

**To cite this article:**

Tosar, B. (2018). The Teaching and Learning of Social Science in Primary and Secondary Education. *CLIL Journal of Innovation and Research in Plurilingual and Pluricultural Education*, 1 (1), 49-52. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/clil.8>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/clil.8>

e- ISSN: 2604-5613

Print ISSN: 2605-5893

## The **A-B-C** of Content Learning in CLIL Settings

# The Teaching and Learning of **Social Studies** in Primary and Secondary **Education**



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**1**

**What is the main purpose of teaching and learning non-CLIL as well as CLIL Social Studies in (post)compulsory education?**

**S**ocial Studies may well be the most controversial and fascinating subject that students are exposed to at school. Its main purpose is to learn to become a critically-thinking global citizen in a democratic society. A geographical and historical awareness of where we come from, where we are right now, and where we want to go can also imply a readiness to resist ideologies, uncover social injustices and criticize inequalities in order to participate actively in the society we live in.

**2**

**How do current approaches to the teaching and learning of Social Studies differ from traditional encyclopaedic approaches?**

**A**ccording to Dewey (1916), a society can only make progress if its members are educated to be intelligent, reflective thinkers and problem-solvers. Schools play an indispensable role in this view of education.

If schools are one of the key motors of progress for any society, students need to be continually challenged in the Social Studies classroom. It would be extremely difficult to transform society and have a real impact on the world through a view of education oriented to the simple transmission of abstract knowledge, to say nothing of the traditional methods of memorization and repetition of dates and facts detached from any meaning. The critical approach is key to understand Social Studies in a global and democratic society, because it is oriented to thinking reflectively about controversial issues, Socratic dialogue and Project-Based Learning (PBL). Indeed, “learning by doing” is the answer, as illustrated by the photograph showing the door of my classroom (**Figure 1**).

**3**

**What role does language (I.E. oral interaction, reading and writing) play in the teaching and learning of (non-CLIL as well as) CLIL Social Studies?**

**C**ritical literacy is the cornerstone of the role of language in Social Studies to “read the word and the world,” as Freire (1984) put it. Language allows us to understand the temporal location and sequencing of

events, and also to think about what will happen in the future. In the Social Studies classroom, students need to learn to “read the world” before learning to “read the word”, because the critical understanding of any text implies an ability to perceive the relationship between a text and its context. Critical literacy implies exploring below the surface of texts and reading beyond the lines, in order to be aware of how identities and ideologies are formed. For instance, we can teach the discovery of America either from the perspective of the European explorers and conquerors or from another point of view, that of the native people—which means that there are many stories about the same historical event. Reading and writing shapes identities and unveils visions of the world. Exploring and questioning words like “discovery”, “explorer” or “conqueror” illustrates the critical role of language in the Social Studies classroom. “Who discovered whom?” instead of “The discovery of America” might be a more accurate title for this history lesson.

## 4

**May the teaching and learning of Social Studies benefit in any way from being taught through English, or through any additional language in general?**

The teaching and learning of Social Studies with a “democratizing CLIL approach” (Escobar, Urmeneta 2011) can greatly benefit all the students, for -at least-two reasons: first, the integration of a foreign language with the content of this subject can be done through many activities and strategies that can reach everyone; and second, learning a foreign language is a powerful tool to become a more competent and global citizen. CLIL Social Studies is oriented to fostering critical thinking and boosting knowledge about controversial social issues.

Actually, one way to democratize classroom interaction in CLIL Social Studies is to enhance language, social, emotional and cognitive skills through PBL. For instance, secondary students can learn about women’s rights in their History class through a CLIL project that integrates language and content with cooperative work, critical thinking, social action and communication to a real audience. That implies not only using and developing different strategies in the CLIL classroom, but also raising critical awareness of democratic values by putting democracy into practice.

## 5

**May the teaching and learning of Social Studies benefit from an across-the-curriculum approach? If so, in which way?**

A transdisciplinary approach to education is very beneficial for all students and for the teaching and learning of Social Studies in particular. Indeed, this specific subject can be the cornerstone of an across-the-curriculum approach (Ross, 2014). Students can learn Social Studies content while reading a poem, watching a film or

critically analysing an advertisement. Critical literacy is a way of teaching that empowers children to read beyond the lines, disrupt the commonplace, explore multiple perspectives and take social action. For instance, sexism in advertising could be a way to explore this kind of text or discourse from a critical point of view in Social Studies.

## 6

**Please, explain one instance of exemplary teaching strategies especially useful in a quality (CLIL) Social Studies lesson.**

An exemplary teaching strategy is “think-pair-share”, where students are actively thinking and participating through questions using the following three-step procedure:

1. Each student is asked to consider the same question individually; then,
2. In pairs, students share their ideas and support them with arguments; and finally
3. Each pair communicates their ideas to the class and listens to those of their classmates.

This teaching strategy is very appropriate for the Social Studies class because it is a way for students to self-correct their thoughts on social issues and construct knowledge in a critical and democratic spirit.

## 7

**Can you provide one or two examples of quality learning tasks for the CLIL Social Studies class (maybe also useful in non-CLIL class)?**

An excellent learning task for Social Studies is a well-organized group discussion on controversial issues, such as homelessness. One of the best ways to manage this learning task is the “fishbowl technique”, in which a small group of students sit in a circle in the centre of the class and discuss the topic while the rest of the class sits around them in a concentric circle, listening actively and taking turns to participate in the inner circle. The great advantage of this technique is that it allows the entire group to participate actively in the discussion, as described here: <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/fishbowl>. This activity is ideal for Social Studies because it promotes critical thinking, active listening and cooperation among students.

Another technique that is well suited for Social Studies and which moreover promotes language learning is “dictogloss”, which consists of summarizing and reconstructing a short text by listening actively to the teacher and writing down the key words. This activity lends itself perfectly to the CLIL classroom because it obliges students to listen actively and write in a foreign language, as can be seen here: <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/dictogloss>.

## 8

**How can a teacher adapt the activities above to a CLIL classroom, so that the activity can be carried partially or mainly through an additional language?**

I believe that Fishbowl is an outstanding activity to be implemented in the Social Studies classroom, as we have just seen. It can be easily adapted to the CLIL classroom with the help of language support materials. If four chairs are used to create the inner circle, a sheet of paper taped to the backrest of each chair can as a prompt to guide the student seated there during the debate. For instance, the text on chair 1 can say: “Participant 1: Explain your point of view on the refugees crisis [or any other topic]”; on chair 2: “Participant 2: Ask Participant 1 the following questions...”; on chair 3: “Participant 3: Contribute spontaneously to the conversation”; on chair 4: “Participant 4: Ask the other participants one or two of the following questions...”.

**Photovoice** is another terrific “show and tell and do” activity for the Social Studies classroom. This is a photographic method of community-based participatory research conducted by students to promote discussion and engage stakeholders. Indeed Photovoice is based on active participation, cooperation and critical and creative thinking. It implies giving voice to the “voiceless” through documentary photography. It is centred on the students, who, (under the guidance of the teacher,) have to take photos, then add words to these photos to highlight social issues from their point of view, and finally share the finished product with a real audience by means of a public exhibition or something of that sort.

## 9

**What are the main characteristics of the disciplinary texts that students are required to read and write in the non-CLIL as well as CLIL Social Studies class? What genres and task typologies do learners need to become familiar with?**

In a content-rich communicative classroom, the Social Studies texts that students are required to read and write are basically narrative and/or argumentative. The main point is to study the context where the text was written, to analyse the ideologies beyond the lines and to reflect on the reader’s own vision of the world in order to read and write critically in the Social Studies class. For instance, primary education students can develop their historical thinking just by listening actively to the oral history of their grandparents, elderly friends or neighbours. Oral history is an excellent example of how Social Studies texts should be connected not only to social issues but also to the students’ own lives.

## 10

**What are the main linguistic characteristics of the aforementioned genres and text types that the teacher**

**will need to focus on or provide support with so that learners can successfully read and write this sort of disciplinary texts?**

Narrative texts can help raise students’ historical consciousness, produce a timeline with changes and continuities, reflect on a sequential development of events, etc., while argumentative texts can help students to reflect on social issues, detect bias and fallacies, and develop critical reading and writing skills. CLIL teachers need to bear in mind that, for narrative texts, we tend to use the past tense, and for argumentative texts we probably use a lot more present and future tenses.

In fact, Social Studies is a subject that requires reflection about the past, the present and also the future. From a critical perspective, we need to read the world around us (present); explore problems, causes and consequences, changes and continuities (past); and plan social action to improve the world (future).

## 11

**Can you provide one or two instances of exemplary tasks especially useful in the assessment of Social Studies-related key competences which could be adapted to a CLIL environment?**

A CLIL Social Studies Project can be effectively assessed using a project design rubric showing assessment criteria in a bullet-point list. This can help the teacher determine, for example, if a student project really incorporates PBL practices, needs further development, or lacks essential features of effective PBL. The assessment dimensions recommended by the Buck Institute for Education (2013) are:

- a.) significant content
- b.) 21st century competencies
- c.) in-depth inquiry
- d.) driving question
- e.) need to know
- f.) voice and choice
- g.) revision and reflection
- h.) audience

## 12

**How can less scholastic activities, such as dancing, pottery, drama, singing, etc., be integrated into the teaching and learning of Social Studies?**

Dancing and singing are activities that can be effectively integrated into the Social Studies classroom to help students reflect on the cultures, ideologies and identities of different parts of the world. These activities are essential in a CLIL context because they very much help to integrate content and foreign language. One example is the

way that Social Studies and Arts and Crafts can be connected in the CLIL classroom. In **figure 2**, we see fourth-graders at my school displaying their artwork based on Martin Luther King Jr. after a CLIL class that linked Social Studies with Arts and Crafts: each drawing of this historical figure has a speech bubble where the students wrote his or her wishes for peace. Similarly, in **figure 3**, we see my third-graders celebrating Peace Day with their own cardboard doves that have messages in English with their wishes for peace in the world.



**Figure 1.** Class door



**Figure 2.** 4<sup>th</sup> graders celebrating Martin Luther King's Day in 2018



**Figure 3.** 3<sup>rd</sup> graders celebrating the Peace Day in 2018

## 13

If you hold on to any particular pedagogical, psychological, philosophical or linguistic **view** or **theoretical framework** (i.e. Behaviourism, Cognitivism, Social-interactionism) please, let the reader know the label or labels that designate it.

**S**ocial-interactionism is an important theoretical framework to understand Social Studies education from a critical perspective. Nevertheless, my own philosophical point of view is Personalism. And my two authors of reference are Paulo Freire and Hannah Arendt.

## 14

Can you suggest one or two **titles** (books, articles, etc.) which may help a practitioner to become a better CLIL (and non-CLIL) Social Studies teacher?

**T**he books I would recommend to help a practitioner to become a better Social Studies teacher are:

- Ross, E.W. (2014): *The Social Studies Curriculum. Purposes, Problems, and Possibilities*. New York: SUNY
- Santisteban, A.; Pagès, J. (2011): *Didáctica del conocimiento del medio social y cultural en la Educación Primaria*. Madrid: Síntesis. ■