

# LEARNING ENGLISH IN CONTENT-RICH CLASSROOMS<sup>10</sup>

## APPRENDRE ANGLÈS EN CLASSES BASADES EN CONTINGUTS

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This workshop presents a set of Teaching Units (TU) designed by the student-teachers taking the UAB's official *Teacher-Education Master's Degree (English Branch)* in the 2010-2011 academic year, under the guidance of their school mentors and the supervision of university staff. It is the second volume of a collection of CD's entitled "Learning English in Content-Rich Classrooms. Content-Rich units designed by Student-Teachers, in partnership with Professional Development Schools" (Tsui, Edwards & Lopez-Real, 2009), the contents of which are available at <http://grupsderecerca.uab.cat/clilsi/content/all-subjects>. Figure 1 summarises the CD contents:

TITLE	SUBJECT	GRADE / AGE
A Trip Back to Ancient Greece	History	1 <sup>st</sup> ESO / 13
Discovering China	Social Studies	2 <sup>nd</sup> ESO / 14
Lights, Camera, Action!	Communication	2 <sup>nd</sup> ESO / 14
Hit the Road	Social Studies	3 <sup>rd</sup> ESO / 15
Nothing is What it Seems	Citizenship	3 <sup>rd</sup> ESO / 15
A Trip Back to Ancient Greece	History	4 <sup>th</sup> ESO / 16
A World of Diversity	Cultural diversity	4 <sup>th</sup> ESO / 16
ARTisTIC: from Renaissance to Modern Times	Social Studies and Art	4 <sup>th</sup> ESO / 16
Be Water, My friend	Science	1st ESO / 13
Triangulate the World	Math	2 <sup>nd</sup> ESO / 14
New Materials	Science and Society	1 <sup>st</sup> BTX / 17

Fig.1. Summary of contents

Whereas the design of a TU is a demand common to many teacher-education courses, the TU's in this project share a number of characteristics that make them especially valuable in two ways. On the one hand, the units themselves, as a product, make an important contribution to innovation in the learning of English as a foreign language. In this respect, the following features are to be remarked:

- They adopt a Content-Rich (Escobar Urmenate, 2012) approach, an updated version of the Content-Based approach designed for learning English and learning in English as a *foreign* language. That is, they take bits of intrinsically attractive academic content as their starting point. This implies that it is the content to be explored (e.g. Renaissance Art, Filmmaking) which determines the selection of the language items that will be presented and practiced. At the furthest end of this approach lies Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).
- Classwork is mostly organized by means of meaningful tasks (Skehan, 1998).
- Oral skills are paramount. The units provide plenty of interaction and speaking activities with a communicative purpose.
- ICT is mainly used to facilitate Computer-Mediated Communication (Hiltz & Turoff, 1993).
- There is a balance between individual tasks and tasks which demand peer student cooperation.
- Assessment tasks have a double function: informative (for marks), and formative (to improve learning) and use a varied set of tools to collect information. That includes assessment rubrics, checklists, portfolios or tests.
- All units fully comply with the competence-based curriculum currently in force in Catalonia.
- Planning is formalised by means of a common template for CLIL and Content-Rich Units (CLIL-SI, 2012).

On the other hand, the process of pooling together all the knowledge and skills necessary to set up a teaching sequence is a powerful instrument for triggering deep reflection mechanisms on what to teach and how to learn. In this respect, the units are the result of the work carried out in cycles of collaborative teaching and shared reflection with peer student-teachers (Allwright & Bailey, 1991; Mejía & Tejada, 2001). The design and redrafting of the units is closely interrelated with other course components such as sessions on language acquisition, lesson planning or assessment, and also with the collaborative action-research (Lewin, 1946) component and,

ultimately, with the Master's Dissertation, which is devoted precisely to dissect the implementation of one of the activities in the unit previously designed and piloted.

It is important to emphasise that the process of designing an original teaching sequence is extremely demanding for all participants, but especially for the student-teachers who had to design their own materials from scratch. Lack of experience in this area resulted in large amounts of time spent in designing tasks that would be either finally discarded before implementation or redrafted after piloting. This fact, although being a natural part of the lesson planning process, caused a certain amount of frustration among the student-teachers. Along with this, designing these materials required a great deal of discussion in order to overcome disagreement, as there often were divergent opinions among student-teachers on how to proceed. In this regard, how to assess students for informative purposes was thoroughly discussed, as were the criteria to be used and their weight.

Student-teachers also found the activity to be highly enriching as it gave them the opportunity to put into practice the various resources and tools presented in the course and to reflect on their own teaching practice. It is also important to highlight that the student-teachers had the chance to share their impressions all throughout with their school mentors, university tutors and peers, so the outcomes and reflections were discussed from several viewpoints, thus gaining a deeper understanding of their own performance, learning and achievements.

The educational value of this project is also supported by the quality of the products – which shows the high degree of commitment displayed by the student-teachers and their mentors – and the results of the piloting in terms of learner satisfaction and learning outcomes.

The student-teachers qualifying in 2012 are currently working on a third volume which will also contain TU's in French and German.

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