

# Teaching and Learning in the Portuguese “English Plus” project

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## Abstract

In the European framework, the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) approach has arisen as a means to promote foreign language learning, but it could also provide a beneficial environment for the education of the specific discipline. In Portugal, more and more CLIL projects have appeared in the last ten years, even though little investigation has been conducted into the CLIL phenomenon. Furthermore, examples of research are mostly focused on the tertiary level. The study of a CLIL project (“English Plus”, EP), in which subjects (History and Science) are taught/learnt with/in English in one Portuguese lower secondary school, is therefore highly relevant. The resulting research was designed as a qualitative case study on the EP project and its participants (teachers and students involved in different school years). The purpose of the present work is to characterise the EP project and focus on the specific teaching setting of this school, as well as to reveal the learning experience of participants involved. By doing so, this chapter contributes to knowledge about Portuguese CLIL practice, presenting one option for its implementation and drawing on opportunities for teacher education.

## Keywords

CLIL; school project; co-teaching between Content and Language teachers; learning conditions; teacher education; lower secondary school level.

## Resumo

No contexto europeu, a abordagem CLIL (do inglês *Content and Language Integrated Learning*) surgiu para promover a aprendizagem das línguas estrangeiras, mas o

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ensino-aprendizagem de disciplinas específicas também poderá beneficiar deste ambiente educativo. Nos últimos dez anos, têm aumentado os projetos CLIL em Portugal, embora CLIL seja um fenómeno ainda pouco investigado. Os exemplos disponíveis focam-se, maioritariamente, no ensino superior. Torna-se, portanto, relevante estudar projetos CLIL (como o “*English Plus*”, EP) em que as disciplinas (História e Ciências) são ensinadas/aprendidas com/em Inglês numa escola do 3.º ciclo do Ensino Básico português. Para a presente investigação recorreu-se a um estudo de caso qualitativo do projeto EP e dos seus participantes (professores e alunos envolvidos em diferentes anos letivos). O propósito do presente trabalho é caracterizar o projeto EP e focar as condições específicas de ensino adotadas no âmbito deste contexto escolar, assim como apresentar a experiência de aprendizagem dos participantes envolvidos. O presente capítulo poderá contribuir para o conhecimento das práticas CLIL em Portugal, ao apresentar uma opção para a sua implementação e projetar oportunidades de formação docente.

### Palavras-chave

CLIL; projeto de escola; coadjuvância entre professores de disciplina não linguística e de disciplina linguística; condições de aprendizagem; formação de professores; 3.º Ciclo do Ensino Básico.

## 1. Introduction

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has emerged as one solution through which European citizens can become competent in European languages besides their own (European Commission, 2003). Hence, it is a particularly prolific educational approach in the European framework, where it is practised under many guises (Coyle *et al.*, 2010; Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Pavón Vázquez & Ellison, 2013). Based on the principle that languages are learnt while they are used in socially significant activities (classes of specific disciplines), CLIL aims at the students’ learning of both Language (foreign, second or minority) and Content (the specific subject or part of it) (Coyle *et al.*, 2010; Marsh, 2012), at the same time (Dale & Tanner, 2012). Therefore, it is an example of cross-curricular education, entailing authentic learning conditions and strategies which are more centred on learners (Dale & Tanner, 2012; Grandinetti *et al.*, 2013; Marsh, 2012; Mehisto, 2012).

Teachers engaged in this educational environment might, owing to the presence of a foreign language (FL), change and improve their teaching (strategies, resources, attitudes) through increased awareness of the demands of the language itself for students (e.g. Blanchard *et al.*, 2014; Canet Pladevall & Evnitskaya, 2011;

Grandinetti *et al.*, 2013; Jäppinen, 2005; Piacentini *et al.*, 2022), beyond the fact that CLIL constitutes a benefit for FL learning at school. Within a CLIL context, researchers can gauge the importance for (Science) teachers of becoming language-aware, a quality advocated both inside (Coyle *et al.*, 2010; Llinares *et al.*, 2012; Wolff, 2012) and outside (Bezemer & Kress, 2020; Klein & Kirkpatrick, 2010; Lemke, 2003) of the CLIL research field.

Due to the phenomenon of increasing migration, several European countries witness classes where conversational and academic competence levels in the schooling language, among learners, are heterogeneous, requiring “language-sensitive content teaching” strategies (Wolff, 2012). For this reason, in Wolff’s opinion, CLIL is a “change agent” which prepares CLIL and non-CLIL teachers to work in CLIL-like contexts in European schools. The adoption of the language awareness in CLIL posited by Piacentini *et al.* (2019) through CMIL (Content and Mother tongue Integrated Learning, that is, the CLIL approach also when the teacher’s and student’s native language is used), to improve the communication and understanding of specific subjects, might thus be meaningful. CLIL is, in fact, permeated by the concept of “Language Across the Curriculum” (LAC), which is “linking different forms and aspects of language education within the school, particularly emphasising the role of language in all subject-matter learning” (Vollmer, 2007, p. 177).

Nevertheless, CLIL may have drawbacks. Students not having sufficient time to apply what they have learned is indicated as the main obstacle, together with curriculum and policy constraints, as well as restrictive existing material (Coyle *et al.*, 2010). Access to CLIL programmes might not be open to all students, as highlighted by Bruton (2013). In addition, English has been increasingly chosen as the target language, becoming almost the exclusive language of CLIL implementation in many countries and schools (Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2010). This “language limitation” has led Dalton-Puffer to rename CLIL as CEIL (Content and English Integrated Learning) and to the development of the “CLIL LOTE” network and project<sup>4</sup>. However, CLIL may promote plurilingual and intercultural education since students “learn about ideas and communicate with people from other cultures [and form] international perspectives on the subjects they are learning” (Dale & Tanner, 2012, p. 13), and the English learnt in a CLIL environment should be thought of as functioning as a bridge to learn other languages and other cultures (Piacentini & Simões, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> The “CLIL in languages other than English – Successful transitions across educational stages” project is supported by the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe from 2020 to 2023 ([www.ecml.at/CLILLOTEtransitions](http://www.ecml.at/CLILLOTEtransitions)).

Until a decade ago, works mapping European CLIL initiatives at compulsory school levels contained no reference to Portugal (European Commission, 2006; Pérez-Cañado, 2012), but since then more and more projects have appeared (European Commission, 2017). In a publication reviewing Portuguese research on FL education produced between 2006 and 2011 (Vieira *et al.*, 2014), no studies on CLIL were present. Nowadays, almost two thirds of the Portuguese research publications regarding CLIL are focused on the tertiary level<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, only “the Case of the GoCLIL Project in Portugal” (Ellison & Santos, 2018) and the authors’ works have been devoted to lower secondary grades. According to Ellison (2018), wide research on the Portuguese CLIL phenomenon is possible through longitudinal and case studies and “teacher education should [equip teachers] with skills and competences to investigate their own practice. Methods must now look beyond stakeholder satisfaction questionnaires to the effects of CLIL on learning” (p. 16).

As part of the first author’s PhD research project, we studied the case of the “English Plus” (EP) project in one Portuguese lower secondary school – where teachers design their own CLIL contributions (timetable, strategies, material) within the compulsory curriculum through bottom-up initiatives – with the goal of understanding possible connections between the attention given to Language(s) of Science education and CLIL teacher practices using English as a FL (see Piacentini, 2020). Different studies have been carried out on the EP project, namely on: the project in general and the stakeholders involved in the EP of History (Simões *et al.*, 2013); the viewpoints of students of different ages on learning and teaching through this CLIL approach (Piacentini *et al.*, 2018); the EP project of Science and the characterisation of both non-CLIL and CLIL teaching practices in terms of Science modes (Piacentini *et al.*, 2019) and perceptions among students of Science learning and English (Piacentini *et al.*, 2016); implications for languages and cultures (Piacentini & Simões, 2020; Simões *et al.*, 2013).

Nevertheless, none of these published works could draw a holistic characterisation of the EP project and its specific environment, nor did they have space for the participants’ voices in their mother tongue. The present work aims at providing a methodological contextualisation of the study and at presenting an overview of the EP project, which delineates its evolution and organisation, as well as the co-teaching and co-planning instructional strategies and learning implications.

<sup>5</sup> This fact emerged, until 20/01/2022, from the Portuguese “Working CLIL” research group’s webpage (<https://www.cetaps.com/clil/publications>) listing articles on CLIL implemented in primary, secondary and higher education.

## 2. The case of the CLIL “English Plus” project

Since 2012, in Portuguese compulsory education, FL teaching and learning has been offered in the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle of primary education (from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> grades, ages 10-11) with the English language, and only in the following 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle (starting at age 12) with another FL such as French, German or Spanish. It was in the 2015-2016 school year that English was introduced as a compulsory subject from the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, implying changes in the curriculum and syllabus development as well as the establishment of a specialist Master’s degree for teacher education (Lourenço & Mourão, 2017). The teaching of English may continue until the 11<sup>th</sup> grade at secondary school, regardless of the field of studies. The importance attributed to this language in Portugal is also evident within the CLIL initiatives, both institutionalised and grassroots<sup>6</sup>, at compulsory school levels (Ellison, 2018; European Commission, 2017), where English is the FL most frequently selected.

The focus of our empirical inquiry on the “English Plus” school-led CLIL project arose because in its corresponding school: (i) one integrated learning action (the EP of History) had already been implemented and teachers indicated their availability to continue to collaborate with our research centre (CIDTFF, University of Aveiro<sup>7</sup>); (ii) the educational integration involved the Science curriculum in the year of our study; (iii) the provision pertained to 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades<sup>8</sup>.

### 2.1. Methodological background

Within our broader investigation, we designed a descriptive-explanatory case study with an ethnographic approach (White *et al.*, 2009) in 2015-2016, in response to the PhD student researcher’s need to familiarise herself with the school and project context. She was a cultural outsider (Erickson, 1984), in being an Italian Science teacher with an interest in languages and cultures, enrolled in the Education doctoral programme at the University of Aveiro, thus, not belonging to the community under study. Therefore, an extensive observation was performed,

<sup>6</sup> The bottom-up (or grassroots) initiatives – already mentioned before – contrast with the top-down Programa Escolas Bilingues em Inglês (<http://www.dge.mec.pt/programa-escolas-bilinguesbilingual-schools-programme>), organised by the Ministry of Education and the British Council in Portugal, piloted in 2011-2015 and involving 28 state school clusters in 2021-2022.

<sup>7</sup> For further information, see <https://www.ua.pt/pt/cidtff/page/8715>

<sup>8</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle was chosen as the target school level because students’ FL skills are expected to be more advanced than in previous cycles and an established separation of curricular areas started in the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle exists, justifying a programme of articulation with another language.

and teachers and students associated with the (History or Science) EP project at different times and levels were “embedded” as subunits of analysis of a single case (Yin, 1994). We ensured that personal information was kept confidential, even though the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in Portugal only became applicable in 2018.

In 2015-2016, two Science (tSci1 and tSci2) and two English (tEng1 and tEng2) teachers were involved in the project and in our study:

- (1) tSci1 was the Natural Sciences (NS) teacher of the two 8th grade and one 9th grade EP groups in the year of the study, when she had already had two years’ experience with the EP project. In the same school year, tSci2 was the NS teacher of the two 7th grade EP groups and in her first year of the project;
- (2) tEng1 was the English teacher of these five classes and had played a pivotal role in the evolution of the project, starting from the first EP edition in History in 2010-2011 and reactivating the project for NS in 2014-2015; tEng2 was “tutored” by tEng1 in 2015-2016 and had her own EP group in 2016-2017.

With regard to the students included in our empirical study in 2015-2016, the following profiles existed:

- (1) “former” students (n = 11; s1 to s11) – high school students in the year of the study who previously had EP in History (in 2010-2013, when they attended the project at lower secondary school);
- (2) “current” students (n = 96; 44 7th graders in their first year of the project and 52 8th graders in their second year) – lower secondary students provided with EP in Science in the year of the study.

Information relevant for the purpose of this chapter was gathered through:

- teacher and former student semi-structured interviews<sup>9</sup> (carried out in Portuguese, orally consented and audio-recorded);

<sup>9</sup> Respective guides are available in Piacentini’s PhD thesis (2020; see Appendices).

- observation of planned/implemented classes for current students through the first author’s immersive experience in the school for more than two school terms<sup>10</sup>;
- reading of 2015-2016 documents: the EP planning (“Programa da disciplina de oferta de escola – projeto English Plus”) and the EP report (“Relatório de Atividades do projeto English Plus – Ciências Naturais”), both authored by tSci1, tSci2 and tEng1 with no indication of their individual contributions.

Inductive content analysis was performed on verbatim interview transcripts because of the qualitative nature of our study. Knowledge about this CLIL project was actually fragmented, so we resorted to inductive procedures, hence categories to conceptually describe the phenomenon emerged from data, as Kyngäs *et al.* (2020) state. Thus, unstructured and semi-structured data (from different participants) were open coded and derived sub-categories<sup>11</sup> clustered (and this whole process was repeated/refined), obtaining the main concepts and themes in order to report and give an overview of the case of the CLIL EP project (see following sections). Coding was discussed with teachers and peers. The researcher’s logbook and school documents complemented the interviews about the teaching and learning processes, allowing for further data triangulation. Statements from interviews and documents are typed in italics and using the original language according to the new *Acordo Ortográfico*, indentation being used for longer quotes and when more than one voice is present. A visual understanding of the school context and project provision is possible from the infographic in the Appendix<sup>12</sup>.

## 2.2. The CLIL-EP project: evolution and organisation

The project’s first edition was undertaken between 2010 and 2013 by teachers with students of one class (former students) in one state-run school in northern Portugal (District of Aveiro) and monitored by members of our research group<sup>13</sup> (see Simões

<sup>10</sup> This presence was authorised by “Encarregados de Educação” through a form and included, besides data collection, the development of CLIL and non-CLIL interventions.

<sup>11</sup> Project classes, co-teaching and teachers’ roles, learning (benefits and constraints), collaboration, extra-curricular activities, among others.

<sup>12</sup> The school’s “Projeto Educativo” (<https://w4.soaresbasto.pt/projeto-educativo/>) provides further socio-economic details.

<sup>13</sup> The CIDTFF’s former LALE, currently integrated in LabELing (<https://www.ua.pt/pt/cidtff/page/26926>).

et al., 2013). It was tEng1 who introduced and developed the “integrated learning” as a strategy for language promotion within specific subject classes – other than the top-down bilingual French class (“secção europeia”), previously provided by the school – collaborating first with one History teacher and later with other motivated teachers. She reactivated the project in 2014-2015 for NS in the same institution, involving one Science teacher (tSci1), supported EP starting in another school of the same district and coordinated a further collaboration with the same research group since 2015-2016, the year of our study in situ.

In 2015-2016, out of 20 classes in the school, two at 7<sup>th</sup> grade, two at 8<sup>th</sup> and one at 9<sup>th</sup> (current students) were involved with tSci1, tSci2, tEng1 and tEng2 in the EP project. Updates from teachers revealed that the total number of EP groups increased over time (in the last school year 2021-2022, 8 groups were enrolled, with two Science and three English teachers). Students’ participation in the project was voluntary, depending on learners’ or parents’ decisions, but until 2016-2017 this also depended on a selection process based on merit (marks in English and NS from previous years) if demand was too high. No continuation of the project approach was envisaged for students at high school.

Every week the “English Plus” project consisted of:

- 45 minutes of History or NS with English (EP classes, co-teaching: both subject and language teachers were present and using English);
- 45 minutes of the same subject held mainly in Portuguese (non-EP classes, single-teaching: classes were given by the non-language teacher alone, who used Portuguese but could also opt for English, sometimes deploying project-like strategies) and;
- 45 minutes of “hora de projeto” (project time: a space where the English teacher encouraged socio-cultural subject-related topics using English).

The rest of the schedule (classes of English and French FL as well as of the other disciplines) coincided with the standard student curriculum. In the EP planning and report, project time was introduced as the school’s “complementary offer”. The first edition of EP was devoted to citizenship or sex education using English and to task- or project-based learning (i.e. short theatre plays, study visit preparation) having a connection with History. Over time, project time turned into content-based language instruction where features and contexts of English were explored through topics of Physics-Chemistry, Mathematics and NS. The following teacher interview excerpt reports this evolution:

tSci1, a professora [de Inglês no EP] abordou-me e pediu-me para [...] experimentar [...] um qualquer coisa em Inglês de Ciências [...] jamais me passou pela cabeça [...] mas disse ok [...] vou dar uma coisa sobre os dinossauros porque é um assunto que é interessante e eles vão aprender vocabulário [...] comecei então a ir à Educação para a Cidadania [hora de projeto] dela [...] estava livre [para] todas as semanas dar 45 minutos; [numa segunda fase] tinha as minhas aulas [de Educação Sexual] em Português e dava aquilo [em Inglês]. Extra.

EP teachers were not financially rewarded for the extra work the project implied (tEng1, “as horas extra [...] na escola para envolver os pais, as atividades que se têm que fazer às 6 da tarde à sexta-feira [...] acaba[m] por [...] interferir um bocadinho com a vida pessoal”). At the end of 2015-2016, teachers reported the strong dedication required of tEng1, who had five EP groups, that is, five project times with different students per week and five to co-teach and prepare. The year after, the EP workload was distributed and balanced through the active and necessary inclusion of tEng2.

Teachers of other subject areas (i.e. Physics-Chemistry, Mathematics) also showed motivation towards this CLIL approach, for example asking for language support from the teacher of English as mentioned in the EP planning, and implementing occasional classes, despite tEng1 not being present because of timetable constraints. This constituted a “concerted action” similar to that during the first EP edition (See Appendix) and was also extended to another school, as detailed in the EP report. Working as an “English Plus” teacher was seen, indeed, as a worthy endeavour, as evident in the coordinating teacher’s (tEng1) words used in an informal moment: “antes se estranha, logo se estranha”.

The reopening of the French class in 2016-2017 was probably triggered by this commitment to languages and interdisciplinarity present at the school. The school’s interest in “being and doing” CLIL was also clear in the participation of project teachers in other educational opportunities with our research group at the end of the empirical study, such as the co-organisation of a training course on CLIL<sup>14</sup>. During the school years after this research, the project continued, but collaboration with the university occurred only sporadically.

<sup>14</sup> Short term (3h) training session (09/11/2016) certified by the *Centro de Formação de Associação de Escolas* (AVCOA, Arouca – Vale de Cambra – Oliveira de Azeméis).

### 2.3. The (co-)instructional choices in the EP project

For subject teachers to overcome possible obstacles they might have encountered when teaching through the foreign language, the school management team opted for a co-teaching scheme, in which the English language teacher would work together with the teacher of the specific discipline during her/his corresponding classes. As already outlined in Piacentini *et al.* (2019), teachers' interviews gave us insight into the co-taught classes undertaken by the EP Science and English language teachers as well as the importance of adequate organisation:

tEng1, *eu estou presente na aula de Ciências que é dada em Inglês [...] ao nível de registos escritos no quadro, sou sempre eu que faço para [as professoras de Ciências] se sentirem mais à vontade [...] porque uma coisa é falar, uma coisa é escrever, portanto a direção tem que colaborar [...] arranja[ndo] os horários de forma a que isso seja possível;*

tSci1, *[os alunos] começam logo por escrever o sumário [...] eu depois [...] geralmente projeto [...] em PowerPoint o que é suposto eles registarem; sempre que há uma explicação [ou] um sinónimo a [professora de Inglês] está do outro lado [também] à frente [e] no quadro regista sinónimos em Inglês para eles também porem ao lado do significado [...] se não souberem eles perguntam [...] é assim muito interativo.*

The first author also observed the process of co-teaching, noticing that tEng1 “represented the subject”, through clarifying meanings and recalling concepts, labelling scientific and non-scientific words, symbolising (by means of arrows and maths signs) or drawing sort of diagrams on the whiteboard while her colleague was teaching Science. It was also observed that both Science teachers, in order to aid student understanding, regularly presented Science topics integrating text in English with pictures, animations and quizzes (mainly tSci1), and tended to move around the classroom, making hand expressions and gesturing or modulating the voice (mainly tSci2). Throughout tEng2's interview, the teacher (who was able to have a more observing role in 2015-2016) described the educational approach within the EP project as, for instance: a work “*em conjunto*”, “*em equipa*”, “*de parte a parte*”; “*uma troca de ideias/experiências*”; “*grande colaboração*”; “*núcleo de trabalho*”.

Former students reported differences between non-project (single-teaching) and project practices, in roles assumed by the Language and Content teachers during co-taught classes and in strategies deployed to teach the specific subject through an additional language (Piacentini *et al.*, 2018). Their descriptions

corroborated the English language teacher's (tEng) observed role in making the word meaning explicit and highlighting key concepts, mainly on the board, and the History teacher's in teaching the subject:

s1, *as duas professoras trabalhavam muito bem em conjunto, [a de Inglês] se calhar tinha mais cuidado em dizer o que é que significa esta palavra no contexto em que está, [enquanto que a outra avançava no assunto];*

s2, *ao mesmo tempo [que uma falava ou explicava, a outra] estava a apontar coisas no quadro, [...] havia conceitos que nós não sabíamos [...] História em Inglês [...] para nós apontarmos no caderno;*

s3, *a professora de História estava mais preocupada com o conteúdo da matéria, a professora de Inglês era mais com o nosso falar, com o nosso escrever da História em Inglês, com a nossa ortografia.*

In addition to this “*coadjuvância*” (co-teaching), teachers involved in the project engaged in co-planning – subject and language teachers working together on implementation and material construction/revision for EP – available once a week in their timetables. If that was not possible, extra email exchange or short meetings among colleagues occurred outside of the normal working time, as observed several times. The voice of one EP teacher indicated how crucial the co-planning organisation was:

tEng1, *depois é importante que tenhamos uma hora para reunir por semana pelos menos, porque em anos anteriores já aconteceu não termos e é mails para frente mails para atrás e torna-se bastante desgastante, portanto estes são aspetos que são muito importantes, a forma como [...] a direção da escola apoia a implementação do projeto.*

The writing of a plan specifically for EP classes of Science was not usual, since Science teachers would bring the necessary changes in the implementation or in its order, as was explained to the researcher:

tSci2, *fazemos as planificações [com as outras professoras de Ciências Naturais]. A única diferença [com as turmas não EP] está na realização da aula [e na organização de] outras atividades;*

tSci1, no 7.º ano não segui a ordem da planificação para facilitar a aprendizagem em língua inglesa. Algumas atividades também foram diferentes.

Teacher tEng1 added: “a planificação de Ciências Naturais [apresenta] pontuais introduções de aspetos culturais, literários, etc. ou preparação de atividades que surjam”. Moreover, according to the content topic, they could choose suitable units to teach with the use of English, rather than covering the whole syllabus. Informally, tSci1 declared: “tudo [o programa do 8.º ano através do EP] não dá”.

The rationale for (CLIL) assessment was to employ texts assessing the Science/ History learnt with English rather than how English was used, as teachers explained:

tEng1, na disciplina de Ciências nunca penalizar o aluno pelos erros estruturais ou ortográficos cometidos em Inglês, desde que o aluno, com aquilo que escreveu, consiga comunicar a ideia;

tSci1, nas Ciências [...] não posso dar pior nota na minha disciplina porque eles sabem menos Inglês [...] esta parte do teste [...] em Inglês costumo mandar à [colega de língua].

These texts had a gradually increasing degree of difficulty to support and encourage learners with initial language obstacles:

tEng1, nos testes de Ciências [...] uma parte é em língua materna e [há] sempre um grupo em Inglês [com] um grau de complexidade crescente [...] ao longo do ano;

s5, os exercícios em Inglês do 7.º ano eram mais fáceis, tipo de resposta fechada [...] a partir do 9.º [...] três tópicos possíveis ou [...] composições [...] em Inglês no teste de História.

In addition, tSci1 affirmed that she used to assess students primarily for their Science knowledge and competences (in oral presentations, for example), while also considering the English language formatively, confirmed during observation of group works on natural disasters and class debate on theories of the origin of life in EP classes.

## 2.4. The (different) learning experience through this CLIL project

Teachers framed “English Plus”, in the EP planning and report, as one CLIL approach for bilingual teaching and associated it with the English teacher, who gave English through Science topics during “hora de projeto”. As examined by Piacentini *et al.* (2018), however, in the opinion of the students who attended the History EP edition, participating in the project meant a “composite learning”, as “classes of History in English” but also as a process through which the learning of both the linguistic and non-linguistic disciplines became authentic, with English learnt naturally and History somehow expanded. A great sense of membership and responsibility also came out, motivating students to learn:

s2, o facto de nós termos a História em Inglês [...] nesta escola [...] nós fomos pioneiros [...] também nos deu uma responsabilidade [...] mesmo fora do projeto havia essa [intensa] relação com os professores que este projeto proporcionou [...] em todas as atividades [...] estávamos todos a trabalhar pelo mesmo;

s7,

sentíamos que éramos diferentes dos outros [...] mais à frente e gostávamos disso, [...] História [...] com o Inglês ajudou-me a compreender [...] se fosse só em Português [...] não ia ser tão fácil puxar os alunos para perceberem a matéria e para que todos estivessem unidos a tentar perceber juntos.

These descriptions reflect lifelong skills and competences that, in the EP report, were presented as developed within the project (“de autonomia, de espírito de iniciativa e de empreendedorismo”, p. 10). During the interview, some former students expressed disappointment that project-like classes had not continued at the next school level:

s8, gostava que o English Plus tivesse durado até ao 12.º [...] sinto agora que não tenho tanta facilidade a falar em Inglês como [...] antes [...] ainda tivemos Inglês com a professora [tEng1] no 10.º e 11.º, só que é completamente diferente [...] não temos tanto tempo de Inglês e [...] é uma matéria mais simples, mais banal).

In terms of FL learning, these high school students had learned French in lower secondary grades, had had a few classes of German within the EP project and were motivated to learn or improve their knowledge of other languages (see Piacentini & Simões, 2020). Self-confidence in the capability for FL grew from this first positive experience with English (s5, “eu pensava que [...] não dava para falar outra língua sem ser o Português, que é a nossa língua e a partir do Inglês eu comecei [...] a saber que é possível”). Furthermore, English and the project broadened the learner’s knowledge and vision (s9, “o projeto [...] despertou o interesse em [...] vir a aprender outras línguas [...] outras coisas que aqui não conhecemos, [...] nos permitiu abrir os horizontes”). Among current EP students, the understanding of the FL was seldom perceived as a learning obstacle, although extra work due to the project was seen as one by some (Piacentini *et al.*, 2018). Former EP learners and teachers actually witnessed difficulties fading out over time.

The improvement of teaching practices also through the collaboration experienced with colleagues was a valuable aspect of the project acknowledged by EP teachers, who learned for their students and together with them:

*EP report (p. 10), o trabalho de equipa e a cooperação pedagógica interdisciplinar constitui-se como um dos aspetos mais valiosos deste projeto, levando à implementação de práticas letivas criativas e inovadoras, à diversificação de métodos pedagógicos, materiais e recursos educativos utilizados em sala de aula.*

As a matter of fact, former students described the development of alternative resources and effective activities through group work, game playing, online searches, video watching, theatre performances, visits and trips. The first author also observed all this during the empirical study of the Science EP edition in 2015-2016, where current students were usually “engaged” in extracurricular activities: school visits to embassies or from ambassadors, to Science educational institutions or to English speaking countries; theatre plays (representing creative Science using English) and cinema sessions (with movies in English and connected with Science topics); “open day”, among others. In addition, one project class was “twinned” with a similar group in the other school providing EP of Science, through email exchange and school trips in which students used nicknames (representing their connection with the EP project and functioning to ensure the participants’ anonymity).

The organisation of all these activities was referred to in the EP report as being part of the project, and regarded as a fundamental achievement. Teachers also mentioned the involvement of families:

*tSci2, aqui na escola [há] bastante interesse da parte dos alunos e das famílias a integrar o projeto;*  
*tEng1, um [outro] aspeto positivo desta implementação é aproximar as famílias à escola.*

The following quote is significant because it summarises key aspects of the learning experience entailed in the CLIL-EP project:

*s3, [tive] História [...] até ao 6.º ano [de] uma forma muito metódica, muito aborrecida e [a professora] era capaz de estar a falar e ela só a ler o manual e a escrever no quadro. No projeto [...] víamos vídeos, a professora exprimia-se de uma forma diferente [...] apresentávamos aos pais [...] e assim interligávamos o Inglês com a História de uma forma [...] que me captava mais a atenção [...] nós tratávamos dos problemas da turma [em Inglês] e também tínhamos mais tempo para o projeto em si.*

Consequently, the work for developing this CLIL approach was beneficial for learners, but also for teachers, who themselves clarified this in the EP report: “houve elevados níveis de motivação e, claramente, uma valorização de competências específicas e da atividade profissional, num processo que também para as professoras é de constante aprendizagem” (p.10). The researcher also witnessed EP teachers questioning themselves and reflecting on CLIL and non-CLIL practice during official meetings and also informal chats (in the school spaces or through phone calls).

### 3. Implications and some recommendations

Although the findings presented in this work may be limited to the specificity of the CLIL “English Plus” school project and its participants, they contribute to increasing studies on CLIL at the lower secondary school level and extend research on CLIL practice in Portugal, in terms of understanding of the EP project implementation/implications, thus, informing schools that are interested in adopting a CLIL approach.

The presence of English and its use to teach and learn a discipline (in this case, History and Science) fosters an attitude of awareness in teachers – as Coyle *et al.* (2010), Llinares *et al.* (2012), Piacentini (2021) and Wolff (2012) have reported in their works – who work and learn, themselves, for the progression of EP (Piacentini *et al.*, 2018; 2019). Activities are chosen to engage the student who becomes central in



the learning process (Dale & Tanner, 2012; Grandinetti *et al.*, 2013; Mehisto, 2012). Project time offers an additional opportunity for students to deepen their curricular subject knowledge (Piacentini *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, students' families and other organisations become involved in collaborating with EP, extending the learning process to the entire school community (and to other school contexts). Therefore, besides being regarded as a bilingual approach for learning English, the EP project implies the learning of both History/Science and the FL and learning through English.

From an external perspective (of an Italian person and teacher), it is worth mentioning that Portuguese people appear to have a higher fluency in English when compared to other countries where a Romance language is spoken, such as Spain or Italy<sup>15</sup> (where movies are dubbed). This is confirmed by the participants' perception of themselves revealed during interviews. A certain ease with this language has actually emerged within our empirical study. As highlighted by Piacentini and Simões (2020), "one's stronger self-concept in English, in turn, supports the learning of other languages, which is one first key to accessing other cultures" (p. 76). Under these favourable conditions, and agreeing with Pinho and Costa, who advocate for intercultural education in English classes (2018), we recommend that plurilingualism be encouraged in EP classes and other Portuguese CLIL-with-English initiatives and that both English and Portuguese be used during the project (cf. "translanguaging" practices, Lin & Lo, 2017).

All CLIL programmes imply a degree of collaboration between language and non-language teachers, who learn from each other and from reflecting on each other's pedagogical practice (Dale & Tanner, 2012; Pavón Vázquez & Ellison, 2013; Valdés-Sánchez & Espinet, 2020). However, the instructional strategy adopted in the CLIL-EP project consists of co-planning and co-teaching schemes. Following Escobar Urmeneta's co-teaching structures revisited for discussing Catalan contexts (2020, pp. 43-45), "complementary teaching", "one teach, one assist" and "co-supporting learning"<sup>16</sup> can be detected in our case. In these circumstances of cooperation, assistance and different competence fields deployed through the

<sup>15</sup> See data at <https://languageknowledge.eu/languages/english>, based on the 2012 Eurobarometer survey on Europeans and their languages.

<sup>16</sup> Escobar Urmeneta defines: "complementary teaching" as co-teachers possessing complementary areas of expertise and each one being responsible for using his/her knowledge and skills to enhance the instruction provided by his/her fellow co-teacher; "one teach, one assist" as one co-teacher taking the lead role while the other circulates among the students unobtrusively offering individual assistance; "co-supporting learning" as students working on their own, either individually or in pairs or small groups, while co-teachers circulate around the classroom providing help to students in need, pointing out unnoticed issues, giving advice on how to redirect a particular line of action, or providing emotional support to students (2020).

Content and Language teachers' roles during co-taught classes, a methodology is gradually built up and teachers tend to change usual working directions.

Other subject teachers are also involved in the EP project, even though in a more spontaneous manner when compared to the timetable and teamwork officially devoted to Science (since 2014 onwards) and History (2010-2013). Similarly to the experience of Maldonado and Olivares (2013), this CLIL project seems to have exceeded individual enthusiasm and to have become fueled by a wider teacher community. Nevertheless, the school director's approval and decisions are clearly required for the project's sustainability.

"English Plus", although referred to as a project, should be endorsed more and more as a programme, and the school where it takes place and shape as a "learning institution" through the four components – people, processes, contexts and time – reinterpreted by Alarcão (2009). Further discussion is recommended about attempting to implement EP, that is, a language-aware approach, also within the lab classes and only with the Science teacher and about how to mitigate the "unsustainability" of this provision, as lesson preparation and other project activities are time-consuming and teachers who embark on it do not receive any reward whatsoever.

We conclude by emphasising that in 2018 only 20% of the non-generalist teachers attending the Portuguese "Working CLIL" colloquium were teachers of specific disciplines. In the 2021 edition, this percentage increased to almost 30%. In fact, CLIL training courses should not be seen as exclusive to the language teacher education area. Opportunities for professional development based on CMIL (Piacentini *et al.*, 2019; see section 1) for teachers of all areas could mean, thus, to "equip" teachers with competences to "rethink" their own strategies. At the same time, teacher preparedness in this sense could ensure that more students can benefit from learning through a project-like approach, aligning with Ellison's stance that CLIL is "a worthy endeavour for all of those involved" (2018, p. 16) and making all these integration initiatives more sustainable.

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## Appendix

Infographic of the EP project  
(designed using a Canva template)

