# An Innovative, Competency-based International CLIL Project: Are you brave enough?

## (International Projects: a space for expanding CLIL Methodologies)

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One of the educational challenges we need to face in our hyper-connected world is the need for learning in an authentic, international and integrated environment (OECD 2017a). Student international exchanges (both virtual and face-to-face mobility), have become one of the training experiences most appreciated by enterprises. Academic learning, acquired in contexts other than the usual school and university environment is in demand. Plurilingual, intercultural and adaptive knowledge provided by travelling to other societies and cultures is considered useful in the work place. These experiences reproduce integrated and integrative approaches, based on collaborative methodologies and active learning, such as PBL (Project Based Learning), CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), and Problem Solving Based Learning (PSBL).

In this article, we propose practical orientations to initiate, carry out and complete quality projects. We also provide elements of reflection for planning, developing and evaluating international education projects, with or without student or teacher mobility.

**KEYWORDS:**

international projects, Erasmus+, school planning, basic skills, Project Based Learning, plurilingualism, CLIL, AICLE, EMILE.

Uno de los desafíos educativos a los que debemos enfrentarnos en nuestro mundo hiperconectado es la necesidad de aprender en un entorno auténtico, internacional e integrado (OCDE 2017a). Los intercambios internacionales de estudiantes (tanto virtuales como presenciales) se han convertido en una de las experiencias de capacitación más apreciadas por las empresas. El aprendizaje académico adquirido en contextos distintos al entorno habitual de la escuela y la universidad tiene gran demanda. El conocimiento plurilingüe, intercultural y de adaptación que proporciona viajar a otras sociedades y culturas se considera útil en el lugar de trabajo. Estas experiencias reproducen enfoques integrados e integradores basados en metodologías colaborativas y aprendizaje activos, como Aprendizaje Basado en Proyectos, el AICLE (Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenido y Lengua Extranjera) y el Aprendizaje Basado en Resolución de Problemas (ABP).

En este artículo, proponemos orientaciones prácticas para iniciar, llevar a cabo y completar proyectos de calidad. También proporcionamos elementos de reflexión para planificar, desarrollar y evaluar proyectos internacionales de educación, con o sin movilidad de estudiantes o docentes.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:**

proyectos internacionales, Erasmus +, planificación escolar, competencies básicas, aprendizaje basado en problemas, plurilingüismo, CLIL, AICLE, EMILE.

## 1.INTRODUCTION

International projects, especially those derived from European programmes, have had a major impact on our educational system in the last twenty years (Lorenzo and Piquer, 2013). Since the first Erasmus Program was set up in 1987, European countries have been incorporating a strategy of youth exchange centred on education, which has gradually permeated all levels of the education system. The two terms of the Socrates program, in 1995-1999 and 2000-2006 respectively, and the successful lifelong learning program PAP 2007-2013 provided specific models and orientations for primary and secondary education (Comenius), vocational (Leonardo da Vinci), adults (Grundtvig) and universities or higher education (Erasmus), among many others. Is there anyone who does not know someone who has either gone abroad themselves, or had a family member experience a stay abroad, to take part in a course or an educational exchange of some kind? The aim of achieving 20% mobility of studies for young European students has already been achieved and promises to be consolidated with the current program of the Erasmus+ 2014-2020 program, despite difficulties encountered in the European political structure (European Commission, 2014a).

Why has this educational mobility been so successful? Today's society appreciates change and flexibility as an added value, and recognizes the advantages of learning in diverse cultural contexts. The labour market considers it useful to have experts who also have experience in cultural adaptation and a mastery of other languages. Scientific research recognizes the enrichment derived from studies that include international collaboration and an intercultural point of view. Institutions, always reluctant to leave their comfort zone, have come to accept, just like the other social agents, that a functionary can acquire valuable learning by participating in training in foreign organisations. Schools and families, aware of the possibilities that these experiences can offer to children and young people in training, strive to incorporate international projects, with or without physical mobility, into existing educational itineraries. Primary and secondary school teachers are faced with the challenge of planning projects, tasks and activities that allow participation in a maximum of innovative proposals, while applying rigorous competency approaches and the most effective integrated methodologies. How do we make an international Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) project innovative and competitive? In this article, we look at some useful guidelines.

## 2. LET'S START AT THE BEGINNING

The first challenge is to unite diverse dreams and desires towards a common objective. You do not want to add a new line of work to the faculty, already immersed in a sea of fragmented projects. The aim, rather, is to strategically link an approach to educational quality with a shared vision, to imagine and create a common project. An interesting formula would be to first ensure a dynamic group, and then adjust to the strengths of the educational centre so as to create a project around a proposal that is both useful and viable. We need an initial road map:

**A.** **Organize a dynamic group:** it is advisable to include a member of the management team, to confirm the legitimacy of international agreements, and to ensure that decision-making is done quickly and legally.

**B.** **Collect the proposals of the teaching staff:** it is necessary to involve the team in a climate of transparency, for which it is necessary to open a period of idea collection, suggestions, and proposals on the priority objectives, the subject to be treated, the languages involved, the products, the most appropriate development schedule, etc.

**C.** **Focus and identify the priorities:** the energizing group will listen to all the contributions, and will draw a visual map of possible alliances. It is important to identify the professionals who can join in the effort, the contents to integrate and sequence properly, the products and possible results for each of the subjects involved, the tasks in which other areas or subjects may collaborate at one time or another, available resources, possibilities of subsidisation or participation in funded programs, enriching alliances.

**D.** **Propose the project within the framework of the School Educational Project (PEC, in Spanish schools):** at this moment, the dynamic group must pause in order to synthesize, combine and specify the information received, or expand it if necessary (e.g. ask for participation of families, administration, other educational entities). It is necessary to obtain a clear vision of the application horizon most appropriate for the centre's educational project: Do you want to make a comparative study of some cultural, identity or linguistic trait useful for the development of the student? Is it interesting to jointly build a model, a website or a social event that will enable the students in the most desired competencies? Is it necessary to investigate some concrete problem in order to propose different solutions in line with the school context? Will you explore some area or study common historical processes that will enrich the student as a citizen of the world? Do you bet on sharing different visions on the technological, climatic, scientific, social or ethical challenges in today's world? If we focus the purpose and objectives of our project, it will be easy to give it a title, even if it is provisional, and align it with the PEC to provide the initial dissemination it requires.

**E.** **Initial start-up:** Educational management in the classroom is planned based on principles of educational quality: the student will be the protagonist, work in a group, and participate in decision-making. Emotional and social development must be considered; horizontal and vertical coordination by the participants must also be ensured. The project should be directed towards ethical and sustainable citizen action. With the general aim and the principles clear, we must make the first decision: do we start and coordinate a project of our own, or do we join an existing project?

This is a significant decision, since each option implies a different effort for the school organisation. Do we have

enough support and resources of our own, to start and coordinate a differentiated project that should grow out of what we already do in the school? Or do we join an initiative led by another group, which must also provide us with some of the benefits we seek, and favour the educational project we want for the school or institute?

It is relatively easy to join existing international projects, in particular Erasmus+ (Lorenzo, 2014), which are looking for foreign participants or partners and have an expert coordination team. Just search on Google or explore the social networks and sharing platforms a bit, to find numerous offers. On Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter or Tumblr you can see examples of complete projects or start-up proposals, with interesting materials and products.

For those who want a certain guaranty of quality and European institutional support, or for those who have decided to coordinate their own project, the eTwinning platform (European Commission 2014b) is the ideal working environment with its TwinSpaces subscription, at:
https://www.etwinning.net/en/pub/index.htm
https://twinspace.etwinning.net/

There we can announce our intentions, propose ideas, complete tasks and develop any co-creation work, leaving a record of what we do with students, in a protected space designed for collaboration among educators throughout Europe.

Once the other participating centres have been reached, we adjust our initial project proposal to the reality of the international team. If we choose to join a project underway that is coordinated by a third party, we are interested in ensuring that our priorities and overall line are respected and can be accomplished within the framework of the group. If, on the other hand, we intend to coordinate the project and lead an international team, we should be flexible,

and especially add those proposals of our new colleagues who present their priorities and their preferred objectives. To ensure that the project grows and develops with good prospects for success, the dynamic group should carry on the most difficult task: to coordinate and delegate planning, negotiation, and consensus activities, with maximum involvement of the teaching staff. How do we seduce peers?

**"If we make each participant responsible for the tasks or activities they like, the project will be carried out with almost no additional effort."**

## 3. JOIN COLLECTIVE EFFORTS

Confucius is credited with a very profound phrase: "*Choose a job that is your passion, and you will not have to work even one day of your life.*" If we make each participant responsible for the tasks or activities they like, the project will be carried out with almost no additional effort. The dynamic group must count on maximum participation, asking each member for the contribution that responds to their own interests, capacities and priorities. The phases of the project can be organized using a simple organisation chart, which distributes responsibilities on an agreed schedule. By way of example, we can propose an imaginary sequence of work for a primary or secondary school project:

| Tasks of the school coordinator | Tasks of school participants |
|---|---|
| ■ Initiate project dissemination and international search for participants (e.g. in eTwinning). | ■ Explore international offers and join an existing proposal, (e.g. in eTwinning) |
| ■ Combine and integrate the all the objectives in a flexible and inclusive way. | ■ Clearly transmit their own priorities and capacities. |
| ■ Coordinate actions to negotiate a definitive title and a viable calendar of meetings, exchanges and products. | ■ Collaborate and participate in the proposed activities to define the common project (e.g. schedules, holidays, restrictions) |
| ■ Elaborate the overall proposal, with the contributions of all the participants. | ■ Contribute their own vision and participate in the initial phases of dissemination and negotiation. |
| ■ Negotiate and agree on the compromise necessary for the success of the project (i.e. frequency of contacts, contribution of products, organisation of events). | ■ Transmit the acquired commitments (i.e. frequency of contacts, contribution of products, organisation of events) to the administration or institution. |
| ■ Write and present the proposal, according to required procedures. | ■ Provide the necessary information to guaranty legitimacy and commitments. |

If there are other participating educational centres, it is important to check that all of them feel identified with the final proposal, and that the programmed activities include their priorities and cover their objectives. When each gets the part of the job that meets their needs, commitments to collaboration are simpler and the time frames are more likely to be respected by all. For this purpose, an International Management Group can be created, composed of a person responsible for each country, who will liaise with the respective Booster Groups or their equivalent.

It is advisable for the people in this international management group to have some time during school hours to coordinate the project and to master at least the lingua franca in which they are going to work (usually English). They must facilitate the internationalisation tasks, which are so necessary for the creation of a common European space of shared cultural reference (Perez-Vidal, Lorenzo, Trench, 2016). The so-called "wagon train" model provides a simple visual form for designing an annual project that respects all contributions:

| Life of the International Project: Annual or biennial sequence | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1.** Congress or collective event in the coordinating country | **2.** Meeting and activities in one of the participating countries ■ Visits and exchanges ■ Courses and training ■ Product creation: **Identification of Challenges** ■ External intermediate evaluation ■ Etc. | **3.** Meeting (+ n) and activities in participating countries ■ Visits and exchanges ■ Courses and training ■ Product creation: **Proposed Solutions** ■ External intermediate evaluation ■ Etc. | **4.** Congress or collective event in the coordinating country |
| **Creation of an International Management Group:** ■ Initial External Evaluation | ■ Website shared in different languages ■ Joint production of products, projects or tasks ■ Distance learning activities ■ Dissemination and visibility activities in each country ■ Periodic communications and mobility exchanges ■ Partial evaluations of the different stages, phases or activities (internal and external) | | **Presentation of the result and the finished products:** ■ Final External Evaluation |

The greatest concerns for many teachers in this case are the parts related to methodological implementation, the work in the classroom with students, and the teacher coordination that such a project requires. Experience shows, however, that if the teacher participates in the design of activities for the overall project, he will easily find his place, and will participate from his area, level, and group of students, to contribute to the common product.

**"It is advisable for the people in this international management group to have some time during school hours to coordinate the project."**

Does this seem like an unreal or imaginary situation? Let's take as an example how language and social science teachers can be engaged, with the help of digital technologies, in a proposed project based on a competency challenge that is linked to authentic decision making:

**Product creation (a: Identification of Challenges).** The students will carry out an inventory of environmental challenges and problems, exploring both their natural environment and their social and cultural environment.

**Product creation (b: Proposed Solutions).** The students will propose different solutions to alleviate and prevent the problems detected with habits and actions in the home, in the school, and in society in general. Proposals will be sent to real institutions at local, national, and international level.

This would be an international project (an eTwinning that will be presented later as an Erasmus K2), generated in a CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) space of English and social science, project-based (APB or PBL). And it also promotes problem-solving based learning (PSBL) on the part of the students, to stimulate competency learning. Who is brave enough?

## 4. MAKE SPACE FOR ENGAGEMENT IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

Much of the success of a project lies in combining the objectives of the participants, and prioritizing common agreements. It is advisable to plan visits abroad together, to agree on the forms of internal and external evaluation, and to agree on the products to be elaborated throughout the life of the project. However, to be useful to our school, we must incorporate the project into the internal dynamics of teaching and learning and collect it in the centre's documentation (PEC, Annual Programming, memory, etc.).

Excellence is identified as consistency between objectives and actions, and is measured by realistic indicators of process (e.g. participation, inclusion, commitment) and improvement (e.g. outcomes, outputs, satisfaction of the parties). Although it may seem difficult, the dynamic group at our centre must handle the complexity of finding consensus on a balanced proposal that will include all the interests in the development of the project. Imagine a real situation, in which we want to reconcile different curricular and educational proposals. The first step would be to identify in which part of our educational project we can find space for action to incorporate the different proposals. Here is an example:

| Curricular and educational proposals | Documentation |
|---|---|
| The students, consulted in tutorial, have shown special interest in recording videos about the school, the population, and the territory with their mobile phones, to show them to the foreign students of the schools and institutes with which the project is carried out. | **School Educational Project (PEC):**<br>■ Learning Objectives<br>■ Communication Plan<br>■ ICT School Project<br>■ Citizenship and Tutorial Plan (digital identity and network security) |
| In the department of foreign languages of the centre, the teachers are interested that the students be mixed with other European students, in the English language | **School Educational Project (PEC):**<br>■ Learning Objectives<br>■ Language Project |
| In the department of natural sciences, a teacher is interested in knowing different educational applications of the UNESCO 2030 Objectives, Goals for sustainable development 2030, in which he collaborates in a study with the University where he is writing his doctoral thesis. (UNESCO, 2015) | **School Educational  Project (PEC):**<br>■ Learning Objectives<br>■ Citizenship and Tutorial Plan<br>■ STEM/STEAM Sessions<br>■ Cultural Environment Plan (school-university) |
| Some AMPA families are calling for more technological innovation at school. | **School Educational Project (PEC):**<br>■ Learning Objectives<br>■ Communications Plan<br>■ ICT School Project<br>■ Cultural Environment Plan (school-family) |
| The Ministry of Education promotes and disseminates the CLIL and educational internationalisation plurilingual programs based on contacts and exchanges with other countries in European projects (eTwinning and Erasmus+). | **School Educational Project (PEC):**<br>■ Learning Objectives<br>■ Linguistic Project<br>■ Communication Plan<br>■ ICT School Project<br>■ Internationalisation Plan |
| The City Council is promoting sensitivity initiatives against climate change and promotes the replanting of native plant species in degraded areas around the municipality. | **School Educational Project (PEC):**<br>■ Learning Objectives<br>■ Cultural Environment Plan (school-City Hall) |
| One of the international contacts prioritizes the educational inclusion of a group of students with auditory deficits. | **School Educational Project (PEC):**<br>■ Diversity management<br>■ Community project<br>■ Citizenship and Tutorial Plan (Inclusion, social cohesion and help for Special Needs) |
| Another international contact is incorporating Tablets in the class and wishes to realize diverse multimedia activities based on the creation of videos by the students. | **School Educational Project (PEC):**<br>■ Competency Learning Objectives<br>■ Communication Plan<br>■ ICT School Project |

As we can see, our ideal project has started from very different proposals: it includes ideas from the students, the different members of the faculty, and some AMPA families. It includes the competency priorities of the Ministry of Education on bilingualism or plurilingualism with CLIL incorporation in the English language; in addition, it incorporates municipal proposals for the protection of the local natural environment. However, the International Management Group has also been able to incorporate proposals from two international participants, who want to work on inclusion in the school environment and the use of multimedia technologies in school projects.

The proposal is born out of plural interests; how can we shape it? The best strategy is to orient all interests towards the same horizon, and to find the main axes of alignment with the School Educational Project (PEC). These axes will be the lines of convergence that will help to give visibility, body and quality to the educational principles that will support the teaching and learning actions of all those involved. In order to align the project with our PEC, we start with the general objective of "Improving basic competencies and the educational results of the students, through transversal, integrated and integrative methodologies," and we outline the strategies that can develop it:

## A

**Application of the School Language Project:** "Making all the languages of the project visible, to improve students' communicative and digital learning, including sensitivity to other codes or human languages"

## B

**Development of an integrated and integrative competency curriculum:** "Promote collaborative and cross-cutting methodologies (PBL, CLIL) that favour both problem solving autonomy (PSBL), and inclusion and diversity management."

## C

**Implementation of the Community School Project:** "Develop activities to explore the natural and socio-cultural environments that promote citizen awareness, enriched by the international perspective, for an ecological and sustainable coexistence."

These three educational axes will be present during the whole project, and they can answer all the concerns collected previously. The cross-sectional approach that allows

**Programming Chart**

Project Title [For example "Our World, Our Future"]

**General objective:** To improve competencies and student educational results with transversal, integrated and integrative methodologies, based on teacher coordination.

**Expected output:** An inventory of real environmental challenges and problems in the school environment, and a glossary of solutions and proposals for action.

| Strategic lines (Achievement of objectives) | Indicators | Actions: Tasks of international participants | Coordination |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Application of the School Language Project:** "Visibility of all project languages to improve students' communicative and digital learning, including sensitivity to other codes or human languages" | **Process** **Product** **Satisfaction** **Impact** | **First phase:** Initial collective conference or event Product creation (a: Identification of Challenges). Students will carry out an inventory of environmental challenges and problems, exploring both their natural environment and their social and cultural environment: a) ... b) ... c) | Dynamic group in each country: internal coordination International Management Group: general coordination, evaluation and supervision. |
| **Integrated development of a competency curriculum:** "Promote collaborative and cross-cutting methodologies (PBL, CLIL) that favour both problem solving autonomy (PSBL) and inclusion and management in diversity. | **Process** **Product** **Satisfaction** **Impact** | **Second phase:** Congress or collective event (+ n): training, exchange, etc.) Product creation (b: Proposed Solutions) The students will propose different solutions to alleviate and prevent the problems detected with habits and actions in the home, in the school and in society in general. Proposals will be sent to real institutions at local, national and international level. a) ... b) ... c) ... ... ... | Dynamic group in each country: internal coordination International Management Group: general coordination, evaluation and supervision. |
| **3. Application of the Coexistence Project of the centre:** "Develop activities to explore the natural and socio-cultural environment that promote citizen awareness, enriched by the international perspective, for an ecological and sustainable coexistence." | **Process** **Product** **Satisfaction** **Impact** | **Final Presentation:** Final Congress or final collective event -Publishing and sharing results and products a) ... b) ... c) ... ... ... | Dynamic group in each country: internal coordination International Management Group: general coordination, evaluation and supervision. |

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linguistic and communicative competencies to be worked out in a CLIL school space, aimed at solving real problems in the real world, reproduces the educational methodological interaction efforts currently being promoted by the OECD for its PISA 2018 international assessments, which will be used to assess intercultural, plurilingual global competences (OECD 2017b).

The three strategic lines we have chosen help us deploy our own affordable objectives in the academic, organisational and citizenship fields. From here, we can start our school-programming chart, which will include at least educational objectives, evaluation indicators, activities, and the coordinating body [see the programming chart that is included in this article].

At the same time, our International Management Group has to initiate the first actions involving the main actors of the project: the students and the teachers of the centres involved. A good way to start is to propose a competition among the students of the three countries to choose a logo and a title for the project, through a local selection that results in a winner in each country. The result will be the realisation of a joint logo that aggregates and identifies the sensitivities of all participating centres. You can also choose a title that will be translated into English, the lingua franca of the project (e.g. "Our World, Our Future"), and the different languages of the participating centres.

These initial actions also have to contribute to giving visibility and dissemination to the project from the first day, inside and outside the schools. It is necessary to ensure the presence of the project in the virtual spaces of national and international education, guaranteeing the legally established privacy of students and teachers in each country. The project should be incorporated into the different databases and related educational portals, as well as in public dissemination spaces that are interested in education and innovation in emerging educational networks and communities on the international scene. It is necessary to include all those actions or events that may have media or institutional interest in official calendars. We must communicate our intention, our objectives, and the different international meetings and events in which we participate to the press, the mayor's office or local radio and television. In this era, the school has to leave its academic preserve, and enter into the society for which it prepares its students: in the near future, it will be mediated or it will not exist.

Internally, the school must continue working on the realisation of the different events and activities programmed. During the life of the project, our school priorities, which will be managed by the internal dynamic group, and the international agreements, negotiated jointly in the International Management Group, will both be developed.

The result includes the specific tasks to be presented and/or carried out in each one of the visits to the different countries, as well as the products that have their own calendar and are integrated in the curricula of each one of the countries. Likewise, it would be advisable to provide an external

> **"In this era, the school has to leave its academic preserve, and enter into the society for which it prepares its students: in the near future, it will be mediated or it will not exist."**

evaluation that will collect information during the visits and will issue the intermediate and final reports required by the project. This is an essential requirement to enter the arena of educational excellence. Are we moving in this direction?

## 5. IN SEARCH OF EXCELLENCE

Evaluation is always one of the areas that counts the most when it comes to scoring and evaluating international projects submitted to calls for proposals (e.g. Erasmus+), so it is advisable to spend some time thinking about it, if we want to achieve excellence. It is not only a question of including indicators for the academic results of students, but also of incorporating a rigorous look at the teaching and coordination actions themselves. We will evaluate, therefore, the results obtained according to the criteria, standards or parameters that we propose, for example:

### A

**Processes:** coherence in planning objectives and actions, balance in participation, inclusion, management in decision-making, management of exchanges and mobility, etc.

### B

**Products made:** compliance with delivery agreements, coherence between proposal and outcome, quality compliance, quantity, etc.

### C

**Satisfaction of the participants:** the involvement of the students, the evaluation of teachers and families, the appreciation of social administrations or agents, etc.

### D

**Impact:** the dissemination and visibility of the project, the accessibility of products and results, the sustainability of the actions carried out, etc.

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A good evaluation will rely on agreed rubrics among the participants, which can be shared, and serve both to maintain the project on course and to demonstrate the value principles shared in the international educational world.

The final commitment will be dissemination, contribution to good practice in the whole of the educational community, and participation in activities to stimulate and support other schools that are interested in initiating the experience of international learning networks, European projects, and environments of the future. We will thus have an inclusive, integrated and integrative project that can open new physical spaces (the recognition of other realities and territories), methodological exploration (new complex forms of working in international networks), professional growth (for participating teachers and others inspired by the result), and personal growth for all. **Are you ready to start?** ■

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