

Gloria Gutiérrez Almarza, Fernando Beltrán Llavador & Ramiro Durán Martínez 2010: *Un proyecto de aprendizaje integrado de contenidos y lengua inglesa / A Content and Language Integrated Learning Project. Cristóbal Colón / Christopher Columbus*¹

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The bilingual edited book, Spanish-English, that I present here forms part of a larger series, Documentos Didácticos, published by the University of Salamanca, wherefrom some other related items can be borrowed.² This printed material, illustrated with colourful pictures, also includes a DVD which is presented by one of the teacher trainers. Except for the teaching samples (only English), the rest of the testimonies are given in the participant's mother tongue, yet, when this is Spanish, they are supported by a brief textual summary in English.

The digital format fits as a perfect complement to better illustrate and summarise the project's performance by showing teaching samples and different statements made by the participant teachers, a few students and even some parents. The DVD has four parts: 1-Presentation, 2-Planning of the Project, 3-Teaching and Learning (1.Use of Target Language, 2-Crosscurricular Links); and 4-Learning Outcomes and Evaluation. A structure more or less parallel to and coherent with that of the hard copy: 1-Context of the Project (1.What is CLIL? , 2.Primary MFL teaching in the UK and in Spain, 3.Participating Schools), 2-The Christopher Columbus Project (1.Planning, 2.Implementation) and 3- Benefits (1.Children, 2.Teachers, 3.Parents, 4.Teacher Training).

As a response to the European Commission and Council of Europe³ the use of foreign languages for class instruction has gained ground in Europe since the 1990s. This little book appears in a context of growing

¹ Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca. 72 pp. ISBN: 978-84-7800-217-7.

² The previous volume (160), *Guía internacional de prácticas docentes en centros de enseñanza primaria* (2006), was edited by the same authors. For more information about the series visit the following website:

<http://www.eusal.es/index.php?keyword3=DD&Search=Buscar&Itemid=72&option=com_virtuemart&page=shop.browse&lang=es>

³ In November 2001 a European Union Council Resolution recommended using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR), which had been elaborated by the Council of Europe within the project «Language Learning for European Citizenship» (1989-1996) to set up systems of validation of language ability. An accurate analysis and possible applications of the CEFR are given by Durán Martínez, R., et al. in *La formación del profesorado de lengua inglesa en un contexto europeo*. (2004).

To stimulate language learning, the EU has supported the Council of Europe initiatives like the European Language Portfolio which was developed and piloted by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe, from 1998 until 2000. In a similar way, the Commission issued a Communication on July 24, 2003, on «Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: an Action Plan 2004 - 2006» and a Communication on November 22, 2005, on A New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism. Moreover, from November 22, 2004, the European Commissioner for

trend to bring together subject content and foreign language learning, what is widely known as CLIL.⁴ This quite recent educational model refers to situations in which content subjects such as geography or history are taught in a foreign language:

the learning of language and other subjects is mixed in one way or another. This means that in the class there are two main aims, one related to the subject, topic or theme and one linked to the language. This is why CLIL is sometimes called dual-focused education. (Marsh 2000: 6)

In other words, the «essence of CLIL is integration» (Mehisto, Marsh & Frigols 2008: 11), since the main aim is to fuse both content and language teaching. According to the Eurydice report, except for a few exceptions (Denmark, Greece, Lithuania, Portugal and Cyprus), this content-and-language-integrated learning (CLIL) approach is being adopted in different ways in several countries throughout Europe.⁵

The MFL Teaching Model in Spain may be said to be grounded on the “Spanish National Curriculum for Primary Education” of 1989, where for the first time EFL teachers were addressed to help students to develop their communicative skills, thus involving both the functional and the notional aspects of language. In 1996 started the now well-established MEC-British Council bilingual project and at the present time several “Autonomous Regions” are promoting the so-called “bilingual schools” in which the CLIL approach is being used.

The British Model seems to have a quite more recent development, since it was in 2002 when «the British Government outlined its strategy to transform the nation’s capability in languages» (53). As a result of the “Languages for All Languages for Life Strategy” children between 7 and 11 were entitled to learn a second language. Three years later, in 2005, the KS2 Framework for languages would set out the guidelines for language teaching in primary schools, so that in 2010 all the UK primary schools offered a foreign language.

In this context the “Cristobal Colón/Christopher Columbus” project is an attempt to apply the CLIL methodology from a contrastive point of view at primary school level both in Spain and England.⁶ It relies on three different participant schools in Ávila (“Colegio Público Comuneros de Castilla”, “Colegio Público Claudio Sánchez Albornoz” and “Colegio Diocesano Asunción de Nuestra Señora”) and another three in Nottingham (Kingsway Primary School, Haddon Primary and Nursery School and Dovecote Primary and Nursery School. Following Frigols’ classification of the CLIL/EFL modes in Spain (Frigols-Martín, M.J. 2008), the scenario we are dealing with would correspond mainly to type one, that is, promoting bilingualism in a monolingual community, and this would apply to the Nottingham schools as well as to Avila’s, except for “Colegio Público Comuneros de Castilla” which would belong to the third type: “Bilingual and Bicultural Project” / “MEC/British Council Programme”.

Education and Culture became European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Multilingualism. And from January 1, 2007, the European Commission created a European Commissioner for Multilingualism, mainly focused on promoting foreign languages learning as means for worker’s mobility and business competitiveness.

⁴ The term was coined by D. Marsh in *Bilingual Education & Content and Language Integrated Learning* (1994).

⁵ There are four main works that, when read together, provide a good overview of CLIL in Europe: the two publications by Marsh: *Profiling European CLIL Classrooms* (2001); *CLIL/EMILE: The European Dimension* (2001), the European Commission Eurydice Report (2006), and the Council of Europe Country Report by Maljers et al. (2007).

⁶ For a larger view on the topic see the article by Gutiérrez Almarza. «Modelos de Formación para los Profesores de Lenguas Extranjeras en Enseñanza Primaria: Las experiencias española y británica./Models of Education for Foreign Language Primary Teachers: the Spanish and British Experience» (2000).

It seems to be a highly inclusive and comprehensive project with a special focus on cooperation, both local and international, for it demands a close collaboration in two complementary ways, amongst local schools and foreign ones. In other words, it is an attempt to prepare «learners with integrated education for the demands of an integrated society» (Mehisto, Marsh & Frigols 2008:11). It comes as a result of a long established relationship between Nottingham Trent University and the University of Salamanca in their attempt to provide specialised training for EFL teachers either in pre-service or at-service.⁷ A close cooperation that covers a wide spectrum of educational institutions like primary schools, local educational authorities, university departments, individual lecturers and teacher training centres.

This book offers a pre-eminently practical view, yet there is a first part in which the project is contextualised. This includes a brief introduction to what CLIL consists of, where a few basic references are given, including the following: 1-The European Commission for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth's website link to the CLIL definition and the EU initiatives in this field, 2-The CLIL compendium *Using languages to learn and learning to use languages* (Marshall 2000), 3- *CLIL: A new model for language teaching* (Susan House 2007), and 4- *CLIL for the Knowledge Society* (David Marsh/ Eurydice DVD 2006). A general description of the MFL Spanish and British Models, and a wide overview of the participant schools in terms of numbers (students, staff), their thinking (values), and also special features.

The “Cristobal Colón / Christopher Columbus Project”, -whose exposition obviously occupies the central part of the book-, started to be planned in February 2007, when the schools were chosen and the aims were set out as follows: “1. Planning and implementing a work unit across the schools participating in the project. 2. Developing teaching and training materials which would be accessible to every school through the internet. 3. Researching the topic chosen to teach effectively that work unit. 4. Enhancing prospective joint initiatives among British and Spanish schools. [...]” (59).

The work unit was agreed to have an international scope, hence the Christopher Columbus topic. However, the school year in which it should be developed slightly differed, and therefore while in England was the Year Five, in Spain it was decided for Years Five and Six. The timing would be alike: half a day per week, in the autumn term 2007, during ten consecutive weeks ending with a final evaluation. Previous language instruction and mental starters were performed by Spanish and British teachers. Most of the materials were searched for online, and, most importantly, the lessons were to be based on the so-called four Cs (Coyle 1999): 1-Content, 2-Communication, 3-Cognition, and 4-Culture.

The project was developed in two steps: 1-A preliminary stage in which the participant teachers reflected on the CLIL principles and planned the work unit and its activities working together first via e-mail and videoconference and then during a personal visit to Ávila and to Nottingham. 2-The main stage in which the CLIL units were implemented and evaluated thanks to the availability of a web page that facilitated the sharing of materials and resources. This step has been divided, perhaps artificially, though for the sake of clarity, in two other parts: 1-Use of the Target Language and 2-Cross Curricular Links.

The use of the target language in CLIL methodology, -aimed to learning other subjects than language itself-, is shown in the performance of certain activities like, for example, “Christopher Columbus' Life

⁶ Read the article by Durán Martínez, Beltrán Llavador & Gutiérrez Almarza «Guiding a four-week teaching placement abroad in primary schools: A joint international project». (2006).

Presentation”, “Question and Answer Session on Columbus”, “Higher Numbers and dates Practice with Fans”, “Group Work: ICT matching Activity”, “Shopping Role Play”, “Battleship Game”. In the “Cross Curricular Links” some of the many possible connections that can be established between the linguistic and the educational fields are explained, and how the topic being learned might eventually determine the language use. Amongst others we may find links with literacy, history, dance and music, art, physical education, art and history or geography.

The conclusion is just an evaluation of the project from four different perspectives, those of 1-children, 2-teachers, 3-parents, and 4-teacher trainers. According to the promoters of this initiative “This project has brought benefits at in-service and pre-service training, and engaged primary children in appealing tasks across subjects and countries” (DVD. “Presentation”). However a full list of benefits by group is provided. On the one hand, children claim to have learnt a lot about a historical figure in a new and exciting way. Working in groups has allowed them to share knowledge and experiences with other school peers and with children from abroad. This practical approach has improved their ability to better understand and communicate in a foreign language, thus increasing their confidence. On the other hand, teachers have enjoyed the novelty and methodological advantages of CLIL, that is, the integration of language and subject learning in a communicative way. They have also strengthened their links with other local and foreign schools/teachers, something that has broadened their view of two different educational systems.

Parents have felt engaged in their children’s learning process, praising their working group capacity, their enthusiasm and their ability to naturally learn a second language. Finally, teacher trainers have learned to mediate between the different actors involved in the project. They have helped in the implementation of a CLIL work unit in primary schools of two different countries, an experience that will be useful for their teacher training at university as well as the promotion of CLIL policies at every level: local, regional, national and international. The following statement by one of the participant teacher may serve as a summary of the beneficial results of such educational ventura: “The project has made a positive impact on different subjects and across different levels bringing remarkable results, combining ICT and effective communication in the foreign language” (67).

It seems that this CLIL project has been a success, since it has helped its participants not only to broaden their knowledge on a concrete topic and to communicate in a foreign language, but also to learn how to learn, how to teach, how to cooperate, how to organise, and how to use ICT. Although it would have been highly beneficial to have an account of the possible difficulties met during the application of the CLIL methodology in this context, I personally think that this book might be a useful tool for primary teachers, teacher trainers, trainees, and even for educational authorities. Of the many outlined faces of CLIL by Mehisto, Marsh & Frigols in *Uncovering CLIL* (2008), this “Cristobal Colón / Christopher Columbus Project” could be labelled as a primary education, one subject, short-term, of low-intensity exposure, local and international project, thus exemplifying the great flexibility that CLIL entails.

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