



## Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) at school in Europe

Country Reports



# CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING (CLIL)

## AT SCHOOL IN EUROPE

### MALTA

#### NATIONAL DESCRIPTION – 2004/05

The national contributions formed the basis for the comparative study on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) at School in Europe. Each contribution has the same structure with six main sections entitled as follows:

- 1) National terminology associated with the concept of CLIL
- 2) Organisation and status of CLIL provision
- 3) The qualifications and specialised training of teachers involved in CLIL
- 4) Debate and ongoing reform
- 5) Statistical data (optional)
- 6) References (optional)

Contributions are available in English and, in the case of some countries, in French.



## 1. NATIONAL TERMINOLOGY ASSOCIATED WITH THE CONCEPT OF CLIL

In Malta, both Maltese and English are considered to be official state languages. However, it should be noted that in public state schools, there is a tendency to use Maltese as the predominant medium of communication and teaching. In some private and church schools, on the other hand, English tends to be the main language of instruction.

Principle 10 of the Maltese National Minimum Curriculum (NMC, 1999) ‘...considers bilingualism as the basis of the educational system. This document regards bilingualism as entailing the effective, precise and confident use of the country’s two official languages: Maltese, the national language, and English’ (p. 37).

Moreover, the NMC advises that ‘... This goal must be reached by the students by the end of their entire schooling experience’ (p. 37).

It recommends that, with regard to official languages, all schools should adopt a policy of utilising the two languages, i.e. Maltese and English, specifying in their respective school development plans the language strategy they intend to adopt over a period of time.

The present report should thus be considered in the light of this bilingual context in which Maltese and English are used from a very early stage. In the Maltese context, CLIL takes on the meaning of teaching the majority of subjects in English at primary, secondary and post-secondary levels. As has been noted, reference is currently made in the Maltese context to bilingualism and not specifically to CLIL.

It should also be noted that the NMC recommends code-switching at both primary and secondary levels in order to facilitate communication and instruction in class when the teaching of certain subjects requires it: ‘...one should revert to code-switching only in those cases where the use of English or Maltese poses problems’ (p. 103).

## 2. ORGANISATION AND STATUS OF CLIL PROVISION

As regards the status granted to English in education, one should note that it is included in mainstream school provision. Back in 1992 there was a (successful) attempt to pilot a project with the aim of introducing CLIL at post-secondary level. A selected group of students of French was taught one of their subjects – systems of knowledge, an obligatory cross-curricular subject for entrance to university – by a team of highly qualified Maltese teachers of French and a French national brought over specially to Malta. While this considerably helped the students concerned to further their knowledge and skills in the French language, the project was discontinued after two years.

Mention should also be made here of specific extracurricular activities undertaken by some schools (mainly primary schools), including the Best Language Practice Award competition, which is held locally every year to celebrate the European Day of Languages (26 September). Various projects are organised and, in many cases, English is used across the curriculum.

In the primary sector, the NMC ‘...encourages teachers... to use English when teaching English, mathematics, science and technology’ (p. 79).

As regards secondary schools for pupils aged 11-16, the NMC recommends that English, mathematics, physical education, computer literacy, expressive arts, technology and design and science be taught in English. These particular subjects are also assessed and tested in English. The certification obtained at the end of secondary school indicates what subjects have been assessed in the language.

As already stated, the NMC gives both the aims and language policy reasons for the use of CLIL in the Maltese context of bilingualism. It regards bilingualism as entailing the effective, precise and confident use of Malta’s two official languages (p. 37). The aim, therefore, is to strengthen the use of English and enhance its general usage

and understanding to mother tongue level. This is the policy generally adopted by all schools, classes and streams.

The NMC was published in 1999 but such provisions existed before then. A policy of this kind does not lay down any admission requirements. CLIL/bilingualism covers the years a student progresses through compulsory schooling (up to the age of 16) and is carried forward in post-secondary, tertiary and vocational education.

As regards teaching methodologies and approaches, these tend to respect the learning styles and psychological development of learners irrespective of bilingualism or CLIL. Updating of methodologies and modern approaches is one of the recommendations listed by the NMC: ‘...Teachers are democratic and just in their pedagogical practice when they choose to ... respect students’ interests and different learning styles ... incorporate the students’ interests, styles and needs in their schemes of work and lesson plans’ (p. 41).

For obvious reasons, such methodologies can vary from one institution or class to the next.

Given the particular geo-social reality of Malta and the various recommendations within the NMC, one could say that learners should constantly be exposed to English, formally, informally and non-formally.

The NMC is a nationally binding legal document. However, schools in Malta are autonomous in their adoption of methodologies and approaches. That said, they are committed to the principle of bilingualism as adopted in the NMC. A number of curricular education officers constantly ensure that this provision is respected.

No formal pilot projects as such can at present be identified. One might mention individual initiatives by schools focusing on some aspects of CLIL.

### **3. THE QUALIFICATIONS AND SPECIALISED TRAINING OF TEACHERS INVOLVED IN CLIL**

All teachers in Malta are considered to be fully proficient in both the official state languages. It follows, therefore, that they should be proficient to teach in English those subjects already specified, as required by the NMC. This applies to all levels though to a varying extent.

As regards pre-service training, this is carried out by the University of Malta at which the medium of instruction and evaluation is generally English. Inset courses are generally provided by the Education Division through its Department of Curriculum Management section for training and staff development. Here too, English is generally the oral and written medium of communication. This assures that teachers are constantly being immersed in the language they are expected to use in class for the teaching of certain subjects.

As English is a *sine qua non*, no official qualifications are required to teach the designated subjects and no further formal qualifications are envisaged. However, undergraduates could be asked to sit a formal English test during their first year of Bachelor of Education studies at the University.

In some non-state schools, one can find native speakers of English teaching English and/or other subjects. It should also be mentioned, in passing, that some CLIL provision is informally offered by (target language) mother tongue language assistants and not solely in English.

Since bilingualism is a basic feature of the educational system, no salary increases or other benefits are envisaged.

### **4. DEBATE AND ONGOING REFORM**

As in the case of all other policies, recommendations and principles, the policy of bilingualism was the result of wide discussion among many stakeholders prior to the formulation and eventual publication of the National Minimum Curriculum document in 1999. This discussion continues and another revised and updated version of the NMC is now awaited, so that ‘...the educational system succeeds in responding to the realities and challenges

that have emerged in Maltese society, in a world that is becoming ever more complex, global and interdependent' (p.23).

## **5. REFERENCES**

Creating the Future Together: National Minimum Curriculum, Ministry of Education 1999, Malta. ISBN: 99909-74-04-7.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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