PRACTICAL ENGLISH: BUILDING UP THE NEXT GENERATION OF EUROPEANS.

(FOCUS ON P.A.U. 2012 ORAL TESTS)

BIODATA:

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-WHICH RESOURCES TO USE AND WHY?
-HOW TO USE THEM, WHERE AND WHEN?
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-INTRODUCTION

FACING NEW CHALLENGES: P.A.U. 2012 ORAL TESTS AND BOLOGNA PLAN.

The application of the **Bologna Plan** to our university system and the need to have a real command of English in the framework of the **European Higher Education Area** are also bringing on **direct consequences to the secondary education**. Being the most imminent the next P.A.U. oral tests to access to university.
The creation of the optional subject Practical English for Batxillerat in Valencia means an extraordinary opportunity to **develop communicative competence through a new approach, with an open syllabus and the chance to put into practice all the socio-cultural aspects and topics** we usually have to relegate because of time and a heavy programme.
Having in mind the ultimate aim, **to prepare our students for the oral test in P.A.U. 2012 and for the real life in the adult world they are reaching, we will use technology, media and debate as useful tools for our purposes**: opening their minds, awaking curiosity, fostering critical thinking and maturity with tolerance and respect, arising consciousness about the reality around us and the possibilities of positive change.
The objective of my presentation is to show **a different, maybe unconvencional, humanistic multidisciplinary methodological approach** which I hope could be inspiring for other teachers, because all these contents and this methodology could be used from 4t ESO to 2nd Batxillerat, conveniently adapted. In all those levels where students have already an intermediate command of English language and we could **introduce more complex ideas to help them in the process of becoming independent users (B1-2) and responsible citizens**.

-WHAT IS IT?

A NEW SUBJECT DEMANDS A NEW APPROACH: THE OPEN SYLLABUS IN A HUMANISTIC FRAMEWORK.

This is the first year we have the opportunity of teaching Practical English as an optional subject for 1st and 2nd of Batxillerat in the Valencian Community. In my case, as a Head of the English Department in a Valencian high school, I managed to offer this new optional subject in 1st of Batxillerat, getting the support of 15 students who chose it, the minimum number required to set up the group.
I apply the term open syllabus, in a broad way, to the secondary school context in our country, adopting and adapting this concept to our needs and particular circumstances, making it useful and meaningful for our purposes. This way, **we leave our students room for their creativity, involvement, collaboration and responsibility.**
Students become conscious of being protagonists, so we gain their involvement in the activities and, through these, in the whole educative project.
Of course, we have **an official curriculum fixed by the educational authorities (DOCV Num. 6051/7-7-2009)**, which we have to accomplish. But, as this is a new optional subject, **we are given a general outline with enough space for imagination**. So, as in most aspects of education, what can be done depends on us, on our implication and our ability to adapt the new ideas to a real context.
Our determination and leadership will be crucial to transmit the humanistic sense of this project. Quoting Nelson Mandela, I firmly believe that "EDUCATION IS THE MOST POWERFUL WEAPON TO CHANGE THE WORLD". **I understand English not just as a subject, but as a key to open a wide range of possibilities**: learning, leisure, personal relationships, work, etc.
In short, **a great chance to improve and grow in all human aspects, to open their minds and get a richer vision of the world around us**.

TEACHER´S GUIDELINES AND STUDENTS INVOLVEMENT: THE TEACHER´S ROLE AND THE STUDENTS´ ROLE.

The guidelines of this project are established by the official curriculum, but **with the principles of freedom and imagination as our basis, the syllabus will be shaped progressively with the collaborative work of our students**.
This way, all topics can be redefined, but not the humanistic principles which are the pillars of this project. This method of work implies an extra effort, it demands our creativity to develop the syllabus and make it progress in a meaningful way with the collaboration of our students.

In class, we have to guide the process, supervising, counselling and assessing, but giving progressively more responsibilities to our students. This acquisition of autonomy and maturity, brings our students a valuable practice for getting ready for further studies or adult life.
On the other hand, **students are encouraged to take part actively in the whole teaching-learning process**. Their suggestions and contributions are vital for the success of this project. We hope to get their comments and ideas about activities, topics, materials, etc. Their collaboration is essential to improve our work and benefit the class. **The project is alive if we manage to get our students´ involvement**.

BUILDING UP YOUR OWN SYLLABUS: A PROJECT UNDER WORK.

As I mentioned before, we have to apply the official curriculum to our particular educative context and make it work. Taking into account the official curriculum but thinking about the topics which could motivate my students, I have selected the contents where I feel more interested and confident.
The contents in our syllabus are concrete, but general enough to introduce the contributions of our students, and also the changes or modifications we estimate necessary to make the project progress.
The starting point is the syllabus stated by the teacher as an outline, more or less general, which will be specified through the collaborative work of students and teacher. That is, we can extend or reduce some aspects of the contents, depending on our students´ reactions and, of course, our own criteria.
We divide the contents into **three big blocks**, **distributing the topics in three main areas**, **one per term: English for Personal Purposes, English for Public Purposes and English for Professional Purposes**. There are **four units in each block**, **mainly based on practical contents**, but there is always **a shorter and more theoretical unit at the beginning** of each block to introduce the rest of topics of the term. There is also **a unit in each block which deals with different aspects of Anglo-Saxon culture** and in the third term we will end the course with **a final project**.

OUR SYLLABUS AND TIMING:

IES ELS ÉVOLS (L´ALCÚDIA). 2009-2010
PRACTICAL ENGLISH – OPTIONAL SUBJECT FOR 1st OF BATXILLERAT
HEAD OF THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT- XELO FORÉS ROSSELL

FIRST TERM: BLOCK 1.ENGLISH FOR PERSONAL PURPOSES.

* UNIT 1. REGISTERS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE: FROM COLLOQUIAL TO FORMAL (SLANG, TABBOO, CEREMONY SPEECH, ETC).

* UNIT 2. INTRODUCING AND EXPRESSING YOURSELF:

- TALKING ABOUT YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

- TALKING ABOUT ROUTINES AND FREE TIME

- LIKES AND DISLIKES

- HOBBIES, SPORTS, PERSONAL INTERESTS AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

- GIVING OPINIONS AND REASONS TO SUPPORT YOUR POINT OF VIEW.

* UNIT 3. ENGLISH TO TRAVEL:

- BOOKING (FLIGHTS, HOTEL, TICKETS, ETC)

- AT THE AIRPORT

- ASKING FOR AN ADDRESS.

* UNIT 4. ANGLO-SAXON CULTURE (ICONS, MYTHS AND SYMBOLS): MUSIC STYLES AND FASHION.

- MUSIC STYLES: ROCK, POP, PUNK, SOUL, ELECTRO, HIP-HOP, ETC

- URBAN TRIBES AND STREET FASHION

- REFERENCE IDOLS, ROCK AND POP STARS

- LONDON & N.Y.C.: STREET FASHION TRENDS

- SHOW BUSINESS: MTV, FESTIVALS AND MUSICALS.

SECOND TERM: BLOCK 2.ENGLISH FOR PUBLIC PURPOSES.

* UNIT 5. ENGLISH IN THE MEDIA: TV, RADIO, PRESS AND INTERNET.

* UNIT 6. ENGLISH FOR EVERYDAY LIFE:

- SOCIAL FORMULAS: GREETING, APOLOGIZING, CONGRATULATING, ASKING AND GIVING PERMISSION, ASKING AND GIVING ADVICE, ETC

- ORDERING MEALS

- SHOPPING

- ON THE PHONE (MAKING AND GETTING A CALL).

* UNIT 7. ENGLISH FOR STUDIES:

- JOINING AN OVERSEAS ENGLISH COURSE (FILL IN A FORM, PLACEMENT TEST, ETC)

- READY FOR BOLONIA?

- STUDYING ABROAD: A GOOD CV AND AN INTERVIEW FOR UNIVERSITY.

* UNIT 8. ANGLO-SAXON CULTURE (ICONS, MYTHS AND SYMBOLS): LITERATURE, CINEMA AND TV SERIES.

- CLASSICS AND TODAY´S BEST-SELLERS (SHAKESPEARE, JANE AUSTEN, OSCAR WILDE, VIRGINIA WOOLF, PAUL AUSTER, J.K. ROWLING, ETC)

- BOOKS MADE FILMS: FAMOUS CHARACTERS (KING ARTHUR, HAMLET, SHERLOCK HOLMES, JAMES BOND, HARRY POTTER, ETC)

- CINEMA GENDERS: ANIMATION, COMEDY, DRAMA, HORROR, SCI-FI, THRILLER, WESTERN, ETC

- HOLLYWOOD STAR SYSTEM: BLOCKBUSTERS AND INDEPENDENT CINEMA

- CLASSICAL AND CULT TV SERIES

- GLOBALIZATION AND CULTURAL COLONIZATION.

THIRD TERM: BLOCK 3.ENGLISH FOR PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES.

* UNIT 9. ENGLISH AROUND THE WORLD:

- BRITISH AND AMERICAN ENGLISH

- DIFFERENT ACCENTS

- STANDARD AND INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH

- ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES.

* UNIT 10. AGREE OR DISAGREE: ARGUMENTS FOR A DEBATE BASED ON

- SOCIAL ITEMS (GLOBALIZATION, ECONOMIC CRISIS, HEALTHY HABITS, ETC)

- SCIENTIFIC ITEMS (ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE, NEW TECHNOLOGIES, ETC)

- ARTS AND HUMANITIES (ART EXHIBITIONS, HISTORY RESEARCH, MULTICULTURALISM, ETC).

* UNIT 11. ANGLO-SAXON CULTURE (ICONS, MYTHS AND SYMBOLS): HISTORY AND POLITICS.

- THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND THE BRITISH EMPIRE (THE COLONIES, THE COMMONWEALTH, THE IRISH QUESTION)

- THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA: THE INDEPENDENCE AND THE BIRTH OF A NATION (THE CIVIL WAR, THE CONQUEST OF THE WEST, THE INDIAN NATION)

- MONARCHY AND DEMOCRACY: THE QUEEN AND THE PARLIAMENT, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

- WORLD WAR II: THE USA AS A WORLD POWER (THE COLD WAR, A NEW COLONIALISM, THE CONQUEST OF THE SPACE)

- 11-S: THE USA UNDER ATTACK (THE BEGINNING OF A NEW ERA)

- FROM LINCOLN TO OBAMA: THE FIGHT FOR THE CIVIL RIGHTS (MARTIN LUTHER KING, MALCOM X, KENNEDY).

* UNIT 12. IMPROVING THE WORLD AROUND YOU (END OF COURSE´S PROJECT): INTERNATIONAL NGOs (KNOWING, PROMOTING, COLLABORATING).

(CELEBRATIONS AND TRADITIONS: ALONG THE COURSE, WE WILL CELEBRATE OR INTRODUCE THOSE FESTIVITIES REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ANGLO-SAXON CULTURE, SUCH AS HALLOWEEN,GUY FAWKES´ NIGHT, ETC).

-WHAT FOR?

IMPROVING WEAK POINTS: GETTING READY FOR NEXT P.A.U.´S ORAL TESTS IN 2012.

The imminent oral tests in the exam of access to university is in part the reason for offering this optional subject. But it is also true that it gives us an opportunity for doing all those things we always want to do but we never can, mainly because of time.
In a conventional English class, we are determined by a quite rigid schedule. We have to fight to finish all the topics previously fixed, most of the time without the collaboration or the implication of our students, who usually adopt, in the best cases, a passive role just waiting for our explanation or our correction.
In those circumstances teaching is meaningless, especially for a foreign language. So, from my point of view, **in the current situation of secondary education, the active skills are the most difficult ones to develop in our students**. I mean, **all which implies effort and collaboration on the part of the student**. In this sense, it is obvious that speaking and writing are the skills we need to improve. **Having in mind the Common European Framework for Languages, we should work to make our students achieve B1 communicative competence, as independent users**.

AMPLIFYING CULTURAL CONTENTS.

The aim of contents should not be only linguistic, but also humanistic, which means reinforcing socio-cultural aspects to help our students achieve B1 competence as independent users and, what is even more important, grow and mature as responsible and active citizens.
I am sure among the aspects we have to relegate or treat superficially, more often than we want to, because of time and other circumstances, there are the cultural contents.
Our syllabus brings along the opportunity to develop these **socio-cultural contents in an extended way**, becoming the basis for most of the activities, spoken or written. Those contents which usually have a secondary role in class, in favour of grammar, vocabulary, etc, **are now made explicit** and treated as widely as possible.
These contents, which are **essential for understanding informations and situations of everyday life**, will also help students to manage in a real context and more complex situations.

INTERACTIVE SITUATIONS: MAINLY ORAL, BUT NOT ONLY ORAL.

The main skills treated in Practical English will be speaking and writing, with special attention to oral English. The aim is to gain communicative competence at B1 level, according to the European Language Portfolio.
We will develop a series of interactive activities, as close to reality as possible, to introduce our students in a sort of real English communicative context, where they will have to put into practice all their theoretical knowledge.
To do this **we will work both formal and informal aspects, spoken and written skills, active and passive strategies through oral and written activities**.

ORAL ACTIVITIES:
- FORMAL AND INFORMAL PAIR AND GROUP ROLE-PLAYING
- FORMAL INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW
- INFORMAL STORY TELLING
- FORMAL TEAM PRESENTATION
- INFORMAL GROUP CONVERSATION
- INFORMAL CLASS DEBATE
- INFORMAL TEAM CULTURE QUIZ

WRITTEN ACTIVITIES:
MAILS (INFORMAL)
CV (FORMAL)
REVIEW (FORMAL)
ARTICLE (FORMAL)
OUTLINES FOR A DEBATE (INFORMAL)
OUTLINES FOR A STORY (INFORMAL)

-WHICH RESOURCES TO USE AND WHY?

CREATING AND PREPARING NEW MATERIAL.

Our methodology is multidisciplinary and even unconventional. With a humanistic approach to select and treat the material, based on three main tools: technology, media and debate. Consequently, I have chosen and prepared the materials and resources which I have considered more appropiate and motivating, being always receptive to the comments of my students.

Pros and cons of working without books. As we don´t have a conventional printed method by a publishing firm, we have to build our own one. That means extra work, but exciting and motivating if you are not afraid of challenges. This way we have room to create our own material, putting into practice our imagination and creativity to invent or re-invent activities for our students.

Massive use of audio-visual resources and multimedia to be exposed to real and motivating material to illustrate different socio-cultural aspects: O.V. films and series, TV programmes, songs and videos, web pages,etc.

Extensive use of press and media to contrast the information and help our students to think for themselves: TV news, magazines, newspapers, digital press, etc.

Debates as a useful tool to engage students and make them being critical. Using news and P.A.U. texts to prompt the debate, express opinions and give reasons to support them. We will have to moderate the debate and sometimes play the devil´s advocate to make students participate.

Students´ contributions and suggestions. Always taken into account as a valuable source to improve the teaching-learning experience.

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES.

NEW IDENTITIES.
Create new identities for your students. Take a piece of paper and cut small cards to write down some personal information: name, age, nationality, job, family background, etc. Give them their new identities and ask them to go around the class making each other questions until they found, for example, someone who:
-is from U.K., Australia,etc.
-is under 20, 40, 50, etc.
-is single, married, divorced, etc.
-is a musician, a waiter, a lorry driver, etc.
While your students are speaking you will have to monitor the activity, paying attention to the mistakes to correct them at the end.
After the oral part, you can ask the students to write a brief story about their new personality, inventing and adding details to complete their biography. In the next session the students will have to read aloud their compositions and the teacher and the other students will make some questions looking for additional information. Then, students will be corrected by the class with the help of the teacher. Finally, the teacher will collect the compositions to revise them.

FAMILY TREE.
Make your students draw a family tree about their relatives (parents, brothers & sisters, etc). They will work in pairs and will try to get as much information as possible about their mates´ family: name, age, job, background, address, hobbies and interests, etc. They should take notes to help them with the second part of the activity, when they will have to tell us the family story of their mates. The rest of the class could make them questions about it.

SUMMARIZING THE NEWS.
Ask your students to look out for some digital newspapers and magazines in English to choose and summarize an article they found especially interesting. They can take notes while reading to prepare the summary. After that, they will have to read it aloud for the class and all the students can make comments.

GUESS WHO!
Class game in which the students take turns to perform a famous person and answer their mates´ questions in order to help them guess who they are.
For example, someone performs Obama and the rest of the class has to ask him questions (what do you do? where are you from? are you married?...) until they get enough information to guess his identity.

ROLE PLAYING:
All the activities in this section imply to deliver different roles to our students and make them act in situations as close to reality as possible. Depending on the activities, teachers could take an active part in the game, for example acting as the shop assistant in the Shopping activity, the interviewer in the interview, etc.

-MEETING PEOPLE.
-HAVING A PHONE CALL.
-BOOKING AND TRAVELLING.
-JOINING AN OVERSEAS COURSE.
-SHOPPING.
-ORDERING A MEAL.
-HAVING AN INTERVIEW.

AUDIO-VISUAL MATERIAL.

FILMS:
BILLY ELLIOT. STEPHEN DALDRY.
BLADE RUNNER. RIDLEY SCOTT.
HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX. DAVID YATES.
IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER. JIM SHERIDAN.
ICE AGE II. TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX ANIMATION.
ONLY A KISS. KEN LOACH.
QUADROPHENIA. FRANC RODDAM.
THE SECRET OF THE PYRAMID. BARRY LEVINSON.

SERIES:
FRIENDS. SEASON 4.
LITTLE BRITAIN.
THE SIMPSONS. SEASON 1.

DOCUMENTARIES:
AN UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTH. DAVIS GUGGENHEIM AND AL GORE.
FARENHEIT 9/11. MICHAEL MOORE.
SUPER SIZE ME. MORGAN SPURLOCK.

INTERNET RESOURCES.
WEB PAGES:

BBC.CO.UK
CNN.COM
GUARDIAN.CO.UK
TIMESONLINE.CO.UK

MUSICA.COM
NME.COM
MTV.COM
ROLLINGSTONE.COM
QTHEMUSIC.COM

IDEBATE.ORG
AUDIOENGLISH.NET-PRACTICAL ENGLISH
WONDERHOWTO.COM-HOW TO USE ENGLISH SLANG

-HOW TO USE THEM, WHERE AND WHEN?

DEVELOPING YOUR OWN SYLLABUS: TIMING, SCHEDULE, PROGRAMMING.

As an optional subject for 1st of Batxillerat in Valencia, Practical English disposes of 4 hours a week to be taught.
Distributing contents and activities in a way which helps us to develop skills and motivate students is one of the keys to succeed in this project.
A good knowledge of **our students´profile** is basic to take advantage of all situations in class and get the best of the possible activities.
Also we have to **take profit of all the available resources**, such as the digital whiteboard, internet, etc.
Besides we need to **take our timetable into account**, because we know it is not the same giving a class at 9am in the morning as at 3pm in the afternoon.
I know this optional subject doesn´t exist now in Catalonia, so you could consider these ideas, activities and contents as orientations, to be adapted to your own personal circumstances and professional features. But I am also conscious of the difficulties involved in the teaching of a practical matter in a basically theoretical context as a classroom, without a specific timetable for those practical purposes.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT.

We will organize the class and the available resources according to the contents and their objectives, by using individual work and all types of grouping, from pairs to teams, through different kinds of interactive activities, as stated previously, such as pair and group role-playing, individual interview, team presentation, group conversation, class debate, etc.

Our open syllabus is a source of constant methodological renewal and educational enrichment. Guided by the idea of **keeping teaching-learning practice alive** and not to let interest fall down, we should **let the class flow**, which means that **not everything is planned, but**

it is under control if we have the necessary leadership and the appropiate resources to conduct the class.
Following this **almost "zen" idea** of letting the class flow, I can mention **some illustrative examples** of what can happen. As when the class was related to travelling and we ended talking about types of trips and **reasons to travel**, with a discussion about **religious pilgrimages**. Or the day I asked my students to look for information about **Guy Fawkes**, related to the celebration of the Bonfire Night, and we went on talking about **Alan Moore´s comics**, such as "V of Vendetta" or "Watchmen", and **other literary dystopias** like "1984" or "Brave New World".

STUDENTS´ FEEDBACK AND TEACHER´S RELOADING: ADAPTING CONTENTS AND MATERIALS AND KEEPING A RECORD.

As it has been said along this presentation, students´ participation and collaboration is not only welcome but also absolutely necessary for the success of this project. This way we will enrich each other, and with us all the teaching-learning process. **Students´ feedback is essential for teacher´s reloading, which means adapting contents and materials, depending on their reactions and comments**.
As the project is currently under work, **we have to keep a record** of everything interesting happening in class or related to it. The idea is to show the results and conclusions in depth here next year, when we will have a complete vision of the evolution of this process, with the additions, reductions, extensions, changes, modifications, etc.

-CONCLUSION

In brief, I think **we should take charge of the challenge which entails directing learning in the way that leads to independent and critical thinking, trying to develop personal criteria in our students in order to make them responsible and active citizens**. That means disrupting the routine, defying passivity and apathy with "shock-treatment" attitude, showing them different points of view, sometimes contradictory, sometimes complementary, but always interesting.
We can use **English as a means, not only to improve communication but also to help students gain maturity, making them more independent** by using English language with concrete purposes, mainly expressing themselves properly with confidence and respect, and **managing in more complex contexts and situations**.
We will go beyond the usual linguistic approach to introduce a wider humanistic vision through an open syllabus which is based on cultural contents, chosen and designed to motivate, even defy students´ passiveness.
Our positive attitude and active guidance will be vital for the success of the process**. It depends on us to assume as our final aim, not only as English teachers but also as educators, the challenge of contributing to build up the next generation of European citizens**, applying a whole humanistic approach. You have in your hands both possibilities: to stay as a passive member of the educational system, transferring just fossilized ideas, or to try to become as much active as possible in the formative process**. So now the challenge is up to you!**