

Scepticism can't keep Cili from climbing

Nile MA Cili course leader Phil Ball explains why the 'church of Cili' continues to expand

Despite occasional outbreaks of scepticism, reports of the death of Cili have been greatly exaggerated. Indeed, the paradigm appears to be robust, ever-expanding and in a state of rude good health.

Between August and October alone there have been important conferences in Venice, Colombia (Chia) and Mallorca. Back in March there was a significant think-tank meeting at Lake Como, where the relationship between Cili and competences was explored and recommendations subsequently made to the European Commission. Various other new initiatives from within the church of Cili should maintain the pulse-rate for some time to come.

The Graz Group, for example, working under the auspices of the European Centre for Modern Languages, is engaged in a project to both map out and then develop greater awareness of subject-specific academic 'literacies' – with a deliberate emphasis on the plural noun. In our forthcoming book *Putting Cili into Practice* John Clegg, Keith Kelly and I will argue for a fresh perspective on the word 'content' and propose a three-dimensional model to help teachers negotiate a clearer route through the minefield of language and content integration.

Meanwhile, other significant developments are keeping Cili in the news. Top-down legislation from educational ministries (particularly in Europe) has so far not been a common feature

of the Cili landscape. Typically, the practice has been initiated and then spread via a series of unilateral initiatives, often uncoordinated, with each new push in danger of re-inventing the wheel. It has been a dynamic and democratic process, strong on enthusiasm but often weak on concomitant resources and training.

However, the recent decision of the Italian government to make a certain percentage of Cili practice obligatory for the fourteen-to-nineteen age group promises some interesting outcomes with implications for officially run training and resources. In Spain autonomous regional governments continue to support Cili where it already exists and to encourage its development where its presence is scarce. As experienced trainers are still thin on the ground, online Cili courses will become more important for these contexts, with the added considerations of quality control and competition that inevitably arise in the wake of a growing raft of digital offerings. This is also true in the case of South and Central America, where interest in Cili also continues to grow.

Tertiary education is also becoming more acquainted with the practice that Cili-type methodologies can offer. This

ticularly with regard to the school system. However, the growing visibility of EAL practices as a support strategy for British society's growing plurilingual scene has created an awareness among international Cili practitioners that they have much to learn from this obvious interface. The two paradigms share similar methodological parameters, and this has helped Cili rediscover the excellent work of Pauline Gibbons, Douglas Barnes and others. This can only be positive as it serves to hammer home the discovery that successful Cili projects have all experienced – namely the fact that good Cili practice feeds back into the system in general and begins to improve first language practice as well, principally with regard to its understanding of how language affects academic performance. In fact, it might be true to say that this has been Cili's most important contribution so far.

It also begs a few questions as to its future. Do Coyle, one of Cili's pioneers and one of its most energetic proponents, has recently gone on record as saying that she will be 'happy' when the Cili acronym disappears, in a *BEO Magazine* article. Far from wanting to disown her own baby, she simply meant that as Cili develops, its practice will be seen as the norm.



Courtesy Desirée Flicker

DISCOVERY Two budding scientists eager to learn through Cili

of languages, and Cili-based training (or EMI – where it is English as a Medium of Instruction) for these teachers has now become more common.

In purely technical terms, Cili is also undergoing changes. This reshaping of the model is inevitable, given the pace and instability of educational change itself and the fact that the Cili acronym originally appeared in 1994 in Finland, right on the cusp of many of the more radical developments (digitalisation, competences) whose exact forms were difficult to predict with true certainty twenty years ago. Consider, for example, the case of Britain, long dismissed by Cili militants as a hopeless case, par-

not the exception. This being the case, why would we continue to need the acronym? She's probably right. This is because Cili is an educational paradigm, not a language-learning approach – a point consistently misunderstood by many in the ELT world, and apparent in articles such as the recent one by Amos Paran, in *Applied Linguistics Review* 2013, who approaches the issue with surgical precision – but from an ELT perspective only. The article, nevertheless, was a timely contribution to Cili debate.

The future map of education will surely require the expertise of both subject and language practitioners, but also of a more hybrid model of teaching. Competence-led education is inevitable, and with it the practice of Cili and its performance-based ideology will lead to a future where we replace the rather archaic-sounding EU Key Competence 'communication in foreign languages' with the much simpler 'doing things with languages'. That is when the acronym Cili will disappear, but also when its contribution will be fully appreciated. ■

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