

ASOCIACION EX ALUMNOS DEL PROFESORADO EN LENGUAS VIVAS "J.R.FERNANDEZ"
DEPARTAMENTO DE ALUMNOS LIBRES



Teachers' Centre

AEXALEVI *Forum*

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AEXALEVI *Forum*

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What's the in-thing in English Language Teaching?

At the end of every year, as we evaluate our students' performance in examinations, the textbooks that we have used and our own teaching, we cannot help looking into the future. We look back on the process that has just come to an end and, while we do so, we also look ahead and we ask ourselves the inevitable question: "What's next?"

What's in?

This is not to be understood as a question about fashion. Trends in methodology come and go, but there is something that stays on and that is our commitment to keep updated.

We have found that two approaches to English Language Teaching (ELT) are becoming the in-thing:

- **CLIL** , which stands for Content and Language Integrated Learning.
- **Blended Learning** , which is the integration of face-to-face and virtual learning.

What is CLIL?

Although the idea of an integrated curriculum is not new in education, the integration of language and content is at the heart of CLIL. As a content-based approach, CLIL seeks to use the target language as a medium of instruction and learning of content in the curriculum. We are familiar with the idea of integrating what is learned in the English class with what students learn in other subjects at school. We call this interdisciplinary or cross-curricular integration. CLIL, however, goes beyond this concept. CLIL teachers deal with content coming from maths, history, geography, computer programming, science, etc, as core content in their English classes. This is why we said that CLIL is content-based. There is a focus on content and

language. There is also a focus on learning strategies. This means that the students learn the language as they are immersed in the learning of content.

While implementing CLIL, teachers often need to adapt or design materials for their lessons as there might not be enough resources available yet. CLIL is about teachers cooperating with one another. It is an approach conceived of for bilingual and multilingual education. It is, however, the approach that will be fostered in schools in the Province of Buenos Aires as from next year. This implementation will undoubtedly require adapting CLIL to foreign language teaching and learning.

What does a CLIL lesson look like?

A CLIL lesson begins with a warm-up activity to activate the topic, which could be for example ecosystems in biology, and goes on to the goal-setting phase with a discussion of the language, content and learning strategies that that lesson will aim at. Next the teacher explores what the students already know about the topic and what they would like to learn about it. Then the students may read a text and create a chart with the new information. Later the whole class reports on their findings and charts are improved on. The teacher may ask a

few questions for the students to evaluate their charts. The lesson is rounded off by means of an evaluation of the goals.

Globalization and Technology

We live in a world where everything changes at a fast rhythm. As teachers, we must be aware that people learn in different ways and students have nowadays other and new interests. It is part of our job to keep up with the challenges that the world of education poses. There are two phenomena that have changed the way we experience the world in the last decades of the twentieth century and which have continued their development in these first ten years of the twenty-first century: globalization and technology. We cannot separate one from the other. Not only has technology changed the world we live in and our everyday routines but also the way we conceive the world. The use of technology in the classroom is a new tool that teachers are trying to incorporate into their teaching because it is part of the skills students are in need to develop and because it helps them to learn independently, outside the classroom.

What is Blended Learning?

Blended learning refers to a language course which combines a face-to-face classroom component with an appropriate use of technology. This means that the learners meet with the teacher but the course includes a parallel self-study component such as the use of CD ROM or web-based material. The term technology includes both the use of recent technologies such as the Internet, CD-ROMs and interactive whiteboards, and the use of computers as a means of communication such as chat or email together with a number of environments which allow teachers to enrich their courses such as VLEs (virtual learning environments), blogs and wikis.

The term *blended learning* has been used for some time in the business world. In this context it refers to a situation where an employee can continue working full time and take a training course. The way to do this is for the employee to be trained by using a web-based platform. There are many advantages why companies are attracted to this kind of training: it saves costs, employees do not need to take time off to be trained and they can get training at their own convenience and their own pace. Many of the benefits mentioned can also be applied to

language teaching. The result of using technology in the classroom is that the outside world can be brought into the classroom, which generates interest and therefore has a motivating effect on students. Furthermore, the use of technology can add variety to the class through the use of web-based tasks which may be perceived as more interactive than paper-based tasks. In addition, the use of technology can be time-saving since students can have access to course materials on line saving teachers the time and expense of photocopying. Finally, one of the main benefits of technology is that it fosters students' autonomy: it allows language practice and study beyond the limits of the classroom.

The way we incorporate technology into the classroom can be adapted to different teaching and learning situations. We may not be able to do everything we would like to depending on our students' computer abilities and access to the different technologies, the equipment available at the institution we work in and our own computer skills limitations.

There is a wide variety of technologies used in ELT that teachers can take advantage of:

- ❖ Internet: Internet websites, authentic material.
- ❖ Materials that support coursebooks: CD ROMs and

on-line material on the publisher's website.

- ❖ Electronic dictionaries: the use of CD ROM dictionaries and dictionaries on the web help learners to develop their study skills and enrich their vocabulary.
- ❖ Interactive whiteboards: they are used in many schools as replacements for traditional whiteboards or flipcharts. They are large interactive displays connected to a computer and a projector.
- ❖ Portable devices: the use of MP3 players, laptop computers, digital cameras, dictaphones and camcorders.
- ❖ Computer-mediated communication (CMC): this term refers to situations in which learners and teachers can communicate through the medium of the computer. It includes the use of chat, email and on-line forums.
- ❖ Class wikis: the term "wiki" comes from the Hawaiian phrase "wiki wiki", which means "super fast". A wiki is a website that allows users to add and update content on the site using their own Web browser. This is made possible by a software that runs on the Web server. Wikis generally owe their

development to the collaborative effort of the site visitors. A great example of a large wiki is the Wikipedia, a free encyclopedia in many languages that anyone can edit.

Running the wave of the future

The future is already here. Technology has been making its way into the classroom for quite a long time. However, the thrust of Blended learning is to produce a happy marriage between face-to-face learning and learning through virtual means. The integration of content and language has been a major concern in education for a long time. However, the thrust of CLIL is to learn the content from the school subjects in the English class. The challenge that these two approaches pose for us teachers of English is to generate the materials and the procedures so that they can be used in foreign language learning, particularly in Argentina.

GUEST WRITER

The value of songs by Prof. José María Pollari

In the meetings that we have held every other Friday at the Asociación, one of the teachers, Prof. José María Pollari, surprised us once with the song “Forever” that he himself had composed in English. “Forever” was released in the album “Mágico Espejo” by Jorge Aguirre in 2005.

Our topic for discussion was writing, especially how we can motivate our learners to write. On that occasion, José María told us about the value of songs. As a teacher and a professional drummer, José María enriched us with his ideas about using songs as input in our classes and composing songs as a whole-class writing activity. He said that the development of writing can be extended to the writing of songs, especially with teenagers. Once a topic is decided on, the whole class can brainstorm words, phrases, sentences and these can be recorded on the board. The process of composing the song would imply putting all that output together to make the lyrics. Music can be added later on once the song is ready and it can be in charge of the students who are fond of music or who

can play a musical instrument. Which teenager does not like music anyway? José María suggested recording the song and printing the lyrics to be used for reading and listening or even for further writing and of course for fun.

The other teachers on the Friday team got so enthusiastic about José María’s song that they all worked on it with their students. The activity consisted in listening to the song and writing a letter to the broken-hearted voice in it or the ever-after story of the characters.

Here is what José María has written for us about his ideas.

My involvement with songs as a means to getting motivated by something useful in learning started at age 14 when I had already been studying English for four years, but would have quit any time as I didn't like or enjoy it at all.

All of a sudden, the teacher in secondary school turned things upside down when she introduced two variables that changed my feelings and attitude towards English in 24 hours; since then, it has become an ever increasing interest. One was songs, lyrics actually.

In those days the Internet didn't exist and vinyl albums brought no lyrics printed, so the content of the song was an enigma, a word here and there, but no more. Suddenly it is all here revealed! It was my Rosetta Stone.

Later on I started to use the concept in my teaching because it is fun and it generates a relaxed atmosphere in which attention is focused on the song—music helps, of course.

Lyrics are very helpful to acquire good pronunciation, improve flow and diction, because singing requires rhythm and graceful interpretation, and to learn real life expressions that mean something to human beings.

Songs can be used in class to implement grammar or to do listening comprehension exercises. All that is up to the teacher's approach.

If some words are left blank, students can guess them and we have a ready-made exercise to spot verbs, nouns, prepositions, etc.

Musical instruments can also be brought in and students might write songs as a task.

To those of you teachers who still have not taken full advantage of lyrics and music in the classroom, my advice is give it a try. You sure won't regret it!

Prof. José María Pollari

Thank you, José María!

Prof. Florencia Insúa travels to Mercedes, Corrientes on behalf of the Teachers' Centre.

In-service Training

When I arrived in Mercedes, Corrientes, at 7 a.m. Prof. Marina Otero was waiting for me at the bus station with a kind smile on her face. Marina coordinates the English Department at San Carlos School. We had planned a training journey which consisted in observation sessions during the morning and a workshop during the afternoon on two topics which are quite difficult to deal with in the classroom: pronunciation and writing.

We talked about the obstacles we need to face when working on these two topics and we exchanged ideas on how to overcome those obstacles. As we know, keeping students engaged is closely connected to their performance and the way they respond in class, so we came to the conclusion that incorporating variety in the tasks we use was definitely one of the variables we had to consider. We explored and carried out a wide range of activities which are appealing and engaging, in which students work with different

aspects of pronunciation: phonemes, stress patterns, intonation, etc.

When discussing how we planned our writing lessons, we agreed that we need to approach writing in different ways. We talked about activities which can introduce a change in the starting-point of our writing tasks. For example, when dealing with story writing we can have settings, characters, music or pictures as starting-points rather than plot or main events. We realised that for students to become better at writing we needed to assign time for pre-writing tasks to engage students and to prepare them for the task they are asked to do. We also discussed the role of collaborative writing in making the writing task more communicative by giving students the opportunity to exchange ideas and negotiate meaning. Finally, we talked about the importance of helping students develop their writing profile throughout the years by making writing activities part of a journey of self-discovery of their interests.

As a teacher, it was an enriching experience for me to travel to Corrientes and organise this training workshop representing the Asociación with the teachers of San Carlos School. It wouldn't have been possible for me to have had this wonderful experience without the support of Prof. Marta Moure and Prof. Myrian Casamassima. I want to thank Graciela Lacour de Ferrando, the School Principal and all the teachers of English at San Carlos School - Prof. Marina Otero, Prof. Soledad del Mar Miño, Prof. Cristina Zárate Sosa, Prof. Claudia Rochinotti, Prof. María Angeles Bengolea Monzón-

for their kindness and hard work. At San Carlos School, there is commitment from the authorities, parents and teachers to offer students the best education they can have.

Needless to say, I enjoyed my stay. I only have a small regret: that I couldn't see more of this beautiful city, its sights, its architecture, and the "Esteros del Iberá". Next time I go to Corrientes I'll make some time to take the tourist in me for a ride.

Prof. Florencia Insúa



Prof. Marina Otero, Prof. Graciela Lacour de Ferrando and Prof. Florencia Insúa after the workshop at San Carlos School, Mercedes, Corrientes.

If you are interested in having **in-service training** at your institution, contact us at

teacherscentre@aexalevi.org.ar

**The Teachers' Centre can offer your institution
the kind of training and supervision you need.**

Research at the Teachers' Centre

The Forum at Asociación

The Teachers' Centre has held meetings at the Asociación every other Friday coordinated by Prof. Myrian Casamassima. These meetings are a face-to-face forum, in which teachers have had the opportunity to share their ideas, concerns and materials, and to discuss topics related to their teaching practice. In addition, one particular topic – Writing - was chosen to be explored in depth. The team brought material to the

meetings, and techniques and procedures were thoroughly discussed. Later some of these ideas were put into practice by the teachers in their own lessons and the results were shared in the next meetings. The research process went on like this: discussing, exploring more material, planning, trying out and reporting on results. A true Action Research Cycle.

We'd like to share with you what the teachers wrote about their experience in the meetings.

■ *"This has been a wonderful experience for me. I've met very nice people and I have learnt a lot. Every Friday we met we discussed different topics related to our everyday teaching, but we decided to focus on "composition writing", something we were all very much concerned about. We brought books on the subject (some very old, but which proved to be very useful indeed), we made our students write following certain guidelines and we had very good results. This was just the starting-point. I do hope we can meet again next year. I've always felt part of the Asociación, but coming here every fortnight has made me feel even better."*

Prof. Grace Morrow

■ “This forum was a great experience and increased my knowledge. Myrian was a great help for me; she was a fantastic guide. I’m very grateful to Marta because through her I developed new skills and ideas to be applied with my students and even with myself! I spent a gorgeous time learning and socializing with my colleagues. I hope this forum will continue next year.”

Prof. Elena Durán

■ “I have been very happy coming to these meetings, to the point that I’ve never been absent although I had other urgent compromises to attend to. As regards the different techniques we learnt, they proved to be very profitable and valuable to implement in our classes. Students became motivated and many times we also had fun working in pairs, which made me feel it was worth coming here and meeting such nice people. As for Myrian, our coordinator, I can’t find the right words to qualify her: she’s been an excellent teacher, a really nice person and an unforgettable friend.”

Prof. Maria Antonieta Castagna

■ “The meetings have been helpful indeed because it is great to be able to share ideas with teachers. No one else can understand what one feels about English. On the course of these months it has been possible to keep updated with the very last trends in teaching and to contribute bringing ideas of our own. I am sure that the aim, which was in the first place to present better approaches to teaching, was achieved. I certainly look forward to these meetings in the coming year because we all need this feedback.”

Prof. Jose María Pollari

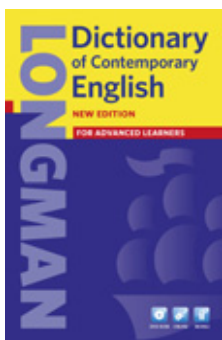
■ “These meetings were very useful and positive for me. Thanks to them, I tried to give my students different ways of writing compositions. Once I asked them to write a poem by giving them a drawing of a man alone, walking on a rainy day. The results surprised me: my students felt free to express their feelings. Moreover, the material we were given was very interesting and useful too. The group was important. Our dialogues and arguments were fruitful and these meetings made me feel grown-up. Our coordinator, Myrian, was excellent and she also made us feel at ease. I hope next year we can meet again.”

Prof. Alba Pantanali

Thank you for having shared the forum with us this year.

**And of course, the forum will continue next year
so we hope you can all join in!**

Highly recommended



Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 5th Edition. Pearson. 2009.

The Evolution of the Species

Anyone who has been a student of English has once had a Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. We are all familiar with this comprehensive and reliable dictionary, which has been for most of us an invaluable tool for our studies.

However, in its 5th edition, the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English for Advanced Learners has reached the climax in the evolution of dictionaries. Its DVD-ROM is a user-friendly resource for reference and practice, on which you will have access to the dictionary proper with its signposted entries, its collocational information, its grammar and cultural references, its recorded pronunciation, and through which you will also have access to vocabulary practice for learners, as well as vocabulary tasks for you as a teacher to use with your learners. The Longman Language Activator, the Longman Writing Assistant and the Longman Phrase Bank are all included in the DVD-ROM.

You can also have access to the Vocabulary Trainer in the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English through your cell phone. Yes, your cell phone! All you need is a cell phone that is compatible with the software (the list is extensive) and an Internet connection. But if you happen not to have a compatible cell phone, you can still download the Vocabulary Trainer through the DVD-ROM and have it in your computer. And if you do not want to actually go to the dictionary to check a word while you are working on your computer, the instant pop-up dictionary will be available on the screen for your reference. The dictionary printed on paper will certainly prove to be a quick way to spot what you are looking up. Information is clearly displayed on every page, in colours, highlighted, with thesaurus and frequency-of-use charts. It is worth having a look at it. Don't you think? Visit the publisher's website to browse a simpler version, free on-line.