The comparison between CLIL and mainstream Social Science materials showed that the latter hardly ever used this kind of activity.

3.4. Activities to guide students' oral and written production

Here the CLIL materials included activities that guided students through long and substantial productions (i.e. written reports and oral presentations) by offering specific guidelines in order for them to select, organise and communicate information efficiently. Such guidelines were also considered necessary for mainstream Social Science materials and were therefore inserted into such materials automatically.

However, CLIL materials also offered a group of activities that offered guided and mostly sentence-level language models for short controlled-production activities. These were aimed at guaranteeing students the opportunity to prepare their interventions. Students were offered a series of models (language and content-oriented) and given the opportunity to structure their intervention according to those models. Such models guaranteed that students with less developed communicative competence or subject knowledge were able to intervene in class. Due to the fact that students' communicative competence in Basque is considerably higher than their competence in English, the team is currently considering various ways of adapting and transferring that kind of guidance to mainstream Social Science materials.

During this process of analysing and adapting CLIL activities to the mainstream materials, the team of writers and trainers noticed that CLIL and non-CLIL teachers received different kinds of in-service training. Those differences were considered to be quite significant and they could partly explain the better results achieved by CLIL students. In Section 4, we will describe how the in-service training model developed for CLIL teachers has affected the teacher training usually offered to Social Science teachers who teach their subject through Basque.

4. The effect of CLIL on in-service teacher training

Teaching a school subject through a second or third language involves much more than the mere change of the language of instruction. It might also require profound changes in terms of teaching methods. This is why teacher training is considered to be one of the key factors involved in any successful CLIL programme (Ball and Lindsay, 2010; Muñoa, 2011).

Any teacher-training programme, however, is very closely linked to teachers' profiles. In the case of the Ikastolas' CLIL project:

The ideal combination for this kind of project is a Social Science specialist competent in English and working closely with the English teacher responsible for the complementary programme. However, in the absence of Social Science teachers able to teach through English, in several schools the English language teachers have been responsible for both the Social Science and the English classes (Ball and Lindsay, 2010).

As stated in Ball and Lindsay (2010), in the case of the Ikastolas this heterogeneous teacher profile has caused the need to develop a CLIL training programme aimed at answering quite different needs – namely those of subject specialists with a better grasp of the subject content but a parallel lack of pedagogical training regarding language support strategies, for example. English teachers, on the other hand, are more confident with the language and have more methodological awareness of how to organise the classroom and tasks to promote communicative competence. However, they may have problems in dealing with the increased amount of subject content and with some of the specific skills related to the discipline.

In order to answer to these training needs, teachers involved in this CLIL project are offered in-service training based on an action-research model that was developed to train

Eleanitz-English teachers³. As Figure 3 shows, this in-service training model is based on the application and subsequent reflection on the materials created both for Social Science and English disciplines. As stated by Ball and Lindsay (2010), this loop of *experiment-reflect-change* has been a key factor in the success of the project and has proved beneficial to both the materials writers/trainers and the teachers. On the one hand, the opportunity for writers to witness the piloting of the materials first-hand has facilitated a continuous improvement of the materials being used, and has given the teachers a real stake in the creative process. On the other hand, reflecting on practice and didactic materials has led to the identification of training needs in terms of methodology and classroom management

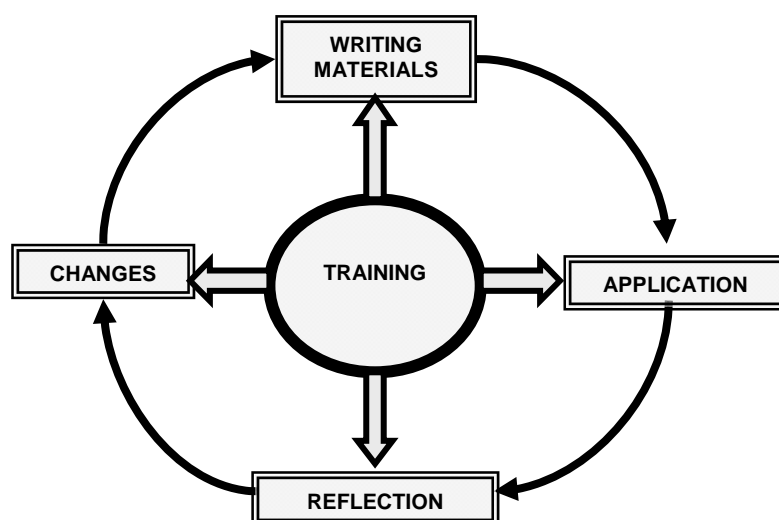


Figure 3: CLIL teacher training model

In addition, trainers visit teachers and observe real lessons in order to offer more personalised and specific feedback to the instructors involved. Teachers are asked to ensure that they have some free time available after the class to discuss the lesson and issues arising from the lesson with the trainer. Since the aim of these private visits is to offer a more personalised training, their content always remains confidential.

The application of this teacher-training model has given trainers the opportunity to identify more accurately the training needs of Social Science teachers. Those needs were closely related to the specifics of any CLIL project, such as how to combine language and content work in their CLIL lessons, how to help students with their English, how to foster communication within the classroom, how to manage effective group-work, etc - but answering to those needs has had a wider impact than in the CLIL classroom. In other words, teachers and trainers realised that the teaching methods used to teach Social Sciences in Basque were too teacher-centred and based on the transmission model. What CLIL required from these teachers was not only to change their language of instruction but also to change their methodological approaches. Integrating content and language in a social science context required the subject teachers to move towards more participative and learner-centred methodologies.

The team of writers and trainers in the Ikastola network considered that the use of more learner-centred methodologies should not only be expected or promoted in CLIL classrooms

³ Eleanitz English teachers are all the English teachers who are involved in the Eleanitz English Project. This project is based on the early introduction of English (at age 4) and aims at enabling students to study Social Sciences or any other school subject through English. For a more detailed description of the teacher-training model followed by the Eleanitz English project see Ball and Lindsay (2010).

but also in mainstream subject teaching. In order to foster that change, the team of material writers and teacher trainers used their experience as CLIL teacher trainers to re-think the content and methodology used for Social Science in-service teacher training in general.

As a result of that re-thinking process, the focus of the general training in Social Science started to shift towards a more experience-based model. In other words, Social Science general training began to apply the loop “experiment-reflect-change” which was the basis of CLIL teacher training, in order to give teachers the opportunity to experiment and reflect on the materials and strategies they were using to teach Social Sciences through Basque, as well as to consider the possible applications of CLIL proposals in their Basque classrooms.

5. Conclusions

For the Ikastola network, the implementation of the CLIL project ‘SSLIC’ has resulted in a series of changes that go beyond the well-known benefits for foreign and L2 language teaching.

As discussed in Section 2, the external evaluation of this CLIL project shows that the learning benefits attained by CLIL students in both Social Sciences and English were worth the invested energy and resources. Moreover, there are wider implications that might be of special interest to those concerned with the maintenance and recovery of minority languages, since the results suggest that a multilingual curriculum can be implemented without limiting students’ competence in the minority language.

Although more research needs to be done regarding the effects of CLIL on the development of L1 and L2 (Sierra, Gallardo del Puerto and Ruiz de Zarobe, 2011), the evaluation results discussed in Section 2 are consistent with a previous longitudinal evaluation carried out by the Ikastolas and The University of the Basque Country (UPV-EHU) (Elorza and Muñoa 2008) and similar results have been found by Cenoz (1998) and Lasagabaster (2008) among others.

This consistency of evaluation results has been crucial to generalize the SSLIC programme among the Ikastolas since it is helping parents, educators and students to overcome the idea of multilingualism being incompatible with the revitalization of Basque Language.

In Sections 3 and 4, we have discussed how the better Social Science results obtained by CLIL students set in motion a process of reflection within the team of material writers and teacher trainers involved in SSLIC. Although some research suggests that CLIL might have an important role in the development of certain cognitive skills (Baetens Beardmore 2008), which would explain the better results obtained by CLIL students in various European contexts, the team of material writers and teacher trainers of the Ikastola network felt that those results might also be explained, at least in part, by the characteristics of the CLIL didactic materials and the in-service training offered to CLIL teachers.

The experience of having created specific didactic materials to teach Social Science through English gave material writers access to a wide range of activities and tasks which, although very widely used in Foreign Language Teaching and CLIL, were not very commonly used in mainstream education. Bringing together those two teaching traditions (CLIL and mainstream education) opened new ways of innovating and improving the teaching materials created by the Ikastolas’ network.

This line of work can be of special interest to immersion schools that aim at revitalizing or maintaining a minority language, since that minority language is the second language for many of their students. Moreover, integrating content and language when teaching through a minority language might also be beneficial to those students whose L1 is the minority language, since exposure to academic or formal language outside school (be that language a

minority language or not) is not always guaranteed. Thus, inserting CLIL activity types might be a way of helping immersion students with the cognitive and linguistic demands of learning, be it through their L1 or L2.

Regarding teacher training, CLIL has given the Ikastolas' network the opportunity to adapt the in-service training model developed for English teachers to the needs of Social Science teachers, regardless of the language they used in the classroom. It goes without saying that the benefits of training subject teachers to help students develop the linguistic competence required for learning will reach not only CLIL students but will positively affect all the students in a school.

It is in this sense that CLIL can become a catalyst for change and help us to improve and update the way we teach (through) foreign languages. More importantly, it can help us to improve our overall educational practice.

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