



Additional Language Acquisition at Infant School: Integrating MORE than Content and ILanguage

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English is taught as an additional language in many schools at pre-primary level. Starting early alone, however, does not guarantee satisfying results in the long run. This is why it is necessary to develop new teaching proposals that are fully appropriate for children this age and that may promote natural language acquisition. And the answer may already be in the system: applying a methodology similar to what we use for Catalan and Spanish to English, that is, implementing CLIL from an early start. The reasoning behind this idea is that it is precisely at this stage where a CLIL proposal becomes more natural and productive: with very young learners, teaching must necessarily be global, content-linked and practical in order to be successful. It is here, then, where the L3 can be acquired, rather than learned; lived, rather than practiced. And how can this be done? Some practical ideas will be presented and discussed in the session to try and shed some light on this question

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Starting Point

The Catalan educational system considers Early Childhood Education as an educational stage arranged into two key-stages or cycles, Nursery and Kindergarten. At this stage, a developmental process takes place:

- From dependency towards autonomy
- From impulsiveness towards reflection
- From selfishness towards socialisation
- From silent period towards first oral exchanges in language use

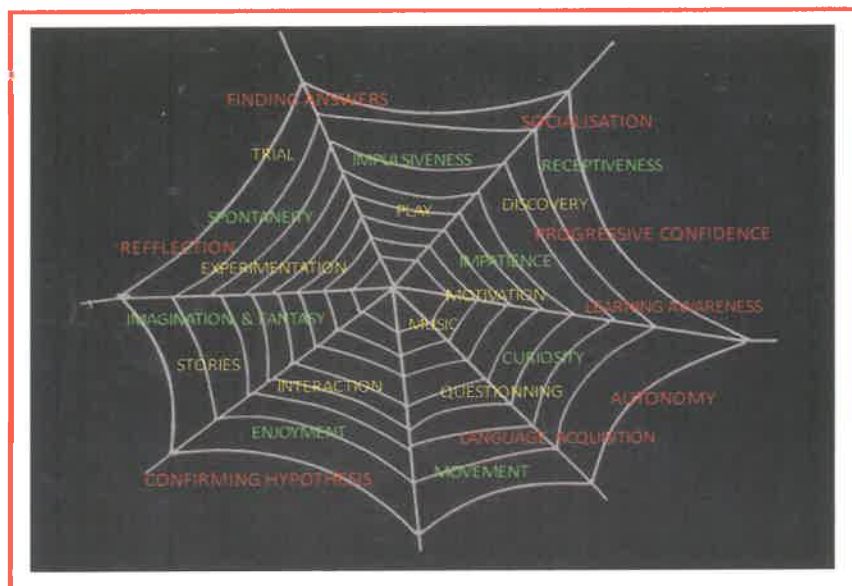
The stage is considered as an educational complement of the family, not as a substitute, and has an important socialisation function. Our psycho pedagogical bases meet in the constructivist view of learning, significant learning which is scaffolded by experience and by the others, adults and peers, and in a global approach and integration of contents. Languages are tools through which communication and content development take place. The teacher should be a specialist of Infant Education and cater for the stage needs. Everybody who is involved in teaching very young learners knows this. The aim of this article is to take it as the basis for a **coherent** introduction of English and coherence means taking all the following variables into account:

- Children's needs, instincts, abilities and interests
- Methodology: content development and teaching proposals
- School project
- Family

Children's needs, instincts, abilities and interests

Very young learners bring with them some instincts, some needs that should not be ignored. Receptiveness, motivation and enjoyment are natural features that clearly identify these children. They want to discover, they want to try, they are curious, spontaneous, impatient, they are having their first oral interactions with other children, they need to move and they need to rest. And they are always ready for meaningful experiences, such as experimenting with different materials so they can confirm hypotheses, searching answers to the questions that they are constantly asking, becoming more confident and autonomous with school routines and habits and enjoying themselves with the world of fantasy and imagination through stories, games and other opportunities for socialisation.

Children's emotional, corporal and environmental resources, their previous knowledge and experience and their new meaningful encounters will knit an acquisition and learning web that will become thicker and bigger through the years and will bring more language and learning awareness with it. A compartmentalised view of learning is not acceptable because the approach a child takes towards discovery, awareness and communication is completely global. The infant is seen as an active and capable human being and all his/her possibilities and languages will immediately activate with every proposal and in each of the many moments that the child will live through.



Methology: content development and teaching proposals

Clearly, trying to be coherent with the idea described above has consequences for the language classroom and, specifically, regarding the use of the different languages present in the school. On the one hand, children's first language is used to work on different curricular contents. With their first language, children also express their feelings, listen to their teachers' instructions and proposals, explain things that happen to them. The same way children develop their first language capacities and improve their oral skills by being immersed in the language, not exposed to but immersed, a similar model should be adopted when introducing an additional language at this stage. Languages would then become "acquired and lived" rather than "learned and practised".

All the teachers at an Infant School no matter the language used, first, second or additional, should develop a project where all the tasks become integrated in order to acquire common targets. It is true that the teacher using the additional language will need to consider certain aspects. First, children will try to understand the global meaning of instructions and narrations but they will mainly use their first language to keep communication flowing. Later on, they will start using code-switching and chunks of language in English. The classroom language and school language will change as teachers adapt their productions to the children and the moment. Furthermore, teachers will need to make a greater use of non-verbal communication and visual support and, very likely, some specific didactic resources such as songs, chants or stories will be used to a greater extent.

So, how can all this be brought to the classroom? How could this be done? Next, two different and complementary applications that could help to answer this question will be described: **Integrated Learning Units (ILUs) and Outdoor CLIL at School (OCLILS)**.

In Integrated Learning Units, the aims to be achieved by the children are shared by all teachers, no matter what language they use, and the concepts are covered in children's mother tongue, second language and additional language depending on the school's linguistic project. They should offer didactic proposals that bear in mind contents from different curricular areas and before designing a unit, teachers should carefully discuss, reflect upon and decide on a series of aspects such as the expected oral comprehension and oral production from children and the choice and sequence of activities. Let us illustrate with two examples of ILUs¹: Discovering Miró and Philip the Clown.

In Discovering Miró, different didactic proposals developing contents from different curricular areas have been described. For instance, an activity developing direct and indirect observation (awareness of one's social, natural and cultural context) through the sculpture the woman and the bird; another activity to work on parts of the face and symmetry (self-awareness) by showing Miró's painting "A portrait of a young Girl" so that children carefully observe it, pay attention to its symmetry and draw one of the two halves in a paper where just one half is shown.

In Philip the Clown, there are also interesting proposals such as celebrating Philip's birthday in the classroom, where the teacher's performance could be something like: where the teacher uses language that is well-adapted to the children's level of English, creating a context that is motivating and where children are working for a purpose; the teacher is also using repetition and visual support where required, and so on.



¹ These ILUs were originally created by Infant Education students at Blanquerna. They have been partially modified by ourselves.

Ok, boys and girls. I've got a surprise for you. Yesterday I got a letter from Philip. Philip, the clown! He is very happy. Do you know why he is so happy? Do you want me to read the letter? Yes? Shall we? Ok, then, let's open it...interesting...it's not a letter, it's a card...

(the teacher takes the envelope, opens it and shows the card to the children; she starts reading the card)
Hello children!

Today I'm very happy! It's my birthday! And I want to invite you to my birthday party!

Today is his birthday! (the teacher acts out being very happy and surprised)

There is only one thing

What can it be? Strange? (the teacher pretends something strange is going on...)

You should become clowns !

How can we do that?

The party will begin in a moment ! Come on , use my make up! It's in the envelope!

In the envelope? In the letter? (the teacher takes the envelope and looks inside; she takes out some coloured stickers) Here it is!

Use the red stickers for your nose, the blue stickers for your cheeks and the green stickers for your eye-brows. Go ahead!

Shall we use his make-up? Yes? Ok! Then, Marta, stand up and come here, please. Take a red sticker. Is it a triangle? No? What is it? Good, it's a round sticker; it's not a triangle. Ok, now, put it on your nose...

Good...now take two blue stickers....



By the end of a unit such as this, children will identify with Philip and will see in him part of themselves: a clown expressing his feelings (the clown is sad, children are also sad sometimes), a clown showing his abilities and his physical limitations (he usually falls down, children often fall down) or a clown getting dressed (children are improving their skills at developing autonomy, dressing themselves and undressing themselves).

In *Outdoor CLIL at School (OCLILS)*, we are aware and take advantage of the fact that infant school educational time and space open their limits in terms of communication and thus there are many possibilities for interaction among children and teachers apart from the classroom: the playground, the corridor, the dining-room or even the bathroom can become very rich settings for content development and natural exchanges in an additional language, especially as regards habits and play. Also, interesting moments can be used: lunch time, playground time, and tidy up time, for instance, offer new possibilities for real and meaningful communication.

OCLILS

	Contents (non-linguistic): routines, attitudes, abilities	Contents (linguistic): expressions appropriate to the context, chants, songs...	Resources: to promote interaction +to promote language production	Curriculum links (Descoberta d'un mateix i dels alters, Descoberta de l'entorn, Comunicació i llenguatges
Playground Time				
Toilet Time				
In-and-out-the-classroom Time				
Lunch Time				
...				

We would like to exemplify OCLILS by concentrating on playground time, where the purpose should be the use of the additional language together with other languages in a context where the teacher plays with the children, joins in their games and in their actions in a more or less active way, using information talk when necessary, and showing, listening or observing at those times. Children will eventually start using words and expressions from the additional language for their real interactions.

PLAYGROUND TIME

Contents (non-linguistic)

Playing together:

- Respecting the participation of whoever wants to play in any game and in any playground area;
- Solving conflicts once they appear and have not been avoided before: listening to the classmates' versions, giving own version and solving the problem;
- Describing, showing emotions and respecting others' emotions;
- Following the rules of group games;
- Singing songs and dancing

Playing in the playground:

- Describing the playground areas;
- Locating oneself, resources (materials and facilities) and natural elements in the playground;
- Taking care of materials and playground facilities: respect for facilities and other elements that can be found in the playground (i.e. plants, birds...);
- Developing gross motor and fine motor skills through play;
- Developing imagination and creativity through play;
- Becoming aware of weather conditions and clothing needs (playground jackets)

Playing with things:

- Describing materials available in the playground;
- Sharing materials: taking turns in the use of materials provided in the playground when only individual use is required (i.e. spade, rake...);

Playing and tidying up:

- Washing plastic materials (i.e. buckets, shovels, tins...)
- Washing hands
- Going to the toilet

Contents (linguistic)

Going outside:

- Let's go to the playground!
- Get in line to go outside!
- Hold hands!
- Everybody, let's go outside!

Socialisation:

- Hello!
- What are you doing?
- Can I play with you?
- And me?
- Are you ok?
- How are you?

Fighting:

It was an accident

- I won't do it again
- I'm sorry

Weather:

- What's the weather like?
- Can we go outside?
- Is it sunny?
- Oh, it's raining!

Games and playing:

- What shall we play?
- Do you want to play with us?
- Let's play together
- It's my turn
- We could share it
- Who wants to slide down the slide?

Build a bridge – In the sandpit (Smart Moves 2, Preschool thru 1st n. 1)

Build a bridge, build a tunnel, build a road

Build a cave, build a tower, build a wall

Sortim a jugar (Cantarelles i rutines, n. 9)

El sol truca a la porta

Quin dia més clar

El pati ens espera

Sortim a jugar

(Adapted version)

(The) sun is knocking on the door

What a beautiful day!

The playground is waiting

Let's go out to play!

Resources

Materials:

Ball	Car
Lorry / truck	Boat
Bucket and spade/	Tins/mold
Spoon	Straw and stick
Skipping rope	Watering can
Wheelbarrow/ wagon	Tricycle / Kiddie car
Motorbike	Rocking horse
Cup	Wheel
...	

Areas and facilities:

Sand pit	
Big train, big turtle, Wooden house...	
Tree (palm tree...), Plant (bushes...), Grass, hedge...	
Fountain	Bench,
Fence	Swing
Seesaw	Climbing frame
Slide	
...	

Curriculum links

Descoberta d'un mateix i dels altres

Autoconeixement i gestió de les emocions

Exploració i reconeixement de les pròpies possibilitats a través del cos: emocionals, sensorials i perceptives, motrius, afectives i relacionals, expressives i cognoscitives.

Joc i moviment

Gust i valoració del joc, l'exploració sensorial i psicomotriu com a mitjà de gaudi personal i de relació amb si mateix, amb els altres i amb els objectes.

Exploració de moviments en relació amb un mateix, els altres, els objectes, i la situació espaciotemporal, tot avançant en les possibilitats expressives del propi cos.

Expressió, a partir de l'activitat espontània, de la vida afectiva i relacional mitjançant el llenguatge corporal.

Domini progressiu de les habilitats motrius bàsiques: coordinació, to muscular, equilibri, postures diverses i respiració.

Experimentació i interpretació de sensacions i significats referits a l'espai: dintre-fora, davant-darrere, segur-perillós, entre altres, i referits al temps: ritme, ordre, durada, simultaneïtat, espera.

Comprensió i valoració progressiva de la necessitat de normes en alguns jocs

Prudència davant algunes situacions de risc o perill.

Relacions afectives i comunicatives

Sentiment de pertànyer al grup i compromís de participar en projectes compartits.

Reflexió sobre les relacions que s'estableixen en els grups i participació en la concreció de normes per afavorir la convivència.

Disposició a la resolució de conflictes mitjançant el diàleg, a l'assumpció de responsabilitats i a la flexibilització d'actituds personals per trobar punts de coincidència amb els altres i arribar a acords.

Autonomia personal i relacional

Participació en la cura i manteniment dels objectes i espais col·lectius.

Descoberta de l'entorn

Exploració de l'entorn

Observació i identificació de diferents elements de l'entorn: materials, objectes, animals, plantes, paisatges.

Observació i identificació de qualitats d'elements de l'entorn.

Observació i identificació de fenòmens naturals: dia, nit, sol, pluja, núvols, vent, entre altres, i valoració de la seva incidència en la vida quotidiana.

Identificació de figures tridimensionals: esfera, cilindre i prisma, i planes: triangle, quadrilàter i cercle, que formen part d'elements de l'entorn.

Respecte pels elements de l'entorn natural i social i participació en actuacions per a la conservació del medi.

Experimentació i interpretació

Observació i reconeixement de semblances i diferències en organismes, objectes i materials: color, grandària, mida, plasticitat, utilitat, sensacions i altres propietats.

Observació de característiques i comportaments d'alguns animals i plantes en contextos diversos: com són, com s'alimenten, on viuen, com es relacionen.

Reconeixement dels canvis que es produeixen en animals i plantes en el decurs del seu desenvolupament, interpretant les primeres nocions d'ésser viu i cicle.

Raonament i representació

Situació dels objectes en l'espai, reconeixent la posició que ocupen i la distància respecte d'un punt determinat. Orientació en espais habituals de l'habitatge, l'escola i d'entorns coneguts, fent ús de la memòria espacial.

Comunicació i llenguatges

Observar, escoltar i experimentar

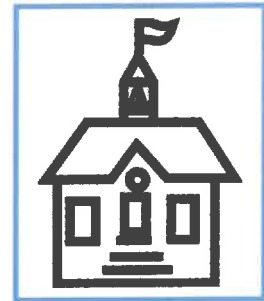
Participació i escolta activa en situacions habituals de comunicació, com ara converses, contextos de joc, activitats de la vida quotidiana i activitats relacionades amb la cultura.

Parlar, expressar i comunicar

Ús de la llengua per mostrar acords i desacords i resoldre conflictes de manera apropiada i assertiva.

School project

The third variable we want to focus on is the school project, because we believe that introducing English in Infant Education should be a School project where all members of the community play their role. On the one hand, the children, the main protagonists, the board and the coordinating team should cater for the appropriate time and space to promote natural communication in the additional language; the teachers should have the opportunity to work together in the design of meaningful didactic proposals with clear objectives and contents that integrate the different curricular areas; and the families, always in a context that can offer other opportunities.



Family

Last but not least, the family can play a crucial role in motivating the children, encouraging them to hear and use English: for instance, using libraries that offer storytelling moments, taking the children to theatre plays in English at the district leisure centre, and so on. The family can also reinforce the language being used at school, welcome children's first oral productions positively, help the teacher with resources and materials or even participate in some sessions at school by telling children their favourite story in English or cooperating with whatever project is going on.

In this sense, the parents' meeting is an ideal time to present the linguistic project of the school and ask for their cooperation. Fortunately, most parents are very concerned with the need to start with English early in a positive and effective way so teachers may well take advantage of that.

Concluding remarks

A very early start with an additional language has been supported by many authors (Taylor, 2007; Piquer, 2006, Perez & Roig, 2004; Vez, 2002, Mur, 1998; Roth, 1998; Reilly & Ward, 1997) who call upon positive attitudes towards other cultures and languages through rewarding and memorable experiences and who share the belief that the younger children are introduced to an additional language, the better. While we agree with this, we also believe that the emphasis should be on the idea that the first contact with a new language should be positive, enjoyable and effective, that is, coherent with the children's needs and educational stage.

Advantageous given
optimal learning conditions

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