Theme 3
Socializing the Global in Europe: Micro-Level Local and Regional Developments
**Content and Language Integrated Learning as a Tool for Multilingual Democratic Education**

Cristina Luca

1 And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. 2 And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there. 3 And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. 4 And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. 5 And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children built. 6 And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do; and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. 7 Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. 8 So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. 9 Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.

Genesis 11:1-9

**Introduction**

The myth of Babel represents a milestone in the history of language, namely the transition from the oral to the written code, dated between 1500 and 1800 BC, when the first Sumerian and Phoenician alphabets were created. This step shows us that after the codification of languages differences arose among them because each culture tends to specialize in different skills and communicative needs. In the myth the separation of men, because of the language they speak, is explained as a divine punishment caused by the human sin of pride. It is an extreme action that divides people and causes a lack of communication between them, making languages mutually incomprehensible. If we consider the symbolic value of the myth
of Babel we can conclude that there was the need for an action outside language itself to separate languages and to create a lack of communication.

Historically, this external action seems, therefore, to have originated in the transition from exclusively oral to written communication, which caused the multiplying of the purposes and uses of language. From that moment on, the linguistic history of mankind is characterised by the relationship between the oral and written code, which alternated in importance at various times. This historical change gives us the opportunity to read multilingualism as a historical condition that developed due to the natural evolution of human civilization.

There is a very intense debate among scholars about the conditions and reasons why different languages developed from an ancient common matrix. What we can observe is that the development of humanity is characterised by a variety of languages and we may conclude that linguistic differentiation is included in the DNA of humanity as one of the factors that characterize our species. As Cummins argues, plurilingualism is a natural condition of human beings. Moreover, it is a genetic condition that does not differ at all for one or another language. Cummins, in his famous metaphor, compares the human brain to an iceberg whose mass is invisible underwater. This iceberg is the potential for humans to acquire language, and the visible mountains of ice are the manifestations outside of this innate potential or capacity, that is, languages themselves. While the languages, or mountains of the iceberg, may be many, the mass of ice that joins below the sea level is the same. So human beings are naturally predisposed to plurilingualism, which is a potential, provided that there are conditions capable of activating its mechanism of language acquisition (Language Acquisition Device or LAD).

As we will see more in detail, bilingualism or plurilingualism in general, and not monolingualism, as some tended to believe, is common to human condition and multilingualism is in fact the rule and not the exception in societies.

Focusing our attention on Europe, we can see that the European Union (EU) is founded on the principle of diversity of cultures, customs, beliefs and therefore languages. According to the Treaty of Lisbon, signed by the Heads of State or Government of all EU Member States in December 2007, the EU “shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity and shall

---

2 Ibid., 80-85.
ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced".³ This principle is interconnected with the new challenges that derive from the international migration flow that affects all member states with important consequences on the linguistic and cultural dimension of EU.

In this paper *linguistic education* is analysed from the perspective of students who suffer from inadequate language competence, whether they are natives or students from a migrant background (called from now on immigrant students). It will be argued that education always implies language education and we should no longer distinguish between monolingual language education for native students and a multilingual education for immigrants. Only when the two instances are integrated, an educational system can foster *democratic education* for both native and migrant students. In my opinion a methodology known as Content and Language Integrated Learning, which was born to promote in particular foreign language learning in privileged environments, offers teachers useful strategies they can apply in particularly disadvantaged school contexts, to promote a cognitive academic language proficiency in a first language or in a second language for immigrants.

The frame of reference and the methodological approach of this paper is that of the science of education in the field of language teaching and learning. Research in the science of education relies on a variety of contributions from different branches of research such as cognitive psychology, sociology and neurolinguistics among others. Therefore the research is interdisciplinary.

My own experience as a teacher of languages in secondary education has guided my research. Therefore, while the overview and the conclusions are taken from a European perspective, specific observations may have been stimulated by the particular context in which my teaching experience took place, that is, the vocational schools of the Friuli Venezia Giulia region in the north east of Italy.

**Plurilingualism and multilingualism: some definitions**

It is important to distinguish between plurilingualism and multilingualism since they are different concepts which entail different approaches in education. These concepts are clearly defined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR):

---

In recent years, the concept of plurilingualism has grown in importance in the Council’s of Europe approach to language learning. Plurilingualism differs from multilingualism, which is the knowledge of a number of languages, or the co-existence of different languages in a given society. Multilingualism may be attained by simply diversifying the languages on offer in a particular school or educational system, or by encouraging pupils to learn more than one foreign language, or reducing the dominant position of English in international communication. Beyond this, the plurilingual approach emphasises the fact that as an individual person’s experience of language in its cultural context expands, from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the language of other people (whether learnt at school or college, or by direct experience), he or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact. In different situations, a person can call flexibly upon different parts of this competence to achieve effective communication with a particular interlocutor.\(^4\)

According to the definition, a plurilingual person may switch from one language or dialect to another, exploiting the ability to express him/herself in one language and to understand another; a plurilingual ability can also be the knowledge of a number of languages a person can call to make sense of a text, written or even spoken. This might even be of a previously unknown language, for example, by recognising words from a common already known language. At its extreme, plurilingual competence allows individuals to achieve some degree of communication, even in the absence of a common language or of a mediator, since they are able to bring the whole of their linguistic equipment into play, experimenting with alternative forms of expressions in different languages or dialects, exploiting paralinguistics (mime, gestures, facial expressions, etc.) and simplifying the use of language.

It is extremely important that every policy in favour of the promotion of the individual’s linguistic competence takes into account that the competence we build cannot be monolithic by definition since it is always the result of complex stratifications and interactions of languages. This concept is stressed by the Council of Europe in another document where it is specified that:

Plurilingual and pluricultural competence refers to the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social agent has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures. This is not seen as the superposition

---

or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the user may draw.\textsuperscript{5}

From a European Union perspective plurilingualism has several functions:

Proficiency in several Community languages has become a precondition if citizens of the European Union are to benefit from the occupational and personal opportunities open to them in the border-free single market. (…..) [Economic function].

Languages are also the key to knowing other people. Proficiency in languages helps to build up the feeling of being European with all its cultural wealth and diversity and of understanding between the citizens of Europe [Identity function].

Learning Languages also has another important effect: experience shows that when undertaken from a very early age, it is an important factor in doing well at school. Contact with another language is not only compatible with becoming proficient in one’s mother tongue, it also makes it easier. It opens the mind, stimulates intellectual agility and, of course, expands people’s cultural horizon [Cultural function].\textsuperscript{6}

This paper works around the idea that before the economic, identity and even the cultural function, plurilingualism is necessary for social inclusion to prevent discrimination, as will become clearer in the following paragraph.

**For a democratic education**

Europe has far too many young people leaving education without the skills they need to participate in the knowledge society and to move smoothly into employment. They face the risk of social exclusion. Further, they are effectively shut out of lifelong learning early in their lives.\textsuperscript{7}

The joint progress report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the “Education and Training 2010” work programme, “Delivering lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation” assesses member states’ implementation of a number of objectives and benchmarks of the Commission “Education and Training”. Among the areas in which the implementation is said to be insufficient is the acquisition of basic skills for all citizens. Far from being democratic, the education of Member States appears

\textsuperscript{5} Daniel Coste et al., *Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2009), 5. Emphasis added CL.


inadequate in terms of early school leavers, upper secondary attainment, key competences and reading achievements. From this report it appears that migrants and disadvantaged groups with different cultural backgrounds from the dominant culture perform less well in the benchmark areas in most countries. The member states are therefore asked to adopt measures to reduce educational inequalities through the means of priority educational policies. Priority education policies have been defined by the researchers involved in the EuroPEP project as:

- policies aiming at acting on educational disadvantage through targeted measures or action plans (whether targeted on socio-economic, ethnic, linguistic or religious, regional or educational criteria or breakdowns) by offering to provide the populations determined in this way something extra (or “better” or “different”).

The following paragraphs focus on the links I want to argue exist between an ineffective linguistic education and school failure. As I have said, I will take into account the case of Italy especially with regard to vocational schools, which are usually attended mostly by immigrant students and the least privileged Italian students.

The answer of the institutions: European, Italian and regional regulations in favour of plurilingualism

After having analysed the meaning and implications of plurilingualism and the necessity to implement democratic education, it is useful to briefly describe the normative frame for specific actions in favour of the promotion of plurilingualism for specific groups.

As far as the EU is concerned, what emerges is that originally there was a clear distinction between regional or national minorities and immigrants. While the first were eligible to forms of institutional protection, the latter were considered only in the frame of economic cooperation. As a consequence, the linguistic protection of the two groups was affected. The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages is a European treaty adopted in 1992 under the auspices of the Council of Europe to protect and promote historical regional and minority languages in Europe. For the purposes of this Charter “regional or minority languages” means languages that are:

I. traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State's population; and

II. different from the official language(s) of that State;

---

it does not include either dialects of the official language(s) of the State or the languages of migrants.\textsuperscript{9}

Interestingly enough, the Charter only applies to languages traditionally used by the nationals, thus excluding languages used by recent immigrants from other states.

The issue of language protection is more widely treated in The Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights which is an international document that was signed by UNESCO, the PEN Clubs, and several non-governmental organizations in 1996 to support linguistic rights, especially those of endangered languages:

Article 1

5. This Declaration considers as a language group any group of persons sharing the same language which is established in the territorial space of another language community but which does not possess historical antecedents equivalent to those of that community. Examples of such groups are immigrants, refugees, deported persons and members of diasporas (...)

Article 4

1. This Declaration considers that persons who move to and settle in the territory of another language community have the right and the duty to maintain an attitude of integration towards this community. This term is understood to mean an additional socialization of such persons in such a way that they may preserve their original cultural characteristics while sharing with the society in which they have settled sufficient references, values and forms of behaviour to enable them to function socially without greater difficulties than those experienced by members of the host community.

2. This Declaration considers, on the other hand, that assimilation, a term which is understood to mean acculturation in the host society, in such a way that the original cultural characteristics are replaced by the references, values and forms of behaviour of the host society, must on no account be forced or induced and can only be the result of an entirely free choice.\textsuperscript{10}

It is remarkable that the first document to promote the linguistic rights of immigrants was signed by institutions and non-governmental organisations that are not bound within the linguistic policies of the member states.

In Italian Law number 40 of 6 March 1998, about “The Discipline of Immigration and the Norms on the Conditions of Immigrants”, there is an interesting statement on linguistic rights. Article 36 states that:


La comunità scolastica accoglie le differenze linguistiche e culturali come valore da porre a fondamento del rispetto reciproco, dello scambio tra le culture e della tolleranza; a tal fine promuove e favorisce iniziative volte all'accoglienza, alla tutela della cultura e della lingua d'origine e alla realizzazione di attività interculturali comuni.\footnote{The school community accepts the linguistic and cultural differences as a value to be placed at the foundation of mutual respect, exchange among cultures and tolerance; it promotes and encourages initiatives to welcome foreigners, to preserve their culture and language of origin and to implement common intercultural activities.” Italy, Legge 6 marzo 1998, n. 40, “Disciplina dell’immigrazione e norme sulla condizione dello straniero”, G.U. n. 59 12 marzo 1998, art 36 comma 3.}

This law highlights the role of schools and introduces the important issue of the preservation of the languages of origin, which is very well known at the European level as the preservation of heritage languages.\footnote{For further information on the concept of heritage languages and the measures to preserve them see Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, \textit{Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe} (Eurydice Network, April 2009), 19-27.}

**The least privileged students in Italy: immigrants but non only**

\textit{Immigrant students in Italian schools: some figures}

The latest report published by the Italian Ministry of Education (December 2009) confirms that the numbers of non-Italian pupils in schools are growing: in 2005/2006 there were 431,211 such pupils, with an increase of 16,3% compared to 2004/2005; in 2006/2007 there were 501,494 such individuals, with an impact on the total school population of 5,6%, in 2007/2008 their number rose to 574,000 and in 2008/2009 to 629,360 with an increase of 9,6% compared to the previous year with an impact on the total school population of 7%. Distribution in different schools is as follows: 7,6% at kindergarten, 8,3% at primary schools, 8% at “middle schools”, 4,8% at secondary schools. This phenomenon characterises especially Northern Italy with the Friuli Venezia Giulia region carrying 10%. In 2005/2006 there were students from 191 different countries in Italian schools. The majority of pupils are Romanians (16,8%), Albanian (14,6%), and Moroccan (13,3%).\footnote{Ministero dell’Istruzione, Università e della Ricerca, Direzione Generale per gli Studi, la Statistica e per i Sistemi Informativi, \textit{Gli alunni stranieri nel sistema scolastico italiano} (Servizio Statistico, Dicembre 2009), http://www.istruzione.it/getOM?idfileentry=218168 (accessed 10 May 2010).}

The school performance of immigrant students is lower than that of Italians especially in secondary schools where more problems arise. Those immigrants who choose vocational schools number 40% against 19,9% of Italian students. This implies a high concentration of immigrants in some schools, especially in areas with the highest migratory flow. For
example, in vocational schools in the northeast of Italy there are 11.4% foreign students, 10.5% in the north-west, 8.5% in the centre and in the south only 1%.

**School results of immigrant students**

The observation of school results shows that generally immigrant students achieve lower grades than Italians do and it also shows that this gap increases in higher education. For instance, at secondary school, the rate of immigrants not able to pass the school year is 12.8% higher than the rate for Italians. We have to remember that 72.6% of immigrant students are enrolled in a lower class compared to their age. According to Italian regulations this may be allowed when a student’s knowledge of the Italian language is inadequate to attend the following class.

This synthetic profile outlined in relation to immigrants has to be compared with the overall data for the Italian school where they were enrolled. Even if the number of students who obtain a higher-level diploma has increased in the past few decades, Italian students’ literacy in reading, science and mathematics is very low compared to many other European and non-European countries as is shown by the results of the OECD/PISA survey. As far as reading literacy is concerned, in Italy 50.9% of students falls below level 3, which was identified in the PISA survey as the level at which students demonstrate the basic level of competence in reading that enable them to deal effectively with common life situations that require this competence. Moreover, the results are dramatically negative especially in vocational schools where, as we have seen, there is a higher incidence of immigrant students. In this regard, it is useful to specify that immigrant students with little knowledge of Italian are excluded from the survey, so that they do not affect the result which refers to nationals or immigrants with at least two years of Italian instruction. During my experience as a teacher in a vocational school in Friuli Venezia Giulia region, I had the occasion to work

---

14Ibid.
15Ibid.
16Reading literacy is defined as ‘students’ ability to understand, use and reflect on written text to achieve their purposes’ in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Programme for International Students Assessment, *Assessing Scientific, Reading and Mathematical Literacy* (OECD, 2006), 12.
17The OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), created in 1997, represents a very important tool to monitor the outcomes of education systems of the participating countries in terms of student achievement, within a common international framework. The programme analyses how well students, at age 15, are prepared to meet the challenges they may encounter in future life by a questionnaire designed to measure reading, science and mathematic literacy.
19Ibid., 17.
on the administration of OECD/PISA questionnaires to students and I can affirm that language skills are measured by the ability of students aged 15-16 to understand simple and ordinary texts rather than refined and complicated messages.

*A fragmented linguistic education*

According to what we have already said, it seems that in the most disadvantaged contexts, where there is a high incidence of school failing Italian students and a high incidence of immigrant students (that is in vocational schools), language education does not show great results. Traditionally, language teaching in schools experiences a great fragmentation of activities, some devoted to teaching the first language to native students, others dedicated to teaching a foreign language to natives, others dedicated to teaching a second language to immigrants. To make things more difficult, various professionals are normally involved in these actions; they very often lack a common training and can hardly share teaching objectives or teaching strategies for their activities. It is fairly evident that this framework cannot promote language education since it does not reflect any plurilingual competence as the result of the integration of all the linguistic varieties an individual possesses at various levels. As a consequence, we can argue that our educational system should implement the integration of all the different actions dedicated to language education. This consideration leads us to an important question of the paper: have specific methodologies been implemented to help teachers face the challenges of plurilingualism? The following section gives an overview of some methodological approaches to language teaching.

*The advantages of integrated language competence*

As I have anticipated at the end of the previous section, in order to achieve the goal of an effective plurilingual education, it is necessary that all different teachers in charge of it coordinate their actions and educational planning. These actions have to take into account the skills, knowledge and language awareness that students have in their mother tongue since secondary or foreign language skills are based on mother tongue competence. Extensive literature\(^\text{20}\) investigates the importance of mastering the mother tongue in second or foreign

---

language learning.\(^{21}\) It is for this reason that the European Commission promotes actions in favour of heritage languages.\(^{22}\)

After having developed and reinforced the mastery of the student’s first language, language teachers have to improve the complexity of using discursive strategies and to develop language awareness by reflecting on the rules that underpin communication as domains of use, contexts and different situations. From these studies, similarities and differences between the different languages can be highlighted. In this way language learning overcomes the learning of mere linguistic contents and becomes a tool to stimulate the student’s language competence and his/her ability to investigate any language as an expression of thought, culture and collective and individual identities. The consequent approach will be cognitive and cultural in the sense that it will focus on the relationship between language and culture and it will help overcome the stereotypes which are usually associated with the use of a particular language in a given social context.

This approach will encourage the positive transfer of skills from one language to another language by promoting plurilingual competence as suggested by the Common European Framework. Moreover, teachers of first, second and other foreign languages have to cooperate when they design teaching actions for the acquisition of specific vocabulary and for the development of complex strategies for understanding and using texts characteristic of the various disciplines that students meet at school. The importance of concentrating on the linguistic aspect of the disciplines taught at school is a crucial aspect according to my experience, since it is here that teachers are more likely to positively influence the learning process of native and non-native students. A positive cooperation of different language teachers is possible only when teachers share their theories of language, have common objectives, similar assessment criteria and comparable use of methodologies.

*The relationship between language learning and the whole school curriculum*

As mentioned earlier in the paper, the OECD/PISA results in Italy are rather depressing with low attainments in language skills and basic linguistic knowledge and the situation is dramatic if we consider in particular the results of students in vocational schools. We clearly know that language involves and deeply permeates our entire social life and it is the basis of

---

\(^{21}\) A definition of first, second and foreign language is available in Maria Bortoluzzi, “Questions and Answers about Learning and Teaching a Foreign Language,” in *Sharing Reflection and Awareness: Learning to Teach English as a Foreign Language* (Udine: Forum, 2004), 22-25.

all the skills and competencies of the so-called knowledge society. It is not surprising, therefore, that the students who have low results in language skills also have significant problems in many other disciplines they study. If we refer to immigrant students we can see again that their language problems strongly influence the possibility of learning the various disciplines: after having acquired the basic communication skills of everyday language (BICS), they have to face the problems connected with the peculiarity of the language that characterises all disciplines (CALP). Evidence shows that one of the problems related to immigrant students is so-called functional illiteracy, that is, the emergence of a regression in school results for those immigrant students who can no longer benefit from special priority education. As these students progress in their school levels, the level of competence in the languages of study turns out to be inadequate and causes school failure. We also have to consider that very often these students have the opportunity to be in contact with a “high” language only at school since in their family context they can hardly experience incidental forms of learning. All these considerations lead us to the awareness that a strong and wide language education is a transversal axis of education that involves all disciplines and all languages. Enhancing this ability, in the broad sense, has positive effects on cognitive development of all students.

At this point another question arises: are there structured forms of fruitful collaboration between language teachers and teachers of the other disciplines?

In Italy the recent reform of the school system goes in the direction of emphasising the acquisition of competences rather than maintaining the fragmentation of disciplines. As a consequence all the disciplines have been grouped into four axes (linguistic, mathematical/scientific, technological, socio-historical) in which the curriculum should be organised. It is interesting to note that on the one hand this system helps cooperation among language teachers since they belong to the same axis, but on the other hand, it does not facilitate the cultural awareness that the linguistic axis is cross-curricular and not an independent one.

Among the various methodologies connected with language teaching, there is one known as “Content and Language Integrated Learning” (CLIL) which, in my opinion, gives a concrete answer to many of the challenges that have been described previously. The following sections focus on the genesis of this methodology and on its possible applications.

---

A model of integrating content-based learning and language learning: Content and Language Integrated Learning

Genesis of the CLIL methodology

Before the 1970s, schools in Europe where the teaching of certain subjects in the curriculum was offered in a foreign, regional or minority language, were mainly present in regions that were linguistically distinctive or in the largest cities. This kind of education, normally referred to as bilingual education or linguistic immersion education, thus concerned very limited numbers of pupils in unusual linguistic or social contexts. Between the 1970s and 1980s interest in this type of education developed thanks to the success of language immersion teaching in Canada that stimulated research in this direction also in Europe. The term CLIL was launched in 1994 and indicates an educational methodology that aims at teaching school subjects in a second or foreign language, therefore stimulating at the same time language skills and the acquisition of competences and contents of the subject. “The acronym CLIL is used as a generic term to describe all types of provisions in which a second language (a foreign, regional or minority language and/or another official state language) is used to teach certain subjects in the curriculum other than the language lessons themselves”.

On 27 July 2003 the European Commission adopted the Action Plan for the promotion of language learning and linguistic diversity. The Action Plan makes concrete proposals for a number of actions to be undertaken from 2004 to 2006 in order to extend the benefits of language learning to all citizens, to improve the quality of language teaching at all levels and to build an environment in Europe which is really favourable to languages. CLIL is one of those actions. Moreover, in the communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, in the section entitled “life-long language learning”, CLIL is mentioned among the virtuous actions for language learning in secondary education and training:

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), in which pupils learn a subject through the medium of a foreign language, has a major contribution to make to the Union’s language learning goals. It can provide effective opportunities for pupils to use their new language skills now, rather than learn them now for use later. It opens doors on languages for a broader range of learners, nurturing self-confidence in young learners and those who have not responded well to formal language instruction in general education. It provides

---

24 European Commission, Directorate General for Education and Culture, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) at School in Europe (Eurydice European Unit, 2006), 8.
exposure to the language without requiring extra time in the curriculum, which can be of particular interest in vocational settings. The introduction of CLIL approaches into an institution can be facilitated by the presence of trained teachers who are native speakers of the vehicular language.25

Among the actions to promote CLIL, the Commission refers to the Socrates programme’s Lingua Action 2 funding for transnational projects for the development and dissemination of new, specific methodologies for teaching subjects through languages other than a lingua franca. The Commission also gives its financial support to schools wishing to introduce a CLIL approach, encouraging the exchange of teachers between partner schools. From the point of view of research, the Commission gives the European Eurydice Unit the task to gather and disseminate information on the availability of CLIL in European education and training systems and it promotes specific studies on the benefits of this methodology.

The contribution that teaching a subject through the medium of a foreign language can make to the Union's language learning goals is highlighted together with the awareness of the great opportunities that the approach can provide within the school curriculum for exposure to foreign languages.

**CLIL: from an elite linguistic methodology to a democratic form of language education**

From what has been said about the CLIL methodology, it is clear that in the European context it is traditionally applied to the learning of a foreign language by European students. In this paper I argue that this methodology has the potentiality to promote linguistic competence of disadvantaged students whose language literacy is not adequate to access the knowledge that the subject matters of school curriculum convey.

Immigrant students are constantly in the position of having to learn different subjects in a language foreign to them (more properly called the second language); they are therefore by necessity and not by choice, in the typical condition that the CLIL methodology proposes. In my opinion this awareness should encourage the school community to activate the teaching strategies that enables the mutual reinforcement of linguistic and content learning.

The great potential of CLIL is that:

- it requires (and not only promotes) collaboration among language and disciplinary teachers: a common planning is to be agreed on;

- it increases the amount of hours of exposure to language: attention to linguistic aspects will also be active in the hours devoted to the disciplines and not just in the small amount of hours normally dedicated to formal language teaching;

- it improves the quality of exposure to the language: the focus will be learning the content and this should generate greater motivation in students;

- it improves access to content: the facilitation techniques of the texts (without simplification of content) allow more efficient access to knowledge.

As we have seen, the techniques proposed are suitable not only for the needs of immigrant students but also for those native students who, as highlighted by the OECD/PISA survey, have reading difficulties and cannot easily access the content of subject matters, thus causing failures and school dropouts. The CLIL methodology is proposed here as a methodology that combines the educational needs of native and non-native students in order to access the knowledge society.

**Conclusions**

The myth of Babel describes the separation of men because of the language they speak as a divine punishment. Under the positive influence of the cultural stimuli that circulate in the European Union generally and in our societies we live specifically, the belief exists that linguistic diversity represents unquestionably a richness to be preserved and not a fall from an idyllic stage of a single language spoken and understood by everyone. One of the aims of this paper is to stimulate a reflection on the fact that this positive attitude toward linguistic diversity can grow in a privileged area (Europe) and for privileged citizens (those who possess a good level of language proficiency). Immigrant students are probably not always in the position to perceive their linguistic diversity as a form of richness when, as we have seen, it may cause school failure and dropout.

In my experience of teaching foreign languages to native students in Italy and the Italian language to immigrants, I have often found a sort of schizophrenic attitude to language. While a communicative approach to teaching foreign languages is now broadly applied in schools, for students who come from a migrant background a formal approach to teaching the language, with an emphasis on grammar and syntax, often prevails. Among the causes of this I have identified two main factors: the first is the lack of reflection on the concept of language itself, which has important consequences in terms of language education. The
second factor, which is a consequence of the first, is more structural and concerns the school organization, programmes and training of teachers.

The concept of democratic language education is intended to convey the need to make educational proposals that go in the direction of an integrated language education. A globalized society has to promote community languages to facilitate mobility and access to experiences that are not limited to the national territory for their citizens and, at the same time, it has to equip disadvantaged students with all the skills to read the world around them and to have access to the knowledge society.

A specific methodology has been described because I have seen that teachers often need practical guidance and operational tools. CLIL methodology has become an innovation that involves the construction of linguistic and communicative competence while developing and acquiring contents and competences of subject matters. It always includes a dual purpose as it integrates the learning of the language and of a subject. Once a particular form of language education, it has now shown its potential in education in general. The understanding of the advantages and cognitive developments that CLIL methodology offers is increasing at the European level and should be encouraged in particular in those schools where language literacy is inadequate. Not only does this methodology give relevance and added value to the process of language learning but it also allows students to access those contents that without specific strategies of facilitation they could not learn. The increased sensitivity to language teaching that this methodology fosters can help non-language teachers cooperate with language teachers in order to produce an output that is significant to both native and immigrant students in favour of a democratic education in schools. Enhancing equal access to knowledge is an extremely important challenge for the European Union as far as it wishes to be regarded as a model in the field of education for the wider world.
Bibliography


Istituto Nazionale per la Valutazione del Sistema Educativo di Istruzione e Formazione. 

Italy. *Legge 6 marzo 1998, n. 40, Disciplina dell’immigrazione e norme sulla condizione 

Ministero dell’Istruzione, Università e della Ricerca, Direzione Generale per gli Studi, la 
Statistica e per i Sistemi Informativi. *Gli Alunni Stranieri nel Sistema Scolastico 

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Programme for 
International Students Assessment. *Assessing Scientific, Reading and Mathematical 