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Are CLIL students at an advantage in the transition between secondary and tertiary education?

In Content and Language Integrated Learning, CLIL, the aim is for equal attention to be paid to content and language in non-language subjects such as history and biology (Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Marsh, Mehisto, Wolff, & Frigols Martín, 2010). Thus, following a CLIL program in secondary education ought, theoretically, to provide better preparation for tertiary education, where a large amount of the literature is in English, and where English is used increasingly as the medium of instruction, than a non-CLIL program, in which language is only studied as separate subjects. But is it so in practice?

Sweden is a particularly interesting context for studies into effects of CLIL, where L2 English is the medium of instruction. L2 English proficiency levels are high in international comparisons (Erickson, 2012), and English is omnipresent in Swedish society (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012).

In my talk, I will share findings from a large-scale longitudinal project into effects of CLIL in secondary education in Sweden. Particular focus will be put on results from two areas of great importance at tertiary level, namely written production (see also Olsson & Sylvén, 2015) and reading comprehension in L2 English – the language of instruction in several subjects for the CLIL students. As will be explained, the findings are not conclusive, and I will discuss probable causes to the various outcomes.

In addition, I will report on an on-going follow-up study about what CLIL and non-CLIL students do after having graduated from high school. Of special interest is the question whether CLIL students choose higher education to a larger extent than the non-CLIL students. This is one of the first post-CLIL studies to be conducted, and will give insights into the possible role of CLIL in students' post-secondary educational choices.