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Teaching Social Sciences through English

## RESUMEN

With the aid of Information and Communication Technologies and based on the idea of promoting interculturalism in bilingual schools, I explain what Integrated Language Curriculum (ILC) is. Specifically in this case, I put some examples by means of which students learn both how the solar system works (Social Science) and English language; for this reason it is known that this type of education has a double aim.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), Integrated Language Curriculum (ILC), Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), solar system, planets.

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With the arrival of the new century and the development of globalization, changes in society have occurred and, as consequence, also within the educational system because teachers have the duty to prepare our students for their personal, social and professional lives when they finish Compulsory Secondary Education, as National Education Act establishes. Nowadays, learning two or more foreign languages is not only a right but also a “duty”: that is, in a multilingual country as Spain students need to be able to communicate in a foreign language, specifically English; in this way, the ability to communicate in a foreign language and its knowledge provide a great help to understand and control our own language and behavior; contacting other cultures through language favours understanding and respect towards other ways of thinking and acting; and actually, this point is of extreme importance taking into account the high level of violence we find in schools.

In Andalucía, with the necessary help of the Regional Government, it has been carried out the so called Plan to foster **Plurilingualism** in the last years, which entails a completely new perspective in all curricular areas, enhancing the notion of a truly integrated curriculum by means of the implementation of CLIL (**Content and Language Integrated Learning**) methodology: in fact, the existence of interdisciplinary links and values education topics makes clear reference to the need to motivate our students by connecting English as a Foreign Language (EFL) with other subjects in the curriculum, such as History and Geography. To accomplish this, it is essential the effective coordination among the different departments involved in the integrated curriculum in order to reinforce the vocabulary and language skills (English), as well as the new concepts (for instance, learning about the solar system in History and Geography/Social science).

“En AICLE [Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos y Lenguas Extranjeras, CLIL, en inglés], se integran el aprendizaje de otras lenguas –distintas de la propia- y contenidos curriculares, es decir, cada clase de AICLE tiene dos objetivos: uno relacionado con el aprendizaje de la materia; el otro ligado al aprendizaje del idioma. Esta es la razón por la que a AICLE se la conoce como educación con doble finalidad”. (Naves T. & Muñoz, C. 2000:7).

Whenever possible, the proposition of exercises, activities, tasks and projects (depending on the level of difficulty and the number of skills to be work with) must be in connection with the student's personal life and their immediate surroundings. In this way, the work will be more motivating, real and practical.

In the following paragraphs I will try to describe how to develop and implement activities about the subject of History and Geography (or Social Science) by means of English (foreign language) for students of **1<sup>st</sup> year** of Compulsory Secondary Education. But first of all, we, as teachers, must know the different ways of learning, depending on each student's characteristics:

1. Visual: computer based learning, topic webs, key diagrams, mind maps, power point slides, posters, videos, etc.
2. Audio and linguistic: word puzzles, magazine articles, songs, crosswords, discussion and debates, library search, presentations, etc.
3. Kinesthetic, physical: model making, practical tasks, role-play, flash cards, dance and drama.
4. Mathematical: organizing tasks into steps, listing key points, making tables and graphs of information, creating timelines, flow charts, etc.

In the following activities, the teacher, rather than lecturing the pupils, has to be looking for feedback, and monitoring them; that is, students will have an active role.

## THE SOLAR SYSTEM

### 1. Active theory

With the help of ICT, the teacher, with the help of students, may create a blog and include the concepts to be learned in relation with the topic, in this case, the solar system: a picture with all the planets included (we can copy images from the Web) and the names of each one will appear in English. In any corner of the blog must appear a text in English (adapted to the students' level and within the grammatical elements studied in the English as a Foreign Language classroom - gradable adjectives and the present simple, in this case).



Example of text:

“The sun is at the centre of the Solar System. Nine planets orbit the Sun, and several of these have moons. Together with asteroids and comets, these make up the Solar System.

Most of the Solar System is empty space. More than 99% of the mass of the Solar System is in the Sun. The planets are like tiny specks of matter, orbiting around the Sun”.

The teacher writes a list of several key words or phrases and photocopies enough copies for pairs and small groups of students. Then, he or she mounts the copies on different coloured papers or cards and cut them up so there is one key word or phrase on each slip. Students will be organized into groups of no more than four.

The teacher gives each group a set of the key words and phrases and tell them these are taken from the text they are about to hear. Students will need time to read and help each other to understand them; they can ask the teacher and use on-line dictionaries.

The teacher tells the students in each group to share out the slips. While the teacher reads out the text, they must place the key words in the order in which they hear them. (They may hear some words twice, but they place the card the first time they hear the word).

In their groups, students use their ordered key words to help them write the text from memory. This does not have to be word for word as the original.

Then, the teacher reads or plays the text again. Later, he or she give students time to edit their texts. When students have revised their texts, it is time to give them a copy of the original text and check it.

### 1. Text Circles

The teacher chooses a text from the website, adapts it to the students' level and divide it into different sections, making sure that each section break is in the middle of the sentence (there should be enough parts for each student in a group to have one). Then, the teacher cuts into slips. In the following example we have six slips for one circle of five students:

<i>1. The Sun is a star, and has existed for about 4,500 million years. Like other stars, it's a</i>
<i>Big spinning ball of gas, with nuclear reactions taking place in the centre. These</i>
<i>Generate immense amounts of heat and light</i>
<i>The planets follow elliptical orbits around the Sun. The planets closest to the Sun</i>
<i>Are the warmest. The Sun's radiation (heat, light and ultraviolet) provides most of the</i>
<i>Energy which keeps the planet warm</i>

Once students have the pieces of paper, the teacher writes the title on the board and gives the first sentence (1); then, he or she writes up any difficult words or phrases and students looks into on-line dictionaries their translation into Spanish. After this, students listen to and repeat the English terms.

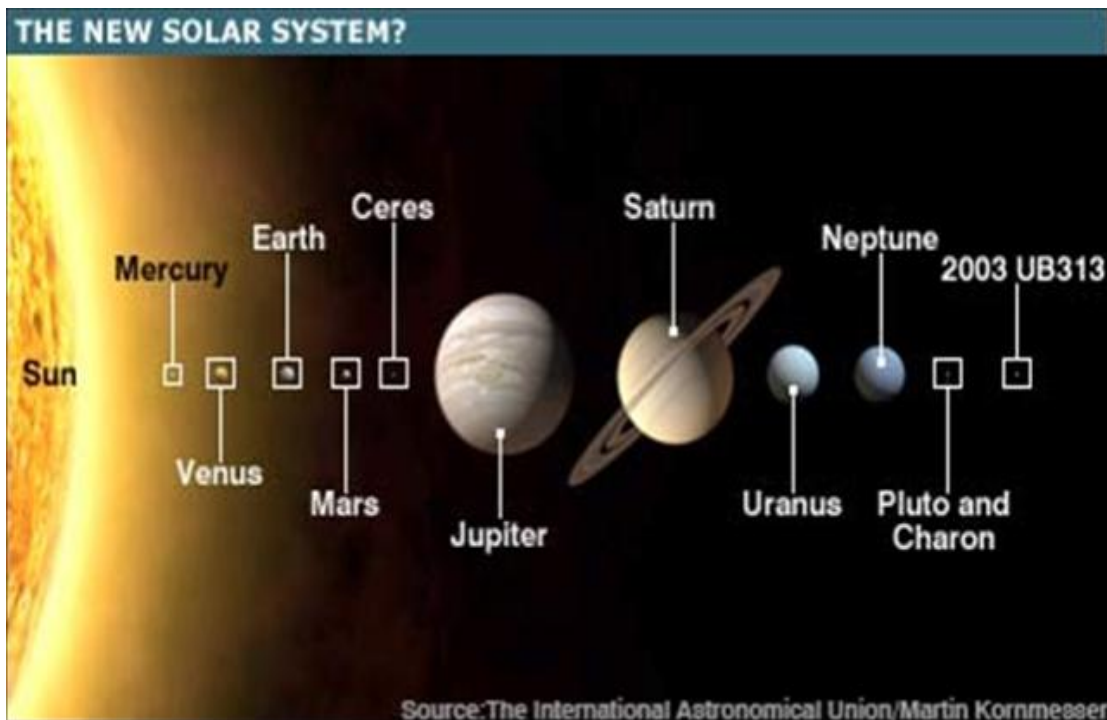
Students organize into groups of five and they read their slips to each other. They must keep their own slips of paper. They have to put the text into the right order.

Finally, the teacher chooses a group for checking: the group reads out the text in the chosen order; the whole class listen and checks.

### 2. Parroting

The teacher writes a series of definitions that are important for students to memorize:

- a. *The closest planet to the Sun*
- b. *The largest planet in the Solar System*
- c. *A ball of dust and ice*
- d. *A rocky planet, and it is the hottest in the Solar System*
- e. *A planet famous for its rings*



The teacher writes the definition on the board, leaving a space above each one to add the key words. Then, he or she dictates the key words: students search the information on the internet and come to the board to write the matching key word above each definition, making sure the students understand them. If necessary, translate them into the mother tongue. Finally, the teacher reads each definition out loud and asks the students to repeat after him or her to focus on the pronunciation.

### 3. Self editing

The teacher chooses a text and adds some mistakes; then, students have to correct it and edit it. To do this, we have to make enough copies for all students or, in an alternatively way, we can put the text on a screen to save paper. For example:

*Venus are a glass plane, and it's the more hot in the Solar System. It was more bigger than the Earth, but not much. It look grey.*

Things to check:

- Have I remembered the –s on the third person singular?
- Have I got the right order in the Wh- questions?
- Are all the verbs in the right tense?
- Are there any word missing?
- Have I put the adjectives before the noun?
- etc

#### **4. Tell me what you know (checking knowledge)**

In order to check if students know and understand what has been explained about the solar system, they will have to answer a few questions: they will ask each other; in this way there will be interaction and they will develop listening and speaking skills at the same time. Some of these questions can be, for example:

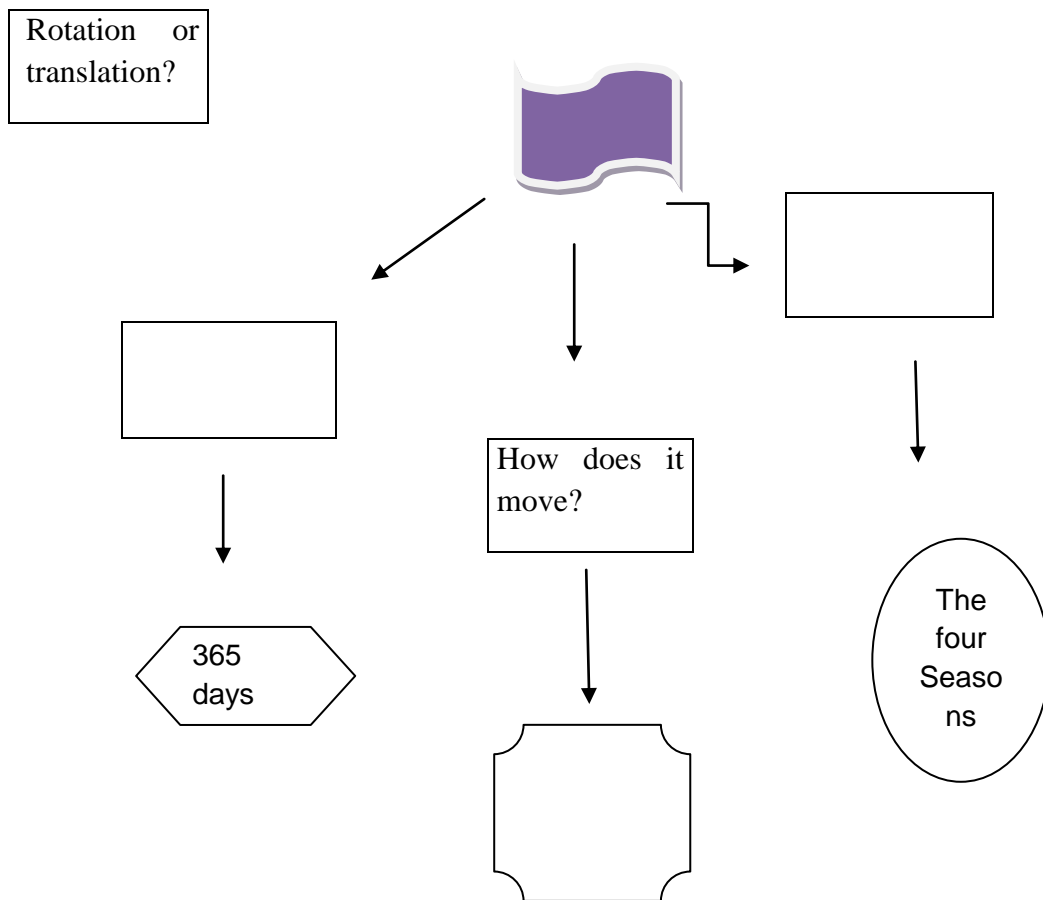
1. *Name the name of the rocky planets*
2. *Name the name of the glass planets*
3. *What causes day and night?*
4. *What is a star?*
5. *Etc.*

#### **5. Using mind maps**

This is a very useful activity in order to remind the lesson and to improve study skills and autonomy in the learning process. The teacher can provide the students with a text and an incomplete mind map: they will have to read the text several times and then complete the map. For example:

*The Earth rotates around the axis. This movement is known as rotation. It takes the Earth 23 hours, 58 minutes and 4,091 seconds to rotate. At any one moment in time, one half of the Earth is in sunlight (day), while the other half is in darkness (night). Besides, the Earth rotates around the Sun and this is called translation movement. It takes a year to complete the whole translation. The consequences of this are the seasons (Winter, Spring, Summer and Autumn).*

Example of mind map to be completed:



At the end of the unit about the solar system, a way of self-evaluation consists of putting into practice what **European Language Portfolio (ELP)** considers essential, that is to say, to know if students have reached or not the aims established at the beginning of the unit. Therefore, students must write down some sentences about what they can or cannot do.



For example: *I can do a blog about the solar system; I can mention the number and names of planets; I can explain how the solar system works; I can explain what rotation and translation movements are; etc.*

I hope History and Geography teachers who have to teach the subject into English may profit from this piece of paper and use these ideas for their proper contents in a mixed-ability class. Obviously, this topic about the solar system is only an example: we can apply activities, such as parroting, mind maps, self-correcting, etc to other contents (the Roman invasion of Spain, the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus or the Industrial Revolution, among others).

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