



**Joint Efforts for Innovation:
Working Together
to Improve
Foreign Language
Teaching in the
21st Century**

**Dolors Masats, Maria Mont
& Nathaly González-Acevedo (Editors)**

A book for the curious and passionate 21st century language teachers and teacher trainers.

Tired of reading about the wonders of technology enhanced project-based learning but not knowing where to seek inspiration to start to adopt this teaching approach? A team of in-service teachers, teacher trainers, pre-service teachers and researchers have worked together to present a simple, engaging and practical book to offer fellow education professionals stimulating ideas for their teaching practice.

Joint efforts for innovation: Working together to improve foreign language teaching in the 21st century offers:

- Inspiring classroom projects and innovative teaching experiences.
- A compilation of digital tools and resources for the foreign language classroom.
- Pioneering proposals to open up the classroom doors.
- Problem-solving and inquiry-based tasks that promote team work.
- Honest reflections from practitioners on their classroom practices.

This book includes

- accessible examples of teacher-led classroom research small-scale studies.
- calls for teachers to do research in their classrooms.
- personal accounts on the importance of school internships for pre-service teachers.

This book is an invitation for practicing teachers and teacher trainers to be creative and to develop learning skills, literacy skills and life skills.

Are you ready to become an innovative 21st century educator?



**JOINT EFFORTS FOR INNOVATION:
WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE
FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN
THE 21ST CENTURY**

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The country of the year

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Introduction

The country of the year is a year-round cross-disciplinary project that offers students the possibility to gain historical, geographical and cultural knowledge of English-speaking countries around the world. This project, which is mainly carried out in the English classroom, is structured through a series of sequenced goal-oriented tasks developed at different times during one academic year. The project started six years ago and involves all the primary students in the school and most of their teachers. Each year the project is devoted to the study of an English speaking country, so the structure of the project varies to adapt to the ongoing object of inquiry and so does the end product children need to produce. When students graduate from the school, they have had the opportunity to learn about six different countries.

At the beginning of each school year, we inform pupils, school staff and families about the country that has been chosen, and give them all the possibility of suggesting tasks to do. Although the goals of the project are the same for all the students, the tasks will be tailored to meet the needs of students in each grade. Younger students will engage in less cognitive demanding tasks than older students, but they will all collaborate to produce a joint product at the end of the school year.

As the project is cross-disciplinary in nature, contents and competence-based learning objectives relate to various field areas in the Catalan curriculum and they vary from one project to another. Table 1 below summarises those common to all projects:

Contents and learning objectives

Skills/Subjects	Contents	Competence-based learning objectives
Arts and crafts	Art techniques Famous artists	To develop creativity and aesthetic emotions. To apply art techniques. To appreciate art work.
Autonomy, empowerment and entrepreneurship	Building the right learning environment.	To develop creativity and teamwork skills. To cooperate to reach agreements. To make personal contributions to the project.
Learning to learn	Planning & assessing	To apply previous knowledge to solve tasks. To self-assess and peer assess processes and products. To develop techniques for cooperative work.
ICT	Searching for Information Delivering information	To use the internet as a tool to search for information. To employ Power Point to create presentations.
Citizenship Education	Cultural and linguistic diversity	To develop curiosity and interest in the culture and the history of English-speaking countries. To appreciate and respect local traditions and traditions from other countries.
Literacy	Understanding and creating oral and written texts The value of knowing other languages	To create multimodal texts to deliver information. To understand short oral and written texts and be able to ask and answer questions related to them. To appreciate and respect home and foreign languages
Music & PE	Musical instruments of English-speaking countries Traditional songs & dances	To recognise the sounds of different instruments (bagpipes, didgeridoo, etc). To sing traditional songs and perform folk songs from English speaking countries (Irish dancing, Haka...).

Table 1. Overview of the project contents and learning objectives common to all projects

Project outline

As we said earlier, every year we follow the same steps to present the project to the children and their families, the structure of the project remains the same but the activities are always different and the final product often is too. First, we will describe the process of presenting the project to the community and then we will briefly summarise the projects we have developed so far.

Getting started

At the beginning of the school year our pupils are welcomed with the bulletin board outside the English classroom decorated with a map, posters and photographs of one English speaking country. In the first weeks, we ask students what they know about that country, if they have ever been there, if they know someone that has visited it, etc. It is at that point that we also inform the school staff and families which the selected country is. Class tutors, who are always informed about the project activities children carry out in the English class, will occasionally devote time in their lessons to get students to make new discoveries about the target country. Families are also welcome to propose activities to be done at school.

Implementing the project

The tasks done during the first weeks of every academic year are essentially the same. Then, the tasks proposed are oriented towards the production of a particular product, a different one each time. In the next sections we will briefly describe what we did each year.

Academic year 2013-2014: NEW ZEALAND

The final product was a mini-book for each kid. As it was the first year in which we implemented the project, students were invited to conduct a mini research on the presence of the English language around the world. They used their laptops and the school library to find out the name of the countries in which English was the official or a co-official language. They were surprised to see there were many, as they associated the language with UK and USA. For that reason, the first country we chose was New Zealand (the furthest and surely one of the less known by the students).

Apart from preparing a mini-book with information about the country (geography, history, flora and fauna, customs and traditions, gastronomy), children had access to other materials (e.g. a Power Point elaborated by the grandparents of one of the students, who had travelled to New Zealand recently) and engaged in the creation of other projects, either as a whole group (e.g. they invented a song about the kiwi bird) or in their own classrooms. For example, 2nd graders prepared an oral presentation on a bird, the kiwi, to be delivered to the 5th grade class, and 5th graders created posters to present the Maori culture to the 2nd graders. That year, the PE teacher got involved in the project and taught 6th graders how to dance the Haka, a traditional ritual dance.

Academic year 2014-2105: IRELAND

Thanks to our second project, we learnt many things about Ireland and Irish traditions, but as a final product that year we celebrated St Patrick's Day. Everybody was invited to come to school dressed in green that day. On that occasion, to signal the beginning and the end of the school day, Irish music played through the school loudspeakers.

Prior to that, half of the children in the school had taken part in a workshop on Irish dancing offered by an Irish Dancing Company. The dances learnt were performed during St Patrick's Day. Some groups recited short poems, others had decorated the corridors of the school.



Figure 1. Celebrating St. Patrick's Day

The youngest students wore a self-made necklace in the shape of a shamrock.



Figure 2. Jack-o-Lanterns made with the help of parents

During the school year, children took part in other activities related to the Irish culture. For example, that year a few families stayed at the school during the last week of October to help teachers and children make Jack-o-Lanterns. To celebrate Halloween, we also organised a storytelling session to listen to Irish tales and we had a traditional Irish breakfast in the morning. The latter task was also used as an excuse to learn about food and nutrition later on.

Academic year 2015-2016: THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Through the third project, children got to know elements related to history, traditions and culture of the United States of America: geography, politics (Presidents/flag), currency, famous monuments and places, traditional food, fauna and flora, sports, famous people (singers, actors...). The final product this time was to create a collective big book, with lots of pictures and short texts, to summarise the main lessons learnt during the project. As always, each group did different activities and learnt about local artists: 6th graders, for example,

focussed on Bruce Springsteen and his song “Born in the USA”.

Children made other discoveries. For example, they learnt to identify the major differences between British English and American English. But the task they all enjoyed the most was the one we carried out at the beginning of the school year: we celebrated Thanksgiving Day. First, we had learnt about the origins of the celebration. We decorated the door of the English class with pictures to symbolize the trip of the Pilgrims to the USA and an American family from the school prepared a Power Point to present us with this part of American history. We read abridged texts about Thanks Giving Day, played memory games using vocabulary related to this festivity and we even organised short performances in class!

Children created nice posters to summarise what they had learnt about Thanksgiving Day, but to celebrate it in the school, we had to ask the kitchen coordinator if children could have a traditional Thanksgiving meal for lunch. They agreed and it was really nice and meaningful! This activity was the start point to learn about healthy food and healthy habits later on and to create a poster with the food pyramid to decorate the classrooms.

Apart from having a special meal on Thanksgiving Day, children also engaged in a meaningful activity to understand what it is being celebrated: they had to express gratitude. We wanted them to become aware and conscious of the so many little things in life we must be grateful for.

Different groups did different tasks to say what they were grateful for: For example, the youngest students did a crown with the shape of a turkey and decorate it with key words to represent what they were grateful for. The oldest students wrote a postcard with the same purpose to take home.

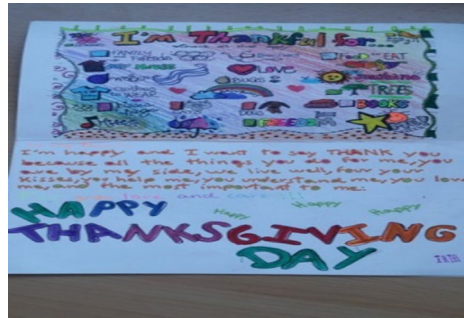


Figure 3. Thanksgiving card for parents

Academic year 2016-2017: AUSTRALIA

Many interesting activities took place during this project! But the one that children liked the most and the one that captured the attention of the local media was the visit of the Australian consul in Barcelona to our school at the end of the

school year. He was received by a group of students who gave him a tour around the school and showed him the displays about his country we had prepared to summarise what we had learnt. The displays complemented a video we had prepared for the same purpose. During his visit, the consul could also watch our video and deliver a presentation about Australia to the 5th and 6th graders. At the end of his visit he recorded a short video thanking the students and teachers for the great job done¹.



Figure 4. Arts and Crafts model of an Australian landmark



Figure 5. Mr. John S. Rochlin (Honorary Consul of Australia in Barcelona) at our school

During the visit, the consul was impressed with all the tasks students had participated in. As usual, different groups had been in charge of conducting different activities. At Christmas, 1st, 2nd and 3rd graders had decorated the hall of the school with ornaments that could evoke warm Christmas in Australia (e.g. flip flops painted in red and green were hanging from the ceiling) and all the students took home a self-made Christmas card inspired in Australian Christmas cards (e.g. Santa Claus surfing).

One of the student teachers doing an internship at our school had recently been to Australia and prepared a Power Point to present to the students the most relevant facts about the country and to narrate his personal experiences there. We did not have families from Australia in the school, but one of our parents had lived there and had learnt to play the “didgeridoo”. He came to the school and taught first graders how to play this musical instrument. This same group also learnt how to throw a boomerang and even made one. 2nd graders decorated the cover of their folders with drawings inspired on the finger paint technique used by Australian aboriginals. 5th and 6th graders created models to represent different natural sites of Australia (Ayer’s Rock, Coral Reef, Shark Bay...), which were exposed in the school’s corridors during the visit of the Australian consul. Other groups made big posters illustrating different aspects of life in Australia.

Academic year 2017-2018: THE UK

Our fifth project was devoted to discovering the UK. First, we dealt with cultural aspects common to all parts of the UK (the weather, the tea time ritual, traditional food), then we divided the project into three smaller projects. In the first term we discovered Scotland, in the second term Wales and in the third term England. We learnt a few facts about Northern Ireland, but as our first project had been about Ireland, we did not create a specific project to learn more about the northern part of the island.

Again, we could count on our families and some parents prepared a Power Point presentation to talk to us about Scotland. They even came to class with homemade shortbread cookies. They were so good that we decided to learn to bake shortbread cookies by following the recipe a very famous British chef had recorded on video. We took our cookies home as a Christmas present. Our Christmas cards that year were also inspired by Scotland: Nessie was in them.

WALES: GROUP EVALUATION						
Mark every item with a Tick or a Cross						
	Is the Power Point clear?	Is it well prepared?	Did you understand it?	Is the pronunciation ok?	Positive things	To improve (a suggestion)
GROUP 1	✓	X	✓	✓	Interesting information	They were a bit noisy
GROUP 2						
GROUP 3						
GROUP 4						
GROUP 5						
GROUP 6						



Figure 6. Peer evaluation of a Power Point presentation of Wales

Figure 7. A matching activity using a cooperative technique (pencil in the middle)

During the 2nd term we learnt about Wales and the story of its patron Saint David. Some of the youngest kids in the school prepared a short performance in class to retell it. In our last term we focused on England and its capital London. Apart from knowing about famous landmarks, we discovered famous British artists. In the English class, we learnt about English artist David Hockney and songwriter Ed Sheeran. Class tutors engaged children in an arts project inspired by one of the artist’s most famous collections. As a final product children created a collective video clip of Sheeran’s song “Perfect”, each class sang a part of the song.



Figure 8. Class of 1st graders singing an Ed Sheeran song for the final school video

Concluding remarks

We have to say that we are amazed at children's engagement in the projects. We have noticed that children enjoy learning about other countries and other traditions. We believe that if they learn to appreciate other cultures they will grow as citizens who respect differences. Taking part in this project is always a very enriching experience for students and for us, their English teachers, especially because through the project, we can establish links with some of our colleagues. In turn, it is a very helpful tool children have at hand to build bridges between what they do in English and what they do in other subjects.

Acknowledgements

We want to thank everyone who, at some point, has been involved in this project: school staff, families and visitors who organised workshops for children or entered our classrooms to collaborate with us.

We are especially grateful to Mr John S. Rochlin (Honorary Consul of Australia in Barcelona), who so easily accepted our invitation to come to the school to visit our exhibition and delivered a talk about Australia. We were touched by his generosity, kindness and his nice words about what he had seen.

We also want to give special thanks to all the English teachers that have been working with us during these years. Their participation and enthusiasm towards this project has been very appreciated.

Notes

1. The message the Australian Consul addressed to our students can be watched at: <https://agora.xtec.cat/ceip-turocanmates/general/el-consol-daustrialia-visita-lescola-turo-de-can-mates/>