

## Bilingual teaching in a modern classroom

“...when the teacher pulls back from being the donor of knowledge and becomes the facilitator...”

(Coyle, 6)

### What is bilingual teaching?

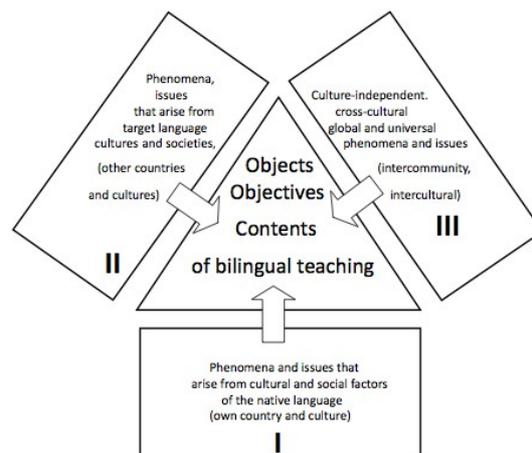
A growing number of schools in Austria are now offering bilingual teaching. **Bilingual teaching** means that in one or more subjects the information is presented in a different language than usual. In addition to German, most bilingual schools have English as teaching language. In many schools, some of them are also state schools, all the information is presented in more than one language, usually in English. These schools also offer their students the possibility to take an international diploma (e.g. the IB diploma of the IBO, International Baccalaureate Organization) in addition to the Austrian school-leaving certificate, the Matura. In some subjects the teaching language might as well change from one lesson to the next. Just recently, also primary schools have started to offer bilingual education.

### Didactics of bilingual teaching

The Bilingual Triangle by Wolfgang Hallet (1998) forms the first approach to this new field of teaching. This model shows that bilingual teaching is neither a translation of the usual content into another language nor an extended foreign languages class.

The aim of bilingual teaching is for the students to reach the ability of communicating with people of a different culture and language background about

- phenomena and issues that arise from cultural and social factors of the native language culture and society (field I)
- phenomena and issues that arise from cultural and social factors of the target language culture and society (field II)
- culture-independent, cross-cultural global and universal phenomena and issues (field III) (Woidt, 83)



The Bilingual Triangle adapted from Woidt (Woidt, 84)

([www.teachingmethodsonline.com](http://www.teachingmethodsonline.com))

## Methodology of bilingual teaching according to CLIL

**CLIL** (Content and Language Integrated Learning) has become the most effective method of bilingual teaching. As the name suggests, learners profit from CLIL in two ways: on the one hand they learn the content of a subject through the foreign language, serving as a medium, and on the other hand learners are confronted with an above-average immersion in the foreign language.

The main idea behind CLIL is that content is taught and studied in a language which is not the native language of the learners. This means bilingual learning is discovery learning, just like the learning of a foreign language. In a bilingual class, the learning process is therefore aided by the increased motivation of the learners. If the learners are interested in the new foreign language, which means that they are gradually “discovering” the language, they learn easier. As a result, the learners’ interest in the content increases their willingness to learn the language in which the teaching is done.

Learning of language and content is integrated in CLIL. Learning a new language and new content is not done in an artificially created context in which content is treated independently of language. Rather, CLIL is embedded in a natural learning environment, in which language *always* serves as the medium for new knowledge. Awareness for this process is usually higher in the foreign language than in the native language: "...the non-language subject is not taught *in* a foreign language but *with* and *through* a foreign language." (Euriydice, 8)

## **Are there any disadvantages of bilingual learning?**

Can the learning of the native language be negatively influenced by a second language? Are children overburdened by bilingual teaching? Quite the contrary is the case. The additional intellectual challenge of bilingual education has a positive effect on further mental development of the child. Recent studies have shown that the brain cells of bilingual and multilingual children are more extensively interlinked than those of monolingual children.

As a result, bilingual children have a much more evolved and refined vocabulary range, as well as the ability to understand language in general and question it critically.

## **Why use CLIL for bilingual learning?**

### **CLIL**

- broadens the cultural horizon of learners
- prepares students for a globalised world
- provides advantages in English competence and also special skills
- reforms learning in schools with its new approach
- increases the motivation of learners
- stimulates joined-up thinking
- teaches active questioning of "knowledge"
- leads to a prestigious, international school-leaving qualification

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**Further reading:**

- Coyle et al., 2010. *CLIL. Content and Language Integrated Learning*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Eurydice, 2006. *Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) at School in Europe*. Brussels: Eurydice.
- Hall, 2001. „Bilingual Benefits.“ In: *Literacy Today*, pp. 27.
- Hallet, 1998. „The Bilingual Triangle. Überlegungen zu einer Didaktik des bilingualen Sachfachunterrichts.“ In: *Praxis des neusprachlichen Unterrichts*, Bd. 45, Nr. 2, pp. 117.
- Woidt, 2002. „Plädoyer für den bilingualen Geschichtsunterricht.“ In: *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, Bd. 53, Nr. 2, pp. 76.