Chapter 54
Content and Language Integrated Learning in Higher Education:
A Technology–Enhanced Model

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes the online learning component of a blended model designed to promote Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) at the University of Urbino, Italy. A technology-enhanced learning environment is presented along with an analysis of how CLIL was implemented across multiple university departments.

BACKGROUND

European Union (EU) policy aims to promote multilingualism: "The Commission's long-term objective is to increase individual multilingualism until every citizen has practical skills in at least two languages in addition to his or her mother tongue" (Commission of the European Communities, 2005, p. 4). Another key objective of EU policy is student mobility in higher education: "The goal was set that by 2020 at least 20% of those graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have had a study or training period abroad" (Commission of the European Communities, 2011, p. 59). In addition, the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training fosters the development of "creativity and innovation by developing specific teaching and learning methods (including the use of new ICT [Information and Communication Technology] tools)" (Commission of the European Communities, 2009, p. 119/10). To accomplish these goals, the University of Urbino, Italy, has developed an Internationalization Project that implements the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach.

SETTING THE STAGE

In Content and Language Integrated Learning, subject-specific content is taught through a foreign language. CLIL aims to enhance both content and foreign language acquisition: "Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language" (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010, p.1). The integration of content and language is pivotal: "Integration is a powerful pedagogic tool which aims to "safeguard" the subject being taught whilst promoting language as a medium for learning as well as an objective of the learning process itself" (Coyle in Marsh, 2002, p. 27).

The Content and Language Integrated Learning approach is characterized by the 4Cs Framework (e.g., content, communication, cognition, culture) that integrates four components:

Content (subject matter), communication (language learning and using), cognition (learning and thinking processes) and culture (developing intercultural understanding and global citizenship). In so doing, it takes account of integrating content learning and language learning within specific contexts and acknowledges the symbiotic relationship that exists between these elements (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010, p. 41).

In addition to content acquisition and foreign language development, Content and Language Integrated Learning also promotes cognitive flexibility:

Different thinking horizons and pathways which result from CLIL, and the effective constructivist educational practice it promotes, can also have impact on conceptualization (literally, how we think), enriching the understanding of concepts, and broadening conceptual mapping resources. This enables better association of different con-cepts and helps the learner advance towards a more sophisticated level of learning in general. (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010, pp. 10-11)

In a Content and Language Integrated Learning context, activities are created using the Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) construct:

BICS defines basic interpersonal communication skills (survival skills). It refers to a minimum level of competence to handle non-complex interpersonal situations. CALP defines cognitive academic proficiency as a level of linguistic competence needed to operate in more formal academic settings which demand more abstract use of language. (Cummins, 1979)

In a Content and Language Integrated Learning environment, learners are provided with content-specific input in a foreign language, which represents an added educational value but at the same time a challenge for students. To foster content and language acquisition, learners are thus provided with comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985). Furthermore, students are required to produce output, in keeping with Swain's Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1995, pp. 235-253), and negotiate meaning, as suggested by Long (in Ritchie & Bhatia, 1996), in the target language: "negotiation for meaning [...] facilitates acquisition because it connects input, internal learner capacities, particularly selective attention, and output in productive ways" (pp. 451-452). The foreign language is consistently used by instructors and students in CLIL classes. In short, in order for CLIL CALP-level context-reduced activities to be "linguistically accessible whilst being cognitively demanding" (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010, p. 67), students need to be provided with scaffolding geared to help them understand discipline-specific input, produce output, negotiate meaning, and engage actively in the learning process.

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