

MASTER'S FINAL DISSERTATION

Teaching and learning English in Early Childhood and Primary Education

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**Does starting to learn English in a non-
formal context benefit the learning
process?**

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ABSTRACT: Nowadays, the importance of learning English is widely known as it is the language that enables people to communicate with the rest of the world. This reality has a high incidence on schools, which are trying to offer better English learning experiences to students through different methods. This article has the aim of analysing one of these approaches that focuses on the importance that students have a positive emotional link with the additional language since they start learning it through quotidian moments. The research demonstrates that designing informal contexts such as quotidian moments (routines, lunch time...) in which students feel comfortable and educators are not invasive, would promote an extra motivation to students to learn the additional language and would make easier the learning of this language in formal learning. The conclusion of this article is that it would be very appropriate to make use of English in non-formal educational contexts because of the emotional benefits it could have regarding the relation between the additional language and the student. Moreover, this fact has a direct positive repercussion on the motivation that students would have on learning English in the future.

KEY WORDS: Non-Formal Education, Beginners, Age Factor, Emotional Connection.

RESUM: Avui en dia, és bastament coneguda la importància d'aprendre Anglès ja que és una llengua que permet a les persones comunicar-se amb la resta del món. Aquesta realitat té una gran incidència a les escoles, que estan intentant oferir millor experiències d'aprenentatge de l'anglès a els alumnes a través de diferents mètodes. Aquest articles té l'objectiu d'analitzar un d'aquests mètodes que es centra en la importància de que els estudiants tinguin una connexió emocional positiva amb la llengua addicional des de que la comencen a aprendre a partir de moments quotidians. La recerca demostra que

dissenyar contextos informals com els moments quotidians (rutines, estona de dinar...) en els que els estudiants se senten còmodes i els educadors no són invasius, promouria una motivació extra als estudiants per aprendre una llengua addicional i faria més fàcil l'aprenentatge d'aquesta llengua a l'aprenentatge formal. La conclusió d'aquest article és que seria recomanable usar l'anglès a contextos educatius informals perquè els beneficis emocionals que podria tenir tenint en compte la relació entre infant i llengua addicional. A més a més, aquest fet té una repercussió positiva directa en la motivació que els alumnes podrien tenir per aprendre anglès.

PARAULES CLAU: Educació No Formal, Iniciats, Factor de l'Edat, Connexió Emocional.

INTRODUCTION

When people think about education and all of its wide fields that can be analysed, everybody agrees that the reality of the society is something compulsory to take into account as it shapes education itself. One of the most remarkable aspects that are highlighted in the XXI century is the globalization of the world with all of its consequences, and one of these consequences is the necessity of establishing a *lingua franca* that enables people from all around the globe to communicate among them.

It is commonly known that the language that is used as *lingua franca* all over the world is mostly English, so nowadays an indispensable requisite in most of the jobs is a good English level. This fact has a direct repercussion on education because families know that, as English is a must, if their son or daughter does not have an accurate English level their chances of having a good job decrease, so families and society tend to push the educative environments to make their children learn English.

Each school has its own way to achieve the objective of improving the English level of students, for example by advancing the age of starting to learn this language. But is advancing the age a good strategy? Some studies (Balagué, 2010 or Muñoz, 2014) remark that it is more important to think about the “how” and not about the “when” despite this last one is important too. This idea is supported by statistics, as it is widely seen that despite Spain is the second country of Europe in which children start learning English the youngest, its population has the worst English level of all the continent. The first time that students have contact with English is normally in a formal English class with all of its characteristics, something that can entail some disadvantages that can impoverish the potential learning of the first moments in which they have contact with this language.

This article has the aim of exploring how non-formal educational moments could be an alternative to create more powerful educative situations in which students can get a

stronger link with the additional language from an emotional and cognitive point of view. If we think perfunctorily about how we could exploit linguistically these educative moments, we can easily see that they are plenty of potential linguistic situations that could be used to introduce students to the additional language in an authentic context. Regarding this, the question that is presented in this research is: “Does starting to learn English in a non-formal context benefit the learning process?”. Looking deeper in the question, it can be threshed into these three goals:

- *Aim 1:* Describe a non-formal context of learning a language and its benefits.
- *Aim 2:* Analyse if presenting the additional language in a non-formal context before formal context is beneficial and how.
- *Aim 3:* Determine the implications of this research for a learning context.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

As it can be seen in the introduction, this work is sustained by understanding how young learners acquire an additional language to give more facilities to students in their first contact with the additional language (in our case English). Regarding this, we first should develop the idea of non-formal education as it is the educative context in which this work is cantered.

Having said that, this part of the article will focus on defining the concept “Non-Formal Education”. To clearly understand it, a first the definition of this concept and its siblings (formal and informal education) will be given to see which are the differences. After that, a final and operative definition of the concept will be developed so the framework in which this research is based can be ecologically understood.

Sarramona (1992) defines excellently the different terms to which we referred before regarding the different historical perspectives with the official definition of the concepts that were given by Cooms and Ahmed in 1974:

“La educación formal comprendería el “sistema educativo” altamente institucionalizado, cronológicamente graduado y jerárquicamente estructurado que se extiende desde los primeros años de la escuela primaria hasta los últimos años de la universidad. Llamaban educación no formal a “toda actividad organizada, sistemática, educativa, realizada fuera del marco del sistema oficial, para facilitar determinadas clases de aprendizaje a subgrupos particulares de la población, tanto adultos como niños”. Y la educación informal la describían como “un proceso que dura toda la vida y en el que las personas adquieren y acumulan conocimientos, habilidades, actitudes y modos de discernimiento mediante las experiencias diarias y su relación con el medio ambiente””. (p.12)

Regarding these definitions, the differences between these terms could be easily concluded in this way: the main difference between informal and formal or non-formal education is that in informal education there is not a person or a situation with the aim of making another person learn while in formal and non-formal education there is a purpose of learning. Looking into these last two concepts, the main difference is that formal education is centered on institutionalized educative contexts (school and high school) that are usually compulsory to take while non-formal education include the different moments with an aim of learning but that are not part of this institutionalized context.

The non-formal context to which this research refers does not exactly fit into the definition that Sarramona gives to this word. The context to which we refer when using “Non-Formal Context” in this study is a combination between the three definitions given before:

- Formal Education: this concept is related to its definition with the physical space in which it is developed. The proposed “Non-Formal Contexts” are thought to be done in schools, which is the place where is carried out the formal education.
- Non-Formal Education: there are two aspects which can be related with our personalized definition as the original definition defines these moments as the ones in which there is an aim of learning but that were not curricularly institutionalized.
- Informal Education: the only, and important, idea that is taken from its definition is the perception that students have of the educative situation as they should not feel that they are in an explicit learning experience.

Summing up the relations done above and summarizing the concept “Non-Formal Contexts”, the following definition could be given: “Quotidian moments lived by children in their daily life at school that are not curricularly defined but in which teachers plan educative situations that have as consequence an unconscious learning on students”. Taking this definition into real situations, we would include moments such as the playground time, lunch-time, routines (washing hands, singing before having breakfast...) or on guided free-time games.

The idea of using quotidian moments to let students learn English was developed by Flores and Corcoll (2009) when they defined the concept O’CLIL (Outdoor CLIL at School) referring to the actions teachers can plan to introduce English in these quotidian moments. The authors criticized the attitude of some educational institutions that decided to make kindergarten students learn English only because the demand of the parents and society was that students had to learn English and their logical, but not the most reflective and effective, response was to advance the age of introducing it but without analysing the best way to do it. Nevertheless, there are not any surveys that demonstrate that advancing

the age of learning as the only method to improve learning, contributes to a better long term second language acquisition (Balagué, 2010), so it is a huge reason to think that the decision of these schools is more focused on an aesthetic resolution of the demands than a self-reflection about which was the best way to introduce English to their students. The problem of these schools was that they had to give a quick answer to the demands they received and they were more focused on the “why” and what and not on the “how”, something that will be analysed afterwards.

Having arrived at this point, it is where it makes sense to link these ideas with the O’CLIL concept. The O’CLIL situations have one characteristic difficult to be found in formal educational situations: they have a huge grade of authenticity, something essential if we want to introduce English to young learners. Taking advantage of this great benefit by planning in an accurate way some linguistic objectives and developing a reflective educative practice, these O’CLIL moments would arise in excellent learning situations. The idea is not to find excuses to produce language as usually happens in formal education context, in these moments we can *find* occasions in which it makes sense to use language. When regarding the O’CLIL idea, one of its most important characteristics is the fact that students learn the additional language without receiving explicit language teaching, the language is learnt because it is used with students so they learn it by an unconscious acquisition process. Dahl and Vulchanova (2014) presented a study that revealed the importance of implicit learning in natural communicative additional language situations in young learners. In their study, they compared two different Norwegian schools with different characteristics: one of them taught first grade beginners in a native language-based perspective and the other one (with beginners too) was bilingually language-based but this bilingual situation was only produced in English class and at some quotidian moments. The study, which only analysed the learning of new vocabulary, showed that

only by introducing English in these few situations in which this additional language was not taught explicitly, the English vocabulary level of students increased substantially more than the other school which did not use a bilingual approach.

The importance of learning through authentic situations is also claimed by Bueno (2017). As a neuroscientist, he explains that content and concepts learnt in authentic contexts are more meaningful for students so are better learnt because they are faced with a more positive emotional perspective, something essential if we want them to learn efficiently new knowledge in a medium and long-term perspective.

Once an appropriate definition about Non-Formal Contexts has been described and we have seen some of its benefits, it is important to set the age at which these educative situations would be implemented. As explained above, the idea is to introduce the non-formal educative moments before students start working the additional language in formal situations. The Catalan Curriculum defines the compulsory starting age when students start primary education but it recommends to introduce it gradually at the last kindergarten year. Regarding this, the idea would be to introduce these non-formal educational situations one or two years before starting to study in lesson-time, so the age in which it should be introduced would depend on the school. The debate of the age factor is something really interesting in which to deepen and Davies and Taroná (2012) analysed it widely. Despite some years ago the idea “the earlier, the better” had been introduced in European classrooms, there are several studies that demonstrate not only that Early Beginners (EB) do not perform better than Late Starters (LB), but that LB outperform in most of the aspects EB in a long-term perspective. However, it is true that an intensive exposure to English, for example in immersion programmes or staying abroad, has a different effect on learners and in this case the younger ones are the ones that learn better comparing with the older or even adult ones.

As it is easily seen, the context that is proposed in this work does not fit into the immersion programme as the English is introduced only on some occasions during the day so if we pay attention to this thesis, it would not make any difference to introduce English at the lesson time with very young ages. The important issue teachers should take into account when introducing English in kindergarten is that this learning process must be in concordance with the developmental stage in which children are by creating an additional language learning experience that is coherent with the use of language at this age, something defended by Corcoll and Flores on 2014:

“La llengua és l’instrument per desenvolupar les diferents capacitats, per interactuar amb l’entorn i amb les altres persones, per expressar sentiments, per experimentar, per jugar, per començar a entendre la complexitat. Ens comuniquem mitjançant els diferents llenguatges i amb la llengua addicional, farem el mateix”.

(p.33).

This idea is also supported by Nikolov (2009) when he hypothesizes that maybe the studies that demonstrate that starting to learn English at early ages were not well developed as there was the possibility that the activities employed fit more into older students’ characteristics.

It is also interesting to analyse the additional language acquisition from a context-based perspective. Since some time ago, the idea of creating plurilingual contexts is getting stronger more and more as it is reflected in the Catalan Curriculum and the Council of Europe. The CEFRL (2001) defines the plurilingual competence as “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 competencies, but rather as the existence of a complex or even

composite competence on which the user may draw”. If we take this idea into the school perspective, we can translate it into actions by creating contexts in which students communicate and make use of intercultural interactions that may lead them to learn cultural and linguistic aspects that would help them live in a globalized world; saying it in another way, we as teachers should create educative experiences in which different languages convey and support between them to make sure that students acquire the capacity to communicate with different people in the widest range of situations. A good example of this educative perspective is shown in the study carried out by Corcoll (Davies and Taronna, 2012) whose aim was “to suggest a way in which children’s L1s could be effectively used to support additional language learning”. In this study, the researcher created a sequence that conveyed activities in which students had to use Catalan, Spanish and English to learn new English vocabulary. With a guided learning, these situations created an enjoyable time for students (as all the 21 students said in the final self-assessment) and promoted plenty of metalinguistic discussions that were preceded by some research with dictionaries. The last activity of the sequence offered students to sing and dance by code-switching some vocabulary, something that created a high grade of motivation (as most of the activities that involve movement) and, after having done all the sequence, few awareness of plurilingual language awareness in students. Moreover, despite this activity was done in a formal context, it is an example of activity that could be done, for example, in a non-formal educative moment as students feel this situation not as a curricular lesson but more as a leisure time activity (like on the non-formal situations) because of its characteristics: movement, singing and dancing.

METHOD

This article is research where a specific educational proposal is analysed and assessed. This educational proposal could fit in most schools in Catalonia as it is based on the most general aspects that are shared within them as the focus of its justification are psychological processes of children and moments that occur at all schools such as routines or lunch time. The research is not based on a concrete context because the idea is to describe a justified theoretical background that could support a future implementation, so the article could be classified as a qualitative research.

Participants: The participants of the research have been chosen to build a solid justification that supports from a holistic point of view the proposal. To reach this objective, the research gathers information from three different points of view defended by one expert each one:

- The pedagogical point of view, defended by Mar Esteve (ME), a doctor in pedagogy and professor at URL university.
- The neurological and cognitive point of view, defended by David Bueno (DB), a doctor in biology and professor at UB university.
- The linguistic point of view, defended by Maria del Carmen Flores (CF), a doctor in education and professor at URL university.

Moreover, with the objective of complementing or contrasting the information offered by the experts, 9 primary education teachers that have taught or are currently teaching English to students that learn this language in a formal context for first time have answered a questionnaire.

Instruments: the instruments that fit on the characteristics of the research and are going to be used are a combination of two different ones. On the one hand, the three experts are going to be interviewed through semi-structured questions that will adapt to the path of

the conversation and that will later be combined to offer a transversal and strong thesis and on the other hand one questionnaire asked to 9 teachers will be used to complement the information gathered with the interviews.

Procedure: the theoretical framework shaped the direction of the research by highlighting the aspects that required more attention to develop properly this research.

The combination of the given direction and the defined aims developed the route of the research (regarding content, format and typology). The three interviews and the questionnaire were answered in the same lapsus of time as its chronology was not important because all the information was going to be analysed at the same time. All the interviews were done face to face with the experts and the questionnaires were sent via e-mail to the different teachers by using Google Docs.

Once all the interviews and questionnaires are done, the different results are going to be contrasted with the Theoretical Framework and the different aims to develop the final conclusions that will extract the final ideas of the article.

The research complied with the ethical standards and all the participants that participated on this research understand and are conscious that all the data given by them is used in this article.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Aim 1: Describe a non-formal context of learning a language and its benefits

To start developing an analysis of the proposal given, it is compulsory to firstly locate the moments this article is talking about in the educative paradigm, extract the characteristics of its paradigm and then interrelate these characteristics with the different ideas that integrate the transversal analysis that will be done. The most powerful opinion that will be taken into account in this aim is the one of Mar Esteve, the expert in pedagogy, because

of her knowledge of the field, but her opinion is going to be complemented with the ideas of the other experts.

In the theoretical framework the differences between formal, informal and non-formal educational contexts have been widely explained and a concrete definition of the specific moments that are studied in the article has been developed. Nonetheless, it is true to say that this point of view was a very general and academic one, something that has been proven with the different opinions of the experts. The experts do not pigeonhole on the dichotomy between the different terms (formal, informal and non-formal), they prefer understanding the educational moments as moments that can have different degrees of formality and informality, “Depèn de com tu entenguis l’ensenyament i l’escola aquesta distinció és difícil de fer perquè està bé que hi hagi elements de formalitat i informalitat en totes les situacions escolars” (M.E.), and highlighting that “formal”, “non-formal” and “informal” are only tags promoted by the institutional educative authorities, “Quan diem formal o no formal estem dient més que res el context d’aula que nosaltres ja ens va bé pel sistema o el sistema ens ha obligat a compartimentalitzar i a separar per horaris, hores, aules...” (C.F.).

Despite experts avoid categorizing moments into formal or informal, it is true that they can easily agree between the inherent ideas that are related to the different degrees of formality “De formalitat entesa com a ordre, estructura, xarxa, marc i informalitat entesa com a improvisació, autenticitat, frescor, marc per la llibertat, presa de decisions...” (M.E.), something that gives us some clues about the strong points of the proposal. Nevertheless, something that is unanimously claimed is that all of the educative moments, regardless the degree of formality, are moments in which children learn things “Però en principi, el que és l’escola com a tal des de que entren fins que se’n van, tot és espai i moment educatiu” (C.F.) and in fact it is pointed that, as all moments have strong and

weak characteristics, it would be interesting that the tagged moments were less easy to identify because of their interrelation “Per tant aquesta frontera tant de bo a l’escola es diluís més, i després no cal dir que tots són espais igual de potents des d’un punt de vista educatiu.” (M.E.).

Deepening into contexts in which informality prevail, there are many benefits concerning the learning process, and more concretely, the language learning or acquisition process.

It is important to differentiate between the terms “learning” and “acquiring” because the first one is more related to formal contexts as it implies a conscious learning while acquisition is more related to informality as it is learned without being conscious of the learning process. Regarding this distinction, all the experts agree with the idea that the best way to learn a language is through social relations not only because it is more meaningful “A veure, la llengua s’està aprenent constantment i en tots els moments i a més la llengua és una cosa molt àmplia, molt polifacètica. Per tant, com més aprenem la llengua com l’aprenem a la vida normal, millor. (...) La part menys important en algun sentit de la llengua és la que estudiem de vegades, estudiar sintaxis és una cosa analítica...”

(M.E.), but because social environments are more likely to contain potential learning from other fields, something that drifts into something that is very important for the experts: that students live complete and integral experiences, “Té a veure en que si el que estem vivint és una experiència completa, una experiència humana” (M.E.).

Summarizing, we can define the quotidian moments in which the article is developed as moments with a high rate of informality, something that implies more capacity of decision to the students that make these situations become more meaningful for them. Moreover, as language is learnt while students do other things that are not learning the language explicitly (transversal learning), the new knowledge is better learnt because of neuronal reasons.

Below, a conceptual map about the different ideas that are analysed in this aim is presented in order to display in a more visual and integrated way how the relation between formality and informality has repercussion on this proposal:

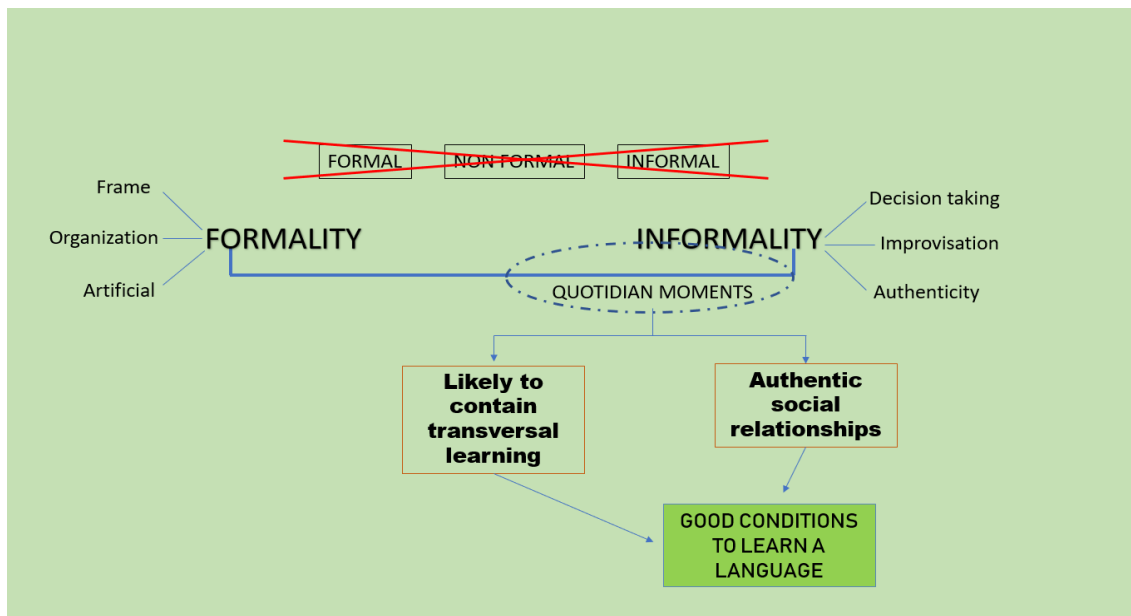


Fig.1 Conceptual map of the main points to distinguish formal, non-formal and informal education with its characteristics.

Aim 2: Analyse if presenting the additional language in a non-formal context before formal context is beneficial and how.

Sometimes the reality of the school is far from what experts theorize and the opinion of teachers that work daily with children must be taken into account too as, without entering in if they are right or not, they have perceptions that are probably shared with a lot of other teachers. That is why, to start analysing this aim, the opinions of the teachers regarding the aspects that surround this proposal will be given to have a wider vision of how these same aspects are lived in the daily school routines.

When asked for a general opinion of the proposal, teachers catalogued it as “interesting” in most cases, remarking its power to learn language through “real use” and in a “natural way” and some of them had doubts concerning whether students would use the additional

language in non-formal contexts. Regarding the answers related to the strong points, teachers think in most cases (67%) that it could help students learn the language in a more “meaningful” way, while when asking for the weak points there is diversity of opinions: some think that there would be problems on teachers’ motivation and coordination, others think that the proposal must be developed very systematically (something difficult in a school) and others think that as students would be in free time moments, they would not use the language.

When asking teachers for the aspects that would improve the most with this proposal, it is interesting to see that there is a slight coincidence with the real aim of the project and the aspects remarked by teachers. 56% of them believe that it would have positive effects regarding the emotional and motivational aspects, while the aspects related to language acquisition; additional language understanding, additional language production and vocabulary acquisition, have lower percentual support with 33%, 22% and 44%, respectively.

After having analysed the introductory questions of the questionnaire, it is time to follow with the analysis of the experts’ opinions, which will be complemented with the different ideas given by teachers to the other questions asked in the questionnaire. Now, it is time to focus on relating the characteristics non-formal contexts have with the linguistic project that is being proposed. The first idea that needs a deep reflection is when it is more beneficial that children have the first contact with the additional language, as it is something with which schools have very different opinions (lately, it is recurrent the idea that “the early, the better”, as said in the Theoretical Framework). “Mira, edat no hi ha un mínim” (D.B.), summarizes our expert in neurology, defending that any kid can learn more than one language at the same time at any age but that the key question is *how* kids have contact with this language “La qüestió és que si l’idioma no és d’ús social, no

l'aprendran" (D.B.), so if students do not feel that the use of the language is not something helpful, they will not learn it; so if our objective when we bring students in contact with the additional language is that they learn it, we must provide environments in which the language is useful, as happens for example in linguistic immersion contexts. Complementing this idea, it is stated that kindergarten offers more integral situations that prompt this transversal learning "(...) jo vaig començar per infantil perquè estàvem com molt situats en aquesta estapa, per interès (...) però tant de bo aquesta integració de continguts i llengua (...) tingués una continuïtat a primària" (C.F.). Moreover, we have the experience of the third expert that was involved with a project at her school in which English was learned through small inputs every day in real communicative situations, something that is quite similar to the proposal of this article, and it was implemented at first and second grade of primary education "Això concret es fa a primer i segon de primària" (M.E.) and it worked. Finally, the third expert warns us about an important aspect: it is very important that teachers that speak in English with young kids (5 years old) have a good pronunciation because "(...) és el que s'agafa més. Després costa molt més agafar la pronúncia per una simple qüestió d'utilització de cordes vocals." (D.B). Summarizing, the key concept is not to think when students should start learning English, the important fact is that we must provide integral and real communicative situations to the students in order to learn better English. This idea is supported by most of the teachers that responded the questionnaire as most of them pointed out this importance on learning in a natural and transversal moments "Learning English in a quotidian way, children learn by playing, they learn in a natural way".

Regarding this idea of the method, different interesting ideas have been said multiple times during the article that should be taken into account when designing how language should be used. The importance of the meaningfulness caused by real communicative

situations and spontaneity is something that we have already seen, but there are other aspects that complement this idea. One of them is orality: “(...) els aprenentatges lingüístics s’han de basar en la oralitat, no només el de l’anglès, el de totes les llengües. L’escriptura és una transposició de la oralitat. Llavors clar, si ho fem amb totes, sobretot amb els més petits s’ha de començar amb la oralitat” (M.E.), it is something widely known in the learning of languages that one of the most important skills when starting to learn a language are the speaking and listening ones before starting to write and read, an idea also supported by the teachers of the questionnaire, that 100% of the sample think that we must focus on these two skills when teaching English to beginners. Moreover, this orality promotes better the meaningful contexts we were talking about before because it enables dialogues, something that reinforces the idea. Another interesting idea is the one explained by the expert on neurology that takes into account that languages are learnt in a shared neural net, so if we learn one grammatical rule in one language it is easier to learn the same rule in another language because we use the same part of the net “(...) perquè tenim unes xarxes comunes. Això ja ho va proposar Noam Chomsky sobre bases purament teòriques fa dècades. Tenim unes zones del cervell absolutament implicades amb el llenguatge, que són les que permeten fer aquestes xarxes. Aleshores, aquestes xarxes són comuns a qualsevol idioma. Tenir un idioma consolidat facilita la incorporació d’un altre. I després hi ha xarxes que són exclusives de cada llengua. Sinó serien la mateixa” (D.B.). This idea is important because it dictates us something very simple but effective: when teachers teach English, it is more efficient to teach things that students know in their mother tongue and it is a good technique to relate languages between them to refine explanations (something that is very common in a plurilingual approach, for example). An excellent example of moment in which language could be used in this way

are routines: they part of the comfort zone of the students and there is plenty of language that is interiorized by them that can be used by the additional language.

These last paragraphs give some clues about how to put into practice the proposal developed during the article. Nevertheless, a detailed explanation about how to implement it will be developed when analysing the third aim.

Once having described the characteristics of the project, it is time to deepen into the benefits that it could have to understand better its aim and its sense of implementation.

When thinking about the project, it is easy to see that this idea is not thought to make students acquire a high linguistic knowledge, not because the educational proposal is not well designed (we have seen the potentialities of informal environments) but because of the time invested. The quotidian moments in which students would have contact with English are not high, something that limits the English use and in consequence its learning. Nonetheless there is an aim that fits more into students' psychological structure: to develop positive emotional connections with English language to enhance their motivation to learn it: "És que l'objectiu hauria de ser aquest. L'època dels grans aprenentatges és la secundària. Abans és posar les bases perquè es percebin aquests aprenentatges com una cosa interessant, divertida, motivadora..." (D.B.).

Regarding the emotional benefits that this proposal could have on students, all experts agree that the proposal fits with the objective of promoting them but each one points out different aspects. Carme Flores insists that "(...) l'objectiu és que el nen es trobi i s'iniciï a l'anglès d'una manera còmode", so that the project should ensure that students feel safe when they have contact with the additional language in order to introduce them in a non scary way. David Bueno has a similar opinion, but in this case he states not only that children must feel safe when interacting in English, but that they must have positive emotional moments in order to ensure a continuity of learning in the future "No només

en el seu aprenentatge sinó després amb la facilitat que tindràs d'ús, si no viuràs aquella llengua amb el neguit que t'ha provocat la incomoditat del moment. Si ha sigut un moment lúdic, divertit, que t'ho passes bé, no et suposarà cap esforç afegit continuar progressant en aquella llengua.” (D.B.). Finally, Mar Esteve relates the emotional connection of the language with a better acquisition of it because the fact of adding the emotional component to a learning makes students feel more motivated to learn the language “Amb això de la segona llengua es veu molt clar amb nanos, quan els nanos tenen una certa edat... nanos que no han sentit l'anglès a casa mai, en el moment que l'anglès entra com un element cultural (cançons, jocs...), l'anglès fa un canvi... Perquè l'anglès comença a formar part de la vida de coses que t'importen” (M.E.). So as we can see, the emotional factor has high incidence and experts think that it is very important not only for the language learning of the moment, but for the future motivation students would have to learn English.

And very related to this last idea, experts think that this project would be a key factor for offering the students a better basis to face learning in formal English classes because students would be more familiarized with the language: “Si tu dius que comences a fer anglès i no n'has sentit mai, de com és com “buah”, una cosa estranya. En canvi, la familiarització simplement fa que no hi hagi aquesta barrera” (M.E.). So, by before introducing students using quotidian situations we skip a barrier that could be an obstacle for its learning and we prompt a “non-invasive” context “sempre ho pensem que ha de ser d'una manera no invasiva” (C.F.). This drawback is also shared by the teachers that answered the questionnaire: 78% feel that one of the three most difficult aspects with beginners is this incapacity of understanding most of the language received, so this project could be a good way to solve a real problem of school English lessons.

In the same way that has been done before, the analysis of this aim finishes with a conceptual map to order the different ideas in which can be seen the different interrelations between causes and consequences of developing the idea explained in the article.

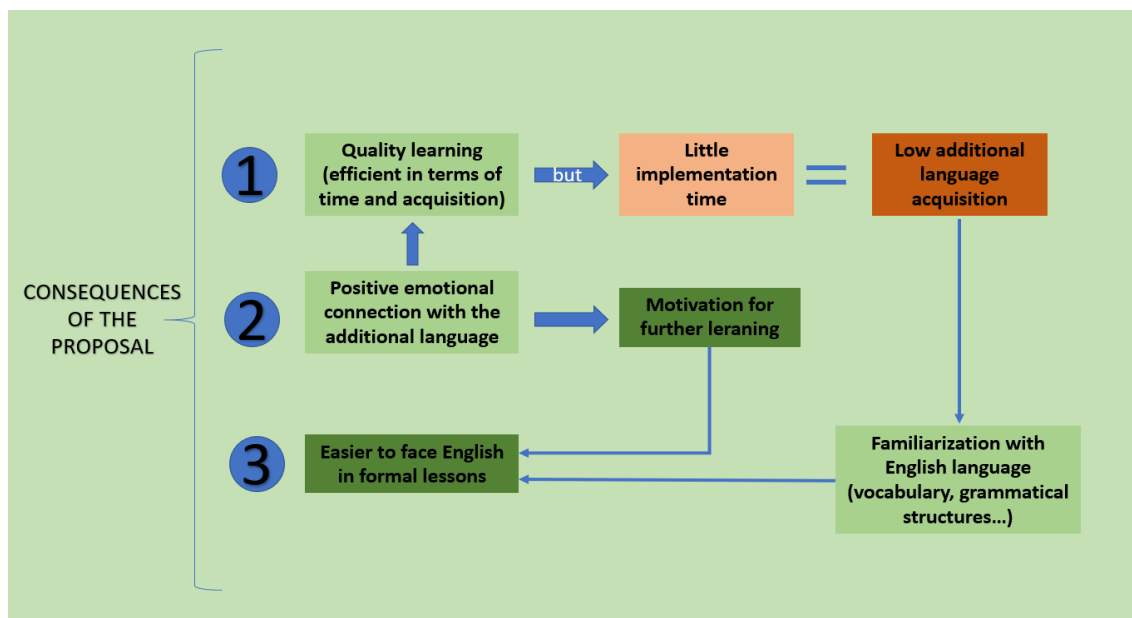


Fig.2 Conceptual map of of the expected consequences of the proposal and the interrelations between them.

Aim 3: Determine the implications of this research for a learning context.

Having arrived at this point, we have a clear idea about the characteristics and benefits that implementing English at daily routines would have. When developing this aim, a more concrete idea about how to implement it in real situations will be defined.

The first part that should be analysed is the one related to previous preparation and implementation. As happens with all the educative moments, the different actions and educative moments that are part of this project require planning and design. Carme Flores is very concrete in this case: “Per fer-ho bé és, primer fer un estudi o anàlisi de l’escola pel que fa la realitat: recursos humans, recursos de línies d’escola, d’espais... I aleshores fer una molt bona planificació de continuïtat de projecte des de que comença fins on volen

arribar i que aquesta continuïtat estigui justificada, és a dir quins espais, quins O'CLILS volem presentar i treballar amb els recursos humans corresponents, i aquests moments O'CLILS han d'estar planificats perquè aquí hi ha llengua que hem de tenir present i hi ha contingut, capacitats i competències, que hem de desenvolupar.” (C.F.). So, synthetizing her own words, it is very important that the quotidian moments fit into the educative context of the school, so it requires a good analysis of the resources and students. Once done that, teachers have to define the objectives that will guide them on the planning and design of the different actions. After this previous analysis, teachers should think about the real implementation in class (techniques, moments...) in the same way that happens with formal learning “Ella va fent un itinerari que quan veu que hi ha coses que estan assentades...” (M.E.). As we can see, it is important to evaluate the learning of the students and if what is being planned works in order to improve the future design of the quotidian moments.

So, what is the best way to implement this idea? What techniques and moments should be used? The answer is very related with an idea that was said before: teachers should create a comfortable environment, so the techniques and approaches we use should have this component, “Li lences llengua (...) aquesta llengua que narra l'acció però que no espera cap resposta per part del nen. D'aquesta manera el nen se sent tranquil de dir, “ah, no m'està preguntant, no m'està dirigint”, aleshores això fa que el nen se senti segur i emocionalment còmode” (C.F.). As we can see, one of these techniques that fit on these characteristics is information talk, that consists on narrating a situation in the additional language without the aim of looking for an answer. Mar Esteve insists on the importance of connecting languages in a more plurilingual way “És un moment en que també juguem a traduir, les típiques cançons que primer es canten en català, després en castellà...” (M.E.), so translation between languages, songs or games that students know and that

have a positive emotional component with them and that are reused through previous knowledge and experiences. Other techniques that are proposed are very similar to the ones used sometimes in formal education and are very related to the immediate context of the students and visual and oral situations “Bé, chants, songs, són fonamentals. Els visual aids també crec que poden ajudar molt, (...) el teu llenguatge corporal com qualsevol moment d’immersió d’una llengua addicional... Els mateixos recursos que fas servir en moments quotidians, (...) si has anat al lavabo i has fet pipí, el recurs ha de ser el paper de vàter, la tovallola, el sabó...” (C.F.). All of these resources that are said need to be adapted to fit into the characteristics of each group, for example it would probably make no sense to use a nursery chant in a second-grade primary education group. To make sure that the moments in which this project is developed are moments that contain the situations to make this language arise, teachers should choose the moments properly: they must be moments in which students feel comfortable, that are repetitive during the week (specially in kindergarten) and that are not linguistically complex. Carme Flores recommends the snack time as a good moment because it accomplishes all of these characteristics “és un moment relaxat, un moment en el que pots treballar tot el moment d’ordre, que tu reculls el que fas, tema de motxilla, tot el tema de recollir és potent...” (C.F.).

Finally, when being with children in one of these quotidian moments, it is important to know how to correct linguistic errors. As said before, it is important that students feel comfortable in this situation so they should not be afraid of committing mistakes and they should see this as part of the learning. Regarding this, it is important that the teachers’ corrections are not invasive, they should better make use of positive reinforcement: “(...) doncs tu diries “Ah, you mean...” ho podries fer sense dir “No, this is wrong”, lògicament

no, en això estaria totalment d'acord, el que sí que reforçaries seria la que és correcta, la llengua correcta reforçar-la" (C.F.).

The implementation of this project cannot be isolated of the school dynamics, so it is important to integrate it in a coordinated way with the different agents of the centre. The worst drawback that can face this project is probably the organization of the school "Jo crec que hi ha un problema important de gestió de temps i espais.. Estem molt marcats per horaris molt establerts, tancats que algunes vegades pot dificultar que hi hagi aquesta aposta per obrir aquesta immersió en aquests espais que no són de classe classe, això pot ser un handicap" (C.F.) because it requires more time and human resources than if it is not implemented. "A veure, és que al final és perquè falten recursos moltes vegades i és un problema d'organització dins el centres", states David Bueno when referring to the repercussion of this project on the centre. He puts emphasis on the importance of the transversal learning, something that requires more than one teacher or educator for the same number of children "Avui els que ens quedem a dinar, dinarem en anglès. Això seria, penso jo, l'òptim. És vivencial perquè, per exemple, si és l'hora de plàstica aprenem els colors mentre pintem." (D.B.).

So, as we can see, the implementation of this project must be a school project, not something isolated done by the English teacher. It requires coordination and motivation to do it in a proper way, something important because if it is not carried out in a good way, it could be even harmful for students: "Pot ser fins i tot perjudicial en el sentit de que si no ens ho creiem, fem el bolet, els nens ho viuran com a tal, amb la qual cosa pot implicar l'efecte contrari. Hem de ser molt conscients i conseqüents amb el que fem, i és una proposta d'escola, no d'un mestre" (C.F.).

After having seen the different aspects that should be taken into account from a pedagogical and organizational way in an "landscape" vision, it is time to deepen into the

teacher's role; analysing from their relation with the students to their relation with teachers and passing through their preparation.

Regarding the first point, when analysing the relation educators should have with students it is necessary to look for an idea that was said before: teachers must not be invasive "Jo en un principi ell se sent segur (...) perquè són activitats que en principi ells ja van desenvolupant, ja van aprenent dia rere dia, però tu l'acompanyes" (C.F.). As the different moments in which students have contact with this language are routines or quotidian moments that are repeated continuously during the course, it is not necessary that teachers lead the moment. Students just have to do what they always do (something that for them is emotionally comfortable) and combine their actions with a foreign language. The role of teachers is to support this language, that is the part of the educational moment in which they do not feel comfortable and would need some help.

Another interesting point to take into account is that before English teachers we are teachers, and this is something to bear in mind with the personal relation with students, especially in free-time activities. As has been repeated in this article, teachers must provide a comfortable context, and this includes that if a student needs to talk with us because of more intimate or emotional reasons for example, we as teachers should change to the language with which the student feels more comfortable "jo crec que s'ha de prioritzar la comunicació i l'entesa i l'acompanyament" (M.E.). Moreover, teachers should be very careful when trying to implement English in free time activities because they should not lead the games. If teachers want to rise English situations in free time moments, they have to adapt and participate at the activities students are organizing "Tenim massa tendència a nosaltres liderar un joc i no és això tampoc, és afegir-te al joc dels infants. (...) La idea és aquest, eventualment aniran impregnant-se d'aquesta llengua i de cop i volta, catapum: l'aniran fent servir." (C.F.). This idea that students would not use

English in non-formal context is an aspect that worries the teachers that answered the questionnaire (56%), so as we have seen children would probably not use English in these free contexts at the beginning but little by little they would start using it spontaneously.

When regarding the preparation teachers should have to take the responsibility of putting in practice this proposal, Carme Flores is very staunch: “(...) aquesta responsabilitat de proporcionar la immersió amb tranquil·litat, no amb angoixa, perquè sinó es perd tot el sentit, tota la naturalitat. La paraula és naturalitat, quan ja no és natural ja és artificial perquè ja estem patint perquè no ens entendran o perquè no tinc la llengua per dir-ho bé”.

So it is important not only to understand how this project works and how to apply it, but also that teachers feel secure when implementing with an accurate additional language communicative competence. This aspect is connected again with the same idea of creating a comfortable environment: if the teacher is nervous or tense because he/she cannot speak in English in a natural way, students feel these nerves and the naturality is lost.

And last, but not the least, the importance of a good coordination between educators. As has been said before, this project must be a school project, not an isolated action of the English teacher. It must be coordinated in two main ways: the pedagogical one and the organizational one. On the one hand, regarding the pedagogic organization, teachers must explain what is being learned to be coherent with the knowledge and learning of the students (the same way that happens with the formal education), even between different cycles. Moreover, if all teachers know what is being done by other teachers, in case one teacher cannot come at school, other teachers can supply him/her in a worthy way “no pot recaure en una persona, ha de ser més persones perquè així dones més resposta...” (C.F.). On the other hand, it is important to talk about the organizational coordination because this project requires more human resources “Requereix més hores lliures pel mestre d’anglès perquè ha de preparar més coses diferents.” (D.B.). School should adapt

to the necessities that this project has in order to implement it correctly, and it could mean maybe to hire a person to carry on exclusively these moments. Furthermore, Mar Esteve reminds us of something important: “(...) els que no són acadèmics molts cops no els porten mestres, hi ha monitors per exemple: a menjador a l’esbarjo, etc” (M.E.). It is possible that the coordination to carry on the project have to be coordinated with monitors, as they are usually educators that are with children at more informal moments.

Finally, in the same way that has been done before, the idea about how to implement the educational proposal is developed in a conceptual map in a more visual way:

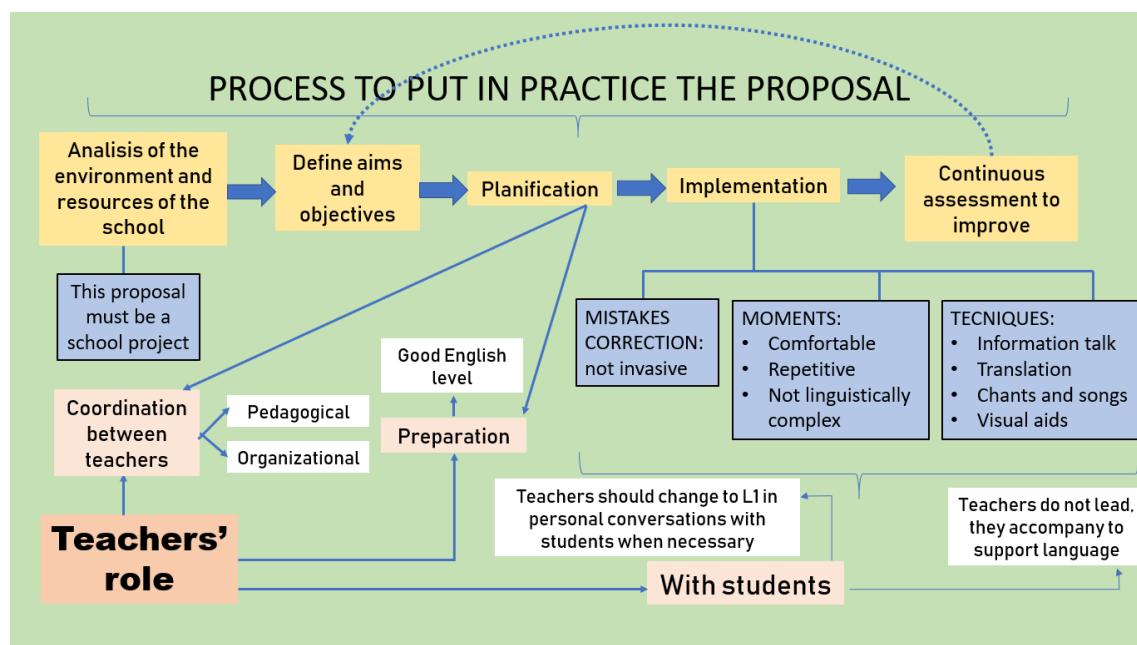


Fig.3 Conceptual map of the aspects to take into account when developing the proposal.

CONCLUSIONS

Remembering the question that vertebrates this article “*Does starting to learn English in a non-formal context benefit the learning process?*” there are many ideas that can be stated after having analysed deeply the topic.

After having done the research and analysed and discussed the results, it can be seen that the fact of working on English in contexts in which informality prevails has the capacity

of making children connect in an emotional way with English, something that is beneficial for a further learning of the language, and specially for facing English formal lessons. Nonetheless, it is true to say that despite these moments are good examples to learn meaningfully new knowledge, students may not learn a lot of linguistic content because the time of implementation would not be high. As it can be interpreted, the objective of this proposal would not be that students start learning English at a younger age to improve their additional language level, but to acquire confidence and positive emotional background with that language, something that would improve their learning at a mid and long-term perspective.

Regarding this, the answer to the main question of the article is “yes, starting to learn English in non-formal context benefits the learning process”. It is true to say that implementing this proposal would not be easy as it should be carried out very carefully and requires high rates of preparation, more resources and organization in the school context.

Regarding the research itself, it is only based on theoretical ideas (some of them scientifically proven) but, as the proposal has not been implemented and analyzed in an ongoing process, implementation results cannot be discussed. Taking this idea into account, the following step that should be carried on to follow with the research would be a study when implementing it in real schools with different contexts to see which are the real consequences this educative proposal would have and if these consequences coincide with the ones developed in this article.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1: Model of interviews

Interview to expert on Pedagogy, Mar Esteve.

1. Com descriuries els contextos no formals?
2. Quines són les principals diferències entre els contextos formals, no formals i informals, especialment fent èmfasi a educació infantil?
3. Quines similituds tenen?
4. Creus que contextos no formals poden ser bons per un estudiant a l'hora d'aprendre una segona llengua?
5. Quins creus que podrien ser els beneficis o perjudicis?
6. Quins són els components emocionals dels contextos no formals?
7. Aquests components emocionals podrien ser beneficiosos per l'adquisició de la segona llengua?
8. Tenint en compte els contextos no formals descrits, creus que podrien ser una bona eina per introduir els alumnes a la segona llengua?
9. Quins moments quotidians creus que serien els millors per implementar la idea?
10. El projecte hauria de ser coordinat amb el mestre d'Anglès d'educació primària?
En cas que sí, en quins aspectes?
11. Com s'hauria de promoure la segona llengua en ambients de temps lliure?

Interview to expert on Neurology, David Bueno

1. A quina edat creus que és més beneficiós que els infants tinguin un primer contacte regular amb una segona llengua?

2. Què en penses sobre la importància de transmetre una bona pronúncia amb infants que adquireixen una segona llengua abans dels 5 anys?
3. Neuronalment, les segones llengües com són apreses?
4. Quins són els principals aspectes que s'han de tenir en compte quan volem que algú aprengui una segona llengua?
5. Com afecta l'autenticitat de les activitats a l'aprenentatge de llengües?
6. Tenint en compte els contextos no formals descrits, creus que podrien ser una bona eina per introduir els alumnes a la segona llengua?
7. En els teus llibres expliques que utilitzar moments quotidians per aprendre noves coses converteix les experiències en més significatives. Es podria aplicar aquesta idea en aquest cas?
8. Un altre aspecte interessant és la importància de promoure un aprenentatge transversal ja que ha estat provat que millora l'adquisició de nous coneixements. Com que en aquest cas l'anglès s'usaria, per exemple, quan els infants juguen a jocs dirigits (psicomotricitat), podríem relacionar aquest idea amb aquest projecte?
9. Dit això, en una idea general, creus que és positiu introduir l'anglès en aquest contextos no formals abans de l'aprenentatge formal?
10. Hipotèticament, com encararia un infant la seva primera classe formal d'anglès havent estat introduït abans en el context no formal en comparació a un que no?
11. Com creus que aquest projecte afectaria la motivació dels infants quan s'encaressin amb l'anglès?

Interview to expert on Additional Language teaching, Carme Flores

1. Do you think that O'CLILs moments could be part of what is called non-formal education?
2. Do you think non formal context would be good for students to learn additional language?
3. Which do you think would be the benefits or damages?
4. What emotional components are characteristic of non formal contexts?
5. Would these emotional components be beneficial for additional language acquisition?
6. At what age do you think students should have the first contact with an additional language?
7. What do you think about the importance of an accurate pronunciation with students that learn an additional language before their 5 years old?
8. What are the main aspects to take into account when we want a learner acquire an additional language?
9. How authenticity on activities affect to the learning of a language?
10. Regarding the described non formal context, do you think that they would be a powerful tool to face a first introduction to an additional language?
11. Do you think the amount of language learnt would be relatively large?
12. So, in a general view, do you think that it would be positive to introduce English in this non formal environments before formal learning?
13. Hypothetically, how would a child face his/her first English lesson having been introduced before comparing to a child that have not.
14. What quotidian moments do you think would be the best to implement this idea?
15. At what age would you implement it?

16. What resources would be the most powerful? (chants, drills...)
17. Should this project be coordinated with English teacher of primary education? If yes, what aspects?
18. How do you think this project would affect on motivation students would have when facing English?
19. Should teachers correct students' linguistic mistakes?
20. How should additional language be promoted in free-time situations?

Appendix 2: Research plan

AIM	DIMENSION	CATEGORY	ITEM	INSTRUMENT	PARTICIPANT
Describe a non formal context of learning a language and its benefits.	Description	Definition	-How would you define non formal contexts? -Do you think that O'CLILs moments could be part of what is called non-formal education?	Semi-structured Interview	Mar Esteve
					Carme Flores
		Differences	-What are the main differences between formal, non-formal and informal educational contexts? (specially regarding early childhood)		Mar Esteve
	Benefits	Similarities	-Are there any similarities? Which are they?		Mar Esteve
		For language learning	-Do you think non formal context would be good for students to learn additional language? -Which do you think would be the benefits or damages?		Mar Esteve + Carme Flores
					Mar Esteve + Carme Flores
		For emotional reasons	-What emotional components are characteristic of non formal contexts?		Mar Esteve + Carme Flores Mar Esteve + Carme Flores

			-Would these emotional components be beneficial for additional language acquisition?		
Analyze if presenting the additional language in a non-formal context before formal context is beneficial and how.	Daily formal learning	Method Drawbacks	<p>-What is the issue you take the most into account when designing a teaching plan for beginners? Motivation, Linguistic content, Contextualization, Authenticity, Classroom management, Other.</p> <p>-What skill do you focus the most with beginners? Speaking, Reading, Listening, Writing, Other.</p> <p>-What three aspects do you consider are the most difficult when teaching beginners?</p> <p>-Rank (1 to 10) what do you think is the importance of each of this aspects in relation to the previous difficulties: Emotional aspects, Cognitive aspects, Motivational aspects, Teacher's methodological approach, Not enough English hours, Others</p> <p>-Is it difficult to create naturalistic situations in which English should be used in class?</p>	Questionnaire. Previous questions: -Age -Gender -Type of school working (state, semi-private, private)	Teachers of beginner students from different contexts.

		Eases	<p>-What three aspects do you consider are the easiest ones when teaching beginners?</p> <p>-Rank (1 to 10) what do you think is the importance of each of this aspects in relation to the previous facilities: Emotional aspects, Cognitive aspects, Motivational aspects, Teacher's methodological approach, Appropriate English hours, Others</p>		
		Opinion of this proposal	<p>-Imagine beginners had received some input in non-formal fun and meaningful situations before. How these aspects would improve? (From 1 to 10) Motivation, Additional language production, Positive emotional connection, Additional language understanding, Vocabulary acquired.</p>		
	Learning moment	Starting age	<p>-At what age do you think students should have the first contact with an additional language?</p> <p>-What do you think about the importance of an accurate pronunciation with students that learn an additional language before their 5 years old?</p>	Semi-structured Interview	<p>David Bueno + Carme Flores</p> <p>David Bueno + Carme Flores</p>
		Method	<p>-Cognitively, how additional language are learnt?</p>		David Bueno

Determine the implications of this research for a learning context.			<p>-What are the main aspects to take into account when we want a learner acquire an additional language?</p> <p>-How authenticity on activities affect to the learning of a language?</p>	<p>David Bueno + Carme Flores</p> <p>David Bueno + Carme Flores</p>
	Benefits	<p>For language learning</p> <p>For emotional reasons</p>	<p>-Regarding the described non formal context, do you think that they would be a powerful tool to face a first introduction to an additional language?</p> <p>-Do you think the amount of language learnt would be relatively large?</p> <p>-In your books you explain that using quotidian moments to learn new things makes them more meaningful and emotionally important so are learnt better. Could we apply this idea in this case?</p> <p>-Another interesting issue is the one that is related to the importance of promoting on a transversal learning as it is proved that it helps on learning. As in this case English would be used, for example, when playing games (psychomotricity), could we relate this idea with this project?</p>	<p>David Bueno + Carme Flores + Mar Esteve</p> <p>Carme Flores</p> <p>David Bueno</p> <p>David Bueno</p>

		For facing formal learning context	<p>-So, in a general view, do you think that it would be positive to introduce English in this non formal environments before formal learning?</p> <p>-Hypothetically, how would a child face his/her first English lesson having been introduced before comparing to a child that have not.</p>		<p>Carme Flores + David Bueno</p> <p>Carme Flores + David Bueno</p>
	Implications	<p>Implementation</p> <p>Incidence on school</p> <p>Motivational aspects</p>	<p>-What quotidian moments do you think would be the best to implement this idea?</p> <p>-At what age would you implement it?</p> <p>-What resources would be the most powerful? (chants, drills...)</p> <p>-Should this project be coordinated with English teacher of primary education? If yes, with what aspects?</p> <p>How do you think this project would affect on motivation students would have when facing English?</p>		<p>Carme Flores + Mar Esteve</p> <p>Carme Flores</p> <p>Carme Flores</p> <p>Carme Flores + Mar Esteve</p> <p>Carme Flores + David Bueno</p> <p>Carme Flores</p>

	Teachers' role	Relation with students	-Should teachers correct students' linguistic mistakes? -How should additional language be promoted in free-time situations?		Carne Flores + Mar Esteve
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