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## **Introducing: Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)**

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**Introduction**

A quiet revolution has taken place in Queensland in the last twenty years. In an educational context where the mainstream teaching of second languages has reached occasional heights but has more often been marginalised and the object of criticism, a progressive program for teaching key learning areas in a second language has taken hold in a number of schools state wide. As part of ongoing discussions about the validity of second language teaching in Australia and a current debate about language choices, this paper examines second language immersion programs from the perspective of their contribution to whole school practices and the preparation of Australian students as global citizens of tomorrow. In a global research context, bilingual immersion programs are usually seen as the sites for integrated language and content learning.

Therefore, the phrase Content and Language Integrated Learning and its abbreviation CLIL have become synonymous with the broad research into bilingual education (see for example Marsh, D. 1994; Mehisto et al, 2008). In particular, the CLIL concept has been embraced by practitioners and researchers in the field of Teaching English as a Second Language, and bilingual programs which teach curriculum through the medium of English are now widespread in non-English-speaking countries (Deller, S. et al, 2007). However, in a unique incarnation, CLIL has found a multilingual home in Queensland

bilingual immersion programs. While many teachers and educators have heard of immersion programs, the nature of such programs, their successful integration in several Queensland schools and their benefits for whole school practices are less considered.

The article will therefore first define the term immersion teaching and give a brief overview of this teaching approach in global settings. After looking at the general concept, the article presents details of a selected program, the German Immersion Program at one Queensland State High School. Most general information about second language immersion programs is available from the Education Queensland website or the participating schools' websites, but some of what I present here is additional information gained from my own children's participation in a German Immersion Program from 2006 and continuing, and from my own teaching experience as a German Immersion teacher.

### **The Concept of Immersion Teaching**

The concept of immersion language teaching refers to the dual focus of teaching a second language and teaching key learning areas through the medium of that second language. Immersion students use the second language as their language of work and communication and develop intercultural competencies and multidimensional subject-specific knowledges at the same time (Haataja, 2009, p.6). The extent of the immersion often depends on contextual circumstances, for example the availability of resources and qualified staff. Some programs offer all subjects in another language, other programs offer only some subjects. Immersion teaching has had many incarnations through its history, among them the use of Greek and Latin as languages of learning across medieval Europe; French as the language of the upper classes in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe; and the success of bilingualism as part of large sections of the Canadian school system (Baker, 2006).

More recently, immersion teaching or bilingual education continues to take many different forms. Apart from the ongoing large-scale bilingual school programs that mirror societal bilingualism in countries such as Canada, English Speaking International Schools in any non-English speaking country are also involved in approaches to immersion teaching. These schools cater not only for English-speaking expats, but often

attract a large number of local students whose parents prefer them to receive their schooling in English as their second language. International schooling is not limited to English, of course; other languages, such as German, are also offered within international schooling for German expats, and similarly attract locals who consider the dual focus on language and content learning as a benefit.

Across Europe, many schools close to borders offer schooling in two languages, to respond to the open borders and increased cross-country (and cross-language) traffic for personal or professional reasons. While these programs might be offered in French, Polish, Czech or German, to name just a few languages, many bilingual immersion programs in Europe are now in English, a reflection of the growing importance of English as a lingua franca in that part of the world. However, a variety of CLIL programs now takes place in almost all EU countries in primary and secondary education and might cover regional, minority or second languages (Eurydice, 2008). In the United States, 242 full or partial second language immersion programs across 11 languages are offered in 28 States (CAL, 2009). Due to geographical, social and cultural reasons, Spanish, next to English, is the second most important language in the United States. The Centre for Applied Linguistics in the United States has recorded 131 schools which have introduced Spanish immersion programs across the country. This mainly reflects the demographics of many American regions where bilingual programs serve a mixture of first and second language speakers of Spanish.

The wide variety of immersion or bilingual programs suggests that no simple definition can be given for such programs. Some cater for expats and interested locals; some were developed as a means for language-learning; some respond to widespread societal bilingualism, regional or minority languages or the physical vicinity to other languages. In Queensland, the concept of immersion teaching usually refers to a partial program of offering approximately half the key learning areas in a second language in Years 8-10. At present, there are ten schools in Queensland that feature immersion programs in French, German, Spanish, Italian, Japanese (the only primary program), Indonesian and Chinese. The target student cohort consists of native speakers of English. In reality these programs often attract background and heritage speakers of the immersion language, as well as native speakers of further languages other than English. The role of

immersion programs as niche attractions to a variety of parents and students, and the reasons for such attraction have not been examined yet. However, a current research project I am conducting at a Queensland State High School involves questioning parents and students about their reasons to enroll in immersion programs. Research findings will enable a clearer picture of parent and student motivation to participate in second language immersion programs in Queensland.

The programs were designed predominantly as a way to reach high levels of language proficiency for second language learners and were part of a revival period for languages education. Until the 1960s teaching of languages other than English (LOTE) in both private and public high schools was the norm: French took first place, followed by German. Although widely distributed today, the Asian languages Japanese, Chinese and Indonesian had not yet gained a place in the canon of foreign languages. In the late 1960s and the 1970s teaching of foreign languages was increasingly neglected, becoming by the middle of the 1980s a rather suppressed optional subject for a small number of interested students. The reorientation of Australia towards the Asian region in the 1980s, the multicultural realities of school and society more widely and an increased awareness of the global advantages of foreign languages led to a renaissance of foreign languages as compulsory subjects in Australian schools throughout that decade. The focus was and continues to be on economic advantages in speaking the languages of our trade partners. This argument links LOTE to many other aspects of current educational policies which seem to prioritise a framework of skills perceived to be advantageous for economic participation and growth.

The cultural climate of languages as part of a general 'up-skilling' of Australian students again nourished the concept of immersion education. In Queensland the movement was led by Michael Berthold, a teacher of French. In 1985 he started the first bilingual program in Queensland at Benowa State High School on the Gold Coast (Berthold, 1995). Full immersion teaching, in which all subjects are taught in the foreign language, was then and still is extremely rare in Australia, due mainly to the lack of qualified key learning area teachers with high skills in foreign languages. Furthermore, there are only few tertiary courses on offer that focus on bilingualism and bilingual education, and most immersion teachers even now rely on occasional professional development sessions,

organised by Education Queensland, for their challenging role as dual focus language and content teachers.

In an early indication of the role of immersion programs for the attractiveness of public schools, the French immersion program gained Benowa a reputation as an exceptional school. The program was retained after Berthold moved to The Glennie School in Toowoomba, where he started another French immersion program (de Courcy, 1997). In 1991 the Queensland government decided to encourage foreign languages, supporting foreign language teaching with extensive funding. In the course of this initiative, the first middle school German immersion program was established at Kenmore State High School (Kenmore SHS) in 1992. The second German immersion program was established in 2003 at Ferny Grove State High School (Ferny Grove SHS) by a former Kenmore SHS teacher who had experience in immersion teaching. These immersion programs were indeed seen as one component of attempts to stem the exodus of students from state schools to private schools in the early nineties. The following section looks at an example of one successfully implemented German immersion program.

### **Taking a closer look at the shape of one immersion program**

Investigating the German Immersion program at one of the State High School offering such a choice is an instructive way to understand the shape of such programs. At this school three key learning areas, namely Mathematics, Science and Studies of Society and the Environment (SOSE) are taught in German in Years 8, 9 and 10 in two parallel German Immersion classes. In immersion programs at other schools, subjects such as Music, Sport or Art may be offered in addition to these KLA's if suitable teachers are available. About 160 students at this High School participate in the two parallel classes of the German immersion program in Years 8, 9 and 10. In each year level, one of the two parallel classes combines Music Extension (in English) with the immersion program. All subjects which are taught in German are taken by qualified teachers who are native or near-native speakers of German. The 'German Immersion Program' (GIP) is strongly supported by a parent group, which meets monthly and organises camps, guest presentations and an exchange program with students in Germany. Most of the immersion students participate in the exchange to Germany. The trip takes place at the

end of Year 10, with students spending most of Term 4 away and in Germany. This extensive exposure to German home life, school lessons and the country at large during an included 10-day tour, enables the immersion students to consolidate three years of language and contents learning. It represents a juncture of literacy skills in general, in German and in key learning areas.

As immersion students are required to follow the mainstream Queensland curriculum, the program will cover such areas as “Australian Identities“ at the same time as mainstream students within the school. Immersion teachers translate most of the materials used from the mainstream textbooks and develop worksheets and information overviews in German. Additionally, book resources from Germany, internet sources such as YouTube and German topical websites are used to prepare adequate teaching materials to cover the curriculum. This means a considerable additional workload for immersion teachers. However, the need to find or develop suitable materials also steers immersion teachers towards expanding their own repertoire of literary skills, particularly in the new media. Table 1 below summarises the new repertoire required by teachers working within an immersion program.

Table 1: New Repertoires of Practices for Teachers

Requirements of immersion programs	New Repertoires for Teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Follows the Queensland Curriculum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop translation skills from English into German</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Covers work program topics at the same time as mainstream students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refine their translations skills from English into German to accurately represent subject-specific terms, expressions and grammatical structures</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Covers specific Queensland Curriculum topics that are not necessarily represented in German textbooks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop new worksheets and information sheets with data research and collected from German materials</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Requires educational materials about a variety of topics, but</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use internet sources, print media and new media such as data</li> </ul>

textbooks are often not available	projector and interactive whiteboards to source, translate and present the topics to be studied in German
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Similarly, immersion students are developing new repertoires of practice that include translation skills, sourcing of materials from German websites and learning new media skills, such as Window Movie Maker, while focussing on mainstream topics in German. In Year 10, these skills have been sufficiently honed to cover topics such as the electrical circuit (Ohm's Law, voltage, resistance), the digestive system or homeostasis completely in German. This mastery of subject-specific literacies in German is quite impressive, however some research has shown that competence in general German language skills seems to suffer under the weight of having to cover the subject-specific topics (and their literacies) as well as second language skills (Dobrenov-Major, 1998).

One of the questions often raised is: "Do immersion students find it difficult to translate the technical terms learned in the key learning areas back into English once they enter Year 11?" This is a question that is raised by parents regularly. Students in Years 11 and 12, who have successfully completed the immersion program, generally report that there is a brief period of a few weeks in Year 11, when they have to get accustomed to the terminology in English. However as they have studied the same curriculum, work program and concepts as their mainstream school mates, it is simply a matter of recognition and internal translation for them. There are a number of factors of the German immersion program that contribute to successful subject-specific literacy skills being developed in both English and German during involvement in the program. This development works to make the transition back to working in English achievable. These factors include:

- Teachers often translate German terms into English for clarification.
- Immersion students frequently use dictionaries and internet translation sites at home to explain specific terms.
- The challenge of understanding new scientific, mathematic or social science terms in German often leads to a deeper engagement with these terms, through personal research at home for clarification.

Students are therefore already familiar with the English terms when they enter Year 11.

After a few weeks after the transition out of an immersion program, students feel 'fluent' in the English vocabulary, but can reach back to sound German foundations in several key learning areas they might want to study later at a German-speaking university. The intensive focus on language structures might have 'trained' these middle years students to apply literacy skills such as grammar analysis, vocabulary scaffolding and word recognition in their native language as well as in the second language (Tisdell, 1999). While no large-scale investigation into the number of former immersion students studying at universities in non-English-speaking countries has been conducted as yet, there is a general assumption within the field that immersion programs contribute to more opportunities for Australian students in a globalised world.

Part of the political rhetoric in recent years has been a focus on how to prepare Australian students for the requirements of a globalised, networked world. Chief investigator of a report on language education for the Australian Academy of the Humanities, Colin Nettelbeck, states that "[language learning] is an absolutely necessary condition for the exercise of personal potential in a globalised world" (Nettelbeck, quoted in Lane, 2009, p.33). Apart from benefitting from potential economic and employment advantages of speaking another language, immersion students have found ways to use new technologies to establish intercontinental relationships with their exchange partners in Germany. Preliminary findings from an ongoing research project into "The Use of Multiliteracies amongst Second Language Immersion Students" that I am currently conducting have demonstrated innovative ways that Australian immersion students use digital technology to communicate with other young people who are speakers of their second language. For example, after the State High School mentioned earlier had organised the official exchange partners between the Australian students and students at a German school, the German students invited their Australian counterparts to join in a social networking site called "Schülerverzeichnis" which is administered by and only open to school students by invitation. This once exclusively German site is now being used amongst Australian students who invite each other to join. The site is only available in German. In a truly globalised networking practice, Australian immersion students are using their language skills to engage with the possibilities and repertoires of new technologies, in new languages, while building up communication skills across cultures.

Taking these aspects into account, Figure 1 summarises the potential that immersion programs might have in addressing broader educational aims in contemporary Australia.

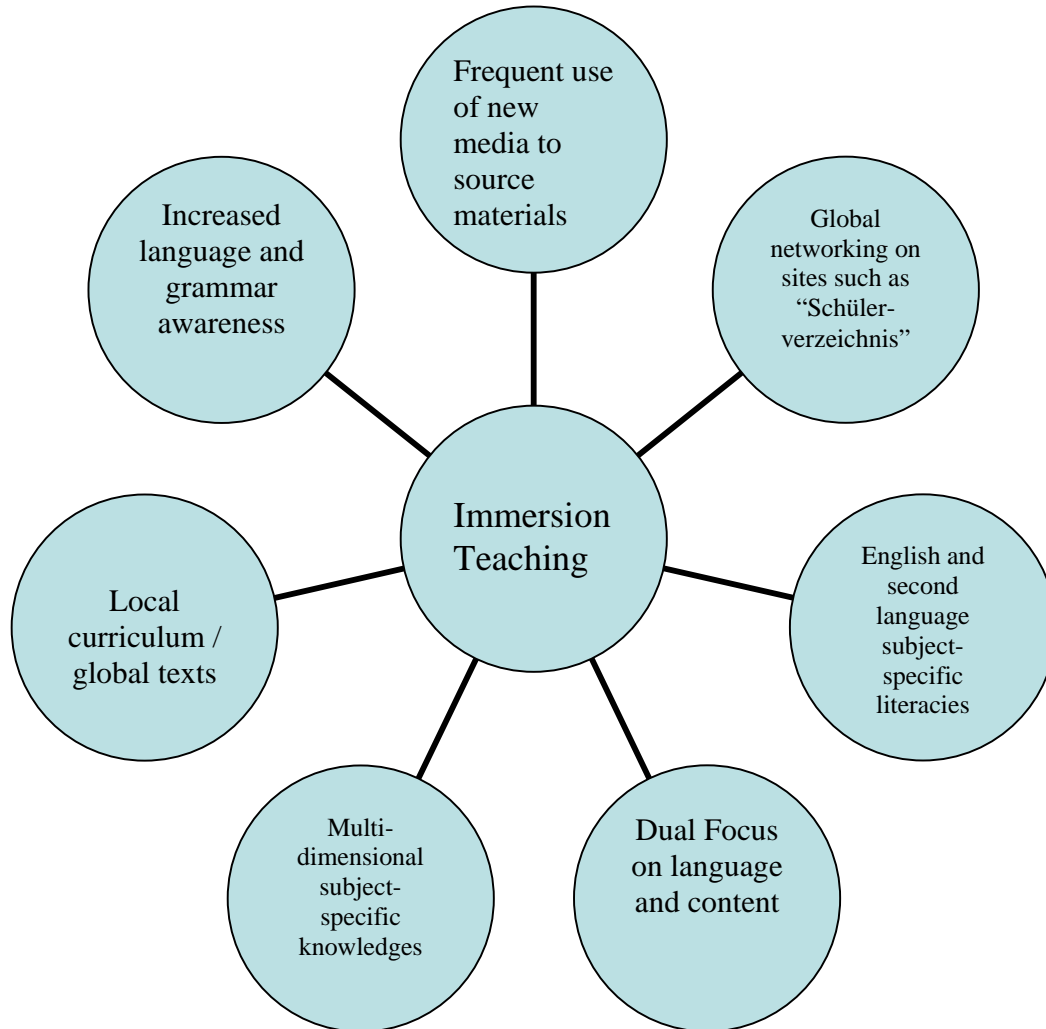


Figure 1: Potential broader educational aims of Australian contemporary society addressed by participation in immersion programs.

A recent parent survey conducted at a Queensland State High School that offers a German immersion program, showed that many parents see future advantages in an immersion experience. Maybe not surprisingly, there is a particular concentration among parents who reported a German-speaking background. This is the case at both Queensland High Schools that offer German immersion, 10–15% of the students involved at both these schools have a German-speaking background, either as

immigrant children or so-called 'background speakers', who have grown up bilingually. Since Brisbane, unlike Sydney, has no German school, parents from German-speaking countries sometimes choose the German immersion program as a 'means to an end'. These parents see immersion programs as an opportunity to maintain and increase language skills at a high proficiency level, with a view toward work opportunities in German-speaking countries for their children in later life.

Future work, travel and study opportunities are however also expected by parents of students involved in the second language immersion programs who have no language or cultural background in the target languages. Parents generally hope for more cultural awareness for their children, and the development of cultural sensibilities for non-English-speaking countries. This reflects a focus on a globalised world, and the awareness that as an Australian one must turn to other parts of the world to remain competitive, despite the great physical distances involved. Parents who give these responses see their children as 'global players' whose futures lie in the international job market. They are seeking a school education which will give their children a good future, and hope that the foreign language skills and a certain 'cosmopolitan cultural quality' of immersion programs will make their children competitive.

## **Conclusion**

Immersion teaching has established itself across schools in Queensland and continues to grow in new regions. The concept of CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning – therefore presents a new research field for educators interested in creating the best conditions for this worldwide phenomenon in its local incarnations. In a time that requires students to develop new repertoires of practice as global citizens, immersion programs offer a host of opportunities to hone the essential skills for this project. The strong emphasis on new media as a necessity to develop Queensland curricular materials in the second language steers teachers and students towards engagement and familiarity with new technologies. Students develop subject-specific literacies in two languages and can look beyond the English-speaking world for tertiary studies and employment. They are building up intercontinental networks much earlier than many of their mainstream school-mates. The rapid economic changes the world has seen in recent months remind us of the interconnectedness of countries and the need to

communicate across languages and cultures. Immersion programs are a promising contribution towards shaping the global Australian citizen of tomorrow.

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