

## CLIL and Comprehensive Sexual Education: A Case of Innovation From Argentina

AICLE y educación sexual integral: un caso de innovación desde Argentina

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Social issues are believed to enrich English language teaching with meaningful topics. In this article we describe and reflect on an innovative practice which combined content and language integrated learning with comprehensive sexual education at a state secondary school in Argentina. By law, comprehensive sexual education must be included across the Argentinian curriculum and English language learning cannot be the exception. Therefore, we designed and implemented a collaborative-driven innovation that allowed learners to learn English and comprehensive sexual education with a focus on authentic materials, purposes, and tasks. The innovation was developed over a month and it involved learners delivering presentations on comprehensive sexual education topics. Reflections on the effect of the innovation and possible future directions are included.

*Keywords:* Argentina, authenticity, awareness, comprehensive sexual education, content and language integrated learning, English language teaching

Se cree que el análisis de cuestiones sociales aporta temas significativos a la enseñanza del inglés. En este artículo describimos una práctica innovadora que combinó el aprendizaje integrado de contenido y lengua extranjera con la educación sexual integral, en una escuela secundaria estatal en Argentina. Por ley, la educación sexual integral debe incorporarse a todo el currículo escolar, y el aprendizaje del inglés no queda exento. Por consiguiente, diseñamos e implementamos una innovación colaborativa para permitir que los estudiantes aprendieran inglés y educación sexual integral, a partir de materiales auténticos, objetivos y tareas. La innovación duró un mes e incluyó presentaciones grupales de los estudiantes sobre temas de la educación sexual integral. El artículo incluye reflexiones sobre los efectos de la innovación y los posibles caminos a futuro.

*Palabras clave:* aprendizaje integrado de contenido y lengua extranjera, Argentina, autenticidad, concientización, educación sexual integral, enseñanza del inglés

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## Introduction

In formal education, English language teaching (ELT) is imbricated in a complex network of curriculum imperatives which include the need to educate learners for diversity, inclusion, and above all, social justice. Thus, the English lesson cannot turn a blind eye to key concepts which are expected to be addressed across the entire school curriculum.

Since 2006, comprehensive sexual education (CSE) is mandatory across the curriculum in Argentinian education. Law 26.150 (2006) establishes that learners have the right to receive CSE from a gender perspective in order to promote diversity and equality. A gender perspective hinges on the position that sexuality is one dimension of human life and examines the impact that gender has on people's roles, opportunities, and access to economic and cultural capital (Gognar et al., 2013; Morgade & Alonso, 2008). From this perspective, CSE includes topics such as identity, gender relations, gender violence, sexuality and health, interpersonal relationships and respect, gender and human rights, sexual harassment, and the deconstruction of sociohistorical and cultural practices. Enforcement of this law entails the obligation of including CSE topics across the curriculum not only as a mandatory subject but also as content present in other areas such as literature, science, history, and English as a foreign language (EFL).

While this law has been celebrated by some, supporting the extension of human rights and attacked by others on moral and religious grounds, it is generally agreed that in order to secure careful and sustainable CSE implementation, teachers need to be properly trained to dismantle their own beliefs and develop their CSE awareness together with pedagogical tools to include CSE in their own subject-specific teaching practices.

Framed in exploratory practice (Hanks, 2017), the innovation described in this article emerged from Cristina's (one of the authors of this paper) two interwoven puzzles: (a) how to include CSE in the EFL class, and (b) how to boost motivation and language learning among

teenage learners. Through personal communications, we agreed to the inclusion of CSE topics in ELT following a content-and-language-integrated learning (CLIL) approach for a period of four weeks, that is, four lessons. Darío (one of the authors of this paper) was interested in implementing and examining the effects of CSE in ELT in state secondary education.

In Argentina, EFL is a mandatory subject present throughout the six years of secondary education and it is, in the state sector, taught two hours a week usually framed in communicative language teaching with instantiations of a code-switching approach where L1 (Spanish) is used in the lesson for specific purposes such as clarifying doubts, checking understanding, or guiding learners' task completion. In light of the tangible need to include CSE in EFL, we believed that CLIL was a helpful approach to operationalise the inclusion of CSE in EFL with secondary school learners.

In this article, we first offer a concise conceptualisation of CLIL. We then review connections between CLIL and CSE, which support our pedagogical innovation. We describe the innovation itself including teaching materials, learners' posters, and voices from the classroom to understand the effect of the innovation. In the final section, reflections and future directions are integrated to offer a comprehensive evaluation of this innovative practice and how it can resonate in regard to other ELT contexts.

## Theoretical Framework

CLIL is often defined as a dual-focus approach through which curriculum content is taught through an additional language so that learners gain in terms of content and language learning at the same time (Ball et al., 2015; Coyle et al., 2010; Genesee & Hamayan, 2016). Given the focus on integration and the multiplicity of CLIL realisations in practice (Díaz Pérez et al., 2018), CLIL may usually be configured as (a) a content-driven approach or (b) a language-driven approach. The first approach entails teaching a subject through the medium

of an additional language, for example teaching science (e.g., Garzón-Díaz, 2018) or history (e.g., Lara Herrera, 2015) in English. The second approach is adopted in EFL lessons in which English learning is contextualised in curriculum to increase authenticity of purpose and topics (Pinner, 2013) and enhance language learning motivation (Banegas, 2013). In the case of our innovation, we adopted a language-driven CLIL approach since the subject was still English and we were not fully qualified to teach CSE, yet it is mandatory to include a gender perspective across the curriculum in Argentinian education.

CLIL practitioners, theory, and research support the position that CLIL enhances motivation (Doiz et al., 2014), language learning, critical thinking skills (Coyle et al., 2010), citizenship education (Porto, 2018), and content learning (Pérez Cañado, 2018) in ways that reveal the benefits of developing comprehensive and cross-curricular aims. In view of this, language-driven CLIL may afford the teaching of English through CSE topics and in so doing learners develop their English language proficiency to discuss matters that are relevant, critical, and present in their daily lives inside and outside the school environment.

In the broad context of our experience, CSE is a right, a must, a need, and a drive to promote social justice, diversity, and inclusion. According to UNESCO's (2018) website, comprehensive sexual education is

a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to realize their health, well-being and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives. ("What is Comprehensive Sexuality Education?," para. 1)

UNESCO (2018) suggests applying a learner-centred approach to address CSE across the curriculum.

Therefore, language-driven CLIL, in accordance with current imperatives in education, places the learner at the centre of the educational experience to discuss the broad spectrum of topics found under the terms gender and sexuality.

In line with the general literature on gender and sexuality, within the ELT literature (e.g., Nelson, 1999, 2004, 2006, 2009, 2010), sexuality and gender are understood as identity constructs under constant change that need to be deconstructed and discussed in language education in order to respect and value diversity among learners, educators, and society as a whole. According to Evripidou (2018a), gender as a social and stratifying institution regulates different aspects of human activity, and heteronormativity needs to be challenged in order to include the wide spectrum of diverse gender identities found among human beings.

With interrelated foci, scholars have addressed gender as a multifaceted construct in second language learning: inclusive pedagogies (Sauntson, 2018), identity (Nguyen & Yang, 2015; Norton & Pavlenko, 2004), LGBT learners' trajectories and classroom participation (Evripidou, 2018a; Moore, 2016), interaction from feminist poststructuralism (Pavlenko, 2004), teacher preparation (Mojica & Castañeda-Peña, 2017), teachers' perceptions (Evripidou, 2018b), coursebooks (Ariyanto, 2018; Gray, 2013), teacher-developed materials (Govender, 2019), and awareness raising in educational communities (Pakuła et al., 2015). These studies, from a praxiological notion, are unified by the following stance: ELT cannot ignore human action; it should adopt an attitude that allows learners to understand the purposes behind human behaviour and the diversity of actions found across institutions and social practices. From this stance, there is a pressing need to imbue ELT pedagogical contours with gender topics to ensure diversity, equity, and social justice not only at a conceptual level, but more importantly, at an activity level. In other words, language learners should not reflect on gender diversity and other CSE-related topics but should work towards enacting diversity with

their daily language-mediated activities. However, the first step to achieve this aim is to raise awareness and to provide learners with content about CSE.

Two unpublished studies make explicit connections between CLIL and CSE. In an exploratory study carried out in Hong Kong higher education, Ho (2017) drew on CLIL to design a sexuality equity curriculum for a language enrichment programme. Findings show that the adult learners developed critical awareness about gender and sexuality issues and increased their motivation to read and participate in class as they emotionally engaged with literary texts and other multimodal resources which explored gender and identity in the Asian context. In Latin America, a qualitative study carried out with Colombian teenagers (Vargas Reyes & Porras Hernández, 2015) investigated the impact of designing language-driven CLIL lessons on contraceptive methods given learners' limited knowledge concerning content. While this study offers support for the inclusion of CSE in EFL, it addresses CSE from a biological stance, which, in current conceptions of sexuality education, is limited as it does not fully embrace the totality of what sexuality entails as it is achieved through a gender perspective. These studies show that awareness raising is vital, and that learners should occupy a central position so that they can build new knowledge based on prior lived experiences. They also highlight that, as defined by UNESCO (2018), CSE should not be limited to sexuality as a biological trait; it should sit at the intersection of gender and identity and the effects that these have on all human activities such as personal rights, relationships, and work-related aspirations and practices.

In light of this framework and the Argentinian context, we believe that in EFL educational settings, language-driven CLIL may become a helpful approach to increase learners' awareness of wider and critical social issues while developing their English language proficiency. In the innovation in practice reported in this article, we included CSE as curricular content to

teach English in tandem. Concomitantly, the experience transformed itself into an in-service professional development opportunity for Cristina for it combined language-driven CLIL pedagogies applied to the domain of CSE.

### **The Teaching Context**

Our innovation was carried out in Year 6 at a state secondary school in southern Argentina. The school year started in March 2018 and finished in December 2018; nevertheless, classes were interrupted between May and July due to major teacher strikes in the province. The class consisted of 20 teenage learners, 11 females and 9 males, with an average age of 17, and Spanish was their L1. Although they were in the last year of secondary education, their English language proficiency ranged between A1–A2 according to CEFR levels. Only one learner was a B2.

Graduated from an Argentinian university, Cristina was their regular EFL teacher and she expressed interest in peer teaching with Darío, a teacher educator and curriculum developer in the region. The innovative practice took place during October and November 2018.

### **The Innovation**

As described above, the innovative practice consisted of developing and delivering CSE-based EFL lessons to a group of teenage learners in their last year of secondary education. The aims were: (a) to allow learners to deepen their views on CSE topics; (b) to engage in authentic materials, purposes, and tasks; (c) to develop their language skills, particularly focusing on reading and listening, and to a lesser extent writing and speaking; (d) to learn CSE-specific vocabulary, and (e) use grammatical structures and items learnt so far through their regular coursebook and lessons.

To this effect, we decided to engage in peer teaching for four lessons. Due to time constraints and workload, peer teaching entailed Darío sharing

his plan with Cristina and refining the dynamics of each lesson via WhatsApp. Darío collected materials for each lesson and co-delivered the four lessons having complementary roles. We agreed that we would use both English and Spanish in our teaching and that learners would be allowed to operate in both languages for processing and encoding meanings. We also agreed that Darío would keep a journal, and that Cristina would help in recording learners' perceptions and assessment of the innovation. In Lessons 1 and 2, an informal group discussion took place to gain learners' insights. While Darío asked questions, Cristina recorded learners' contributions. We also took pictures of learners' working and evidences of teaching and learning (e.g., notes on the whiteboard, learners' posters).

In the subsections below we describe each lesson and share the effects it had on the actors involved as the innovation unfolded.

### Introducing the Innovation

In Lesson 1, we introduced the aim of the lessons for a month. Darío explained in English specific aspects of the projects such as collaborative work, the use of authentic materials, and the presentation of posters as the final product. It was highlighted that we would discuss five CSE-related topics: (a) same-sex marriage (legal in Argentina since 2010), (b) abortion, (c) LGBT rights, (d) gender equality, and (e) gender violence. In English, we elicited learners' prior knowledge on each topic and noted their comments on the board. This moment was also used to present subject-specific terminology. Once we had a map of these five topics, Darío asked the class to work in groups to discuss possible reasons for addressing such topics. As one representative from each group voiced their views, Cristina collected learners' responses. Below, we summarise their main perceptions:

These topics are important to prevent pregnancies and sexually-transmitted diseases. (Marcos)

Because sometimes our families don't support us and learners need to find someone who can listen to them and that help may be found here at school. (Sheila)

To take care of ourselves, among ourselves, and remind ourselves that everybody deserves respect. (Rocío)

In this lesson, we were positively surprised as the learners asked about inclusive/nonsexist language in English and its differences and similarities with Spanish (Banegas & López, 2019; Mare, 2018). We took this opportunity to revise vocabulary (e.g., policeman/policewoman vs. police officer) and pronouns (e.g., his/her, their). We reflected on the social implications of inclusive language and the applications of the cooperative principle to achieve linguistic and social goals without forgetting aspects such as representation and empowerment through language-mediated practices. Drawing on systemic functional linguistics, we all agreed that language was dynamic, that it belonged to speakers and that we could accommodate it to represent new realities; however, we also admitted that language change is a process which cannot be imposed.

We then organised the class into five groups and each group selected one of the topics mentioned above. We noticed that the learners took the topics without any concerns. In fact, they expressed that it was high time these topics could also be discussed in the EFL lesson:

Miss, this is fantastic. It's the first time we talk about gender diversity in English. We always talk about straight couples and stereotypical families. This is real and I like it! (Tamara)

We explained that during the lessons concerning the five topics we would be summarising authentic materials and discussing some topics in particular. We clarified that both Spanish and English could be used in the lessons but that the final poster presentation would be carried out in English. Next, each group received a set of printed authentic sources according to the topic

of their choice. We agreed that together with their prior knowledge, the learners should handle content from quality sources so that their views were argumentatively valid. In so doing, we sought to develop their critical thinking skills and work towards developing learners' informed ideas. In addition, we shared with them websites and videos. For example, for the topic of gender violence, the group had texts on movements such as *Me Too*, *Time's Up Now*, and *Ni Una Menos* (Not One Less), which described the origin and aims of each movement and outlined achievements and statistics related to gender violence. With that material, groups were asked to read for general understanding, highlight key words, and summarise main ideas through bullet points and graphic organisers. To scaffold the process, they could use English–Spanish dictionaries.

### Developing the Innovation

In Lesson 2, we revised the main concepts we had discussed in Lesson 1. We favoured listening and speaking skills as we also noted that the learners were interested in more exposure to English and more opportunities for using English to talk about CSE.

We then explained that first we would focus on gender violence. As a pre-watching activity, we asked them to say what types of violence we could find. We then showed a video called *The Mirror*, a domestic short film on violence, downloadable from YouTube. This video had not been shared with the learners as we wished to introduce new sources of input when discussing some of the topics. After a first watching, we asked them to determine what type of video it was (a short film promoting a helpline). On a second watching, we paused the video at specific moments to make a list of the signs of violence the woman suffers and how each situation becomes more dangerous. We introduced new vocabulary and structures and reflected on ways people could ask for help in Argentina.

In Lesson 3, we followed a similar plan for the video-based tasks around gender violence. We started

the lesson asking for learners' views on abortion, a hot topic in Argentina in 2018 as a bill to legalise abortion in the first 14 weeks of pregnancy was passed by the Lower House but rejected by the Senate. We then showed them a video called "Understanding Argentina's Abortion Debate: Both Sides of the Issue," found on the *New York Times* YouTube channel. Through a graphic organiser, we helped learners notice the balance of divergent views on the video and language items used to express support or concerns with the bill.

The rest of Lessons 2 and 3 were devoted to learners' group work reading and summarising the contents of the materials provided. Some groups produced summaries in Spanish which they then translated back into English. We took advantage of this process to teach and revise new structures and vocabulary, and, most importantly, discuss the implications and resonances of each topic with the groups. By the end of Lesson 3, some groups had already produced a summary of the material and had produced a bullet-point list which would constitute the backbone of their posters.

### Wrapping Up the Innovation

Lesson 4 was divided into two parts. Part 1 was devoted to providing feedback on groups' summaries and bullet points. Then each group started producing their posters. While they were working on them, we supported them by reading aloud their posters and summaries to help them with pronunciation and overall understanding.

In Part 2, each group presented their posters. While stronger learners delivered their contributions in English, less confident learners codeswitched between English and Spanish. Thus, one of the language areas in the spotlight was speaking together with reading as the project unfolded.

Finally, all the posters were taped on the corridor walls to share the experience with the rest of the school. Below, we include the posters (Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4) from which permission of the learners was granted.

Figure 1. Poster by Students on Same-Sex Marriage



Figure 2. Poster by Students on Gender Violence

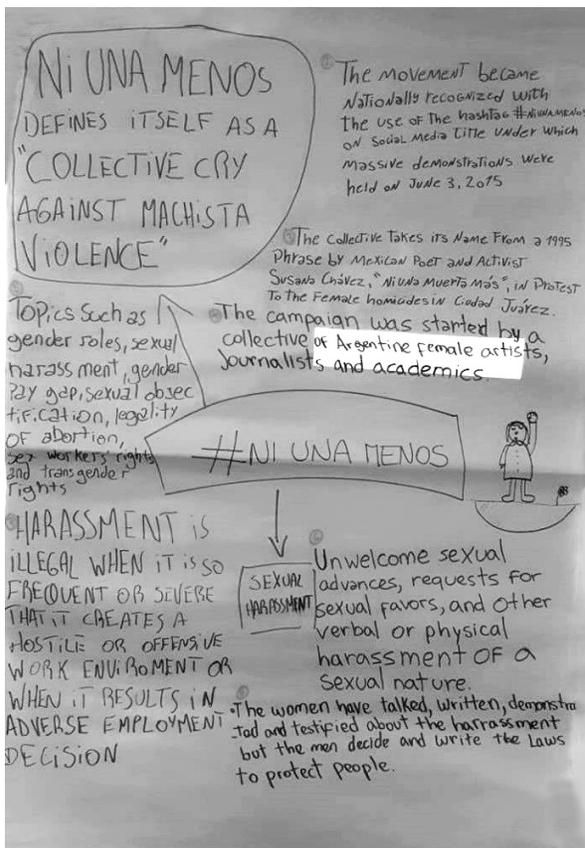


Figure 3. Poster by Students on Abortion

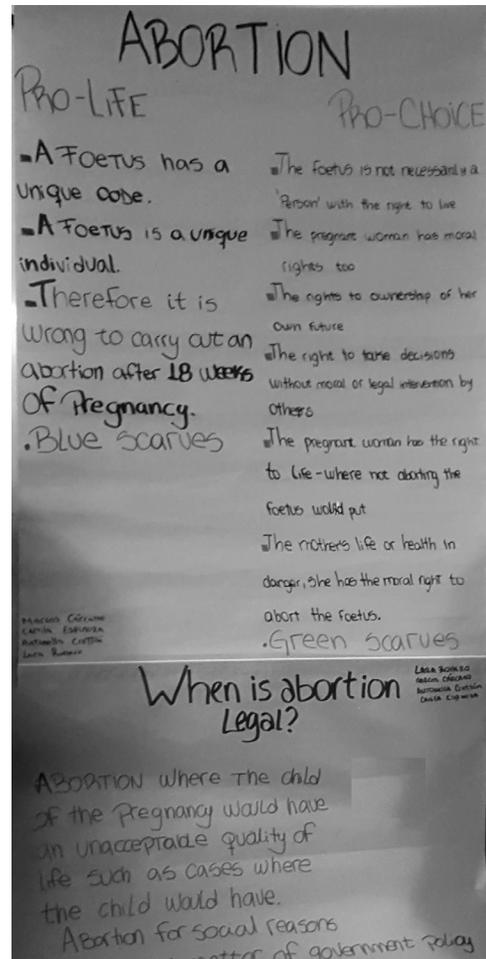
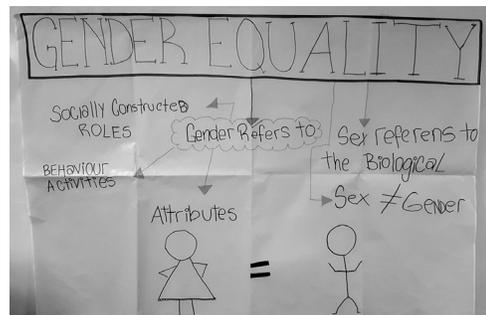


Figure 4. Poster by Students on Gender Equality



The four posters show that in terms of content, learners developed summarising strategies to synthesise the main concepts and terms on the CSE addressed. In this regard, summarising became both a powerful cognitive and linguistic tool to communicate the main features of each topic. The posters reveal that learners acquired knowledge about when abortion is legal or illegal, facts about the movement called *Ni Una Menos* and the difference between gender and sex. In terms of language development, the posters attest to learners' use of subject-specific terminology (e.g., foetus, harassment) and complex syntactical constructions featuring subordinate and relative clauses.

### Reflections

At the end of Lesson 4, we switched to Spanish and asked learners to reflect on the effects of this innovative experience in their regular ELT lessons. Learners' voices became our data to understand the impact of our CLIL-CSE endeavours. The class discussion in Lesson 4 was audio-recorded using our mobile phones. We then transcribed their views and applied thematic analysis for initial codes and unifying categories. Through thematic analysis we identified four overarching themes: (a) content and English language learning through CLIL, (b) opportunity for collaborative work, (c) oral skills development, and (d) authentic materials as a positive challenge.

The language-driven CLIL approach adopted to combine CSE topics with English language learning allowed learners to experience positive effects regarding content and language learning. As promoted in the CLIL literature (e.g., Ball et al., 2015; Genesee & Hamayan, 2016), the learners were able to notice that CLIL helped them acquire new content and new language items at the same time. The learners' voices included below are proof of this theme:

In my group we learnt about *Ni Una Menos*. We've heard and talked about it but we had never learnt anything about how it started, and the history of this movement

is central because it can teach us about how to defend people's rights and gender issues. So we learnt about the topic and specific words to talk about it. That makes learning English motivating and relevant. (Nelson)

I didn't know we have in Argentina so many laws to defend gender diversity and act against gender violence. That was new to me and I enjoyed learning English because it was connected to a critical aspect of society; we need the laws and we also need their enforcement. And because we did it in English, I learnt the words needed to talk about them such as law, bill, etc. (Vera)

The learners' comments indicate that CSE from a gender perspective (Morgade & Alonso, 2008) is important in secondary education and that they can benefit from it both content- and language-wise. Gender is recognised as a critical dimension of social practice (Evripidou, 2018a; Nelson, 2010) which deserves serious attention. As previously reported (Banegas, 2013; Doiz et al., 2014), CLIL can therefore become a solid and motivating educational approach to design and achieve content and language aims which provide learners with the opportunity to exercise agency, develop critical thinking skills, and cultivate critical citizenship (Coyle et al., 2010; Porto, 2018). The learners' comments show their higher-order thinking as the learning of content in the EFL lesson helped them become aware of the necessity to learn about history and social justice.

In relation to collaborative work, all the learners agreed that the lessons allowed them to establish new relationships with their peers as they worked with people they did not normally work with. Two learners expressed:

I thought we were going to kill each other! But that didn't happen, on the contrary it was enriching to work with others. (Daniela)

It was good fun. By discussing abortion in my group, I got to know my mates a lot more and I understood other views on the topic. (Carolina)

While Daniela's metaphor refers to her presumption that the topics would generate heated antagonism, Carolina found the experience rewarding for getting to know her classmates through discussion of CSE topics. In both cases, CSE acted as a space for mutual understanding and growth. The sociocultural nature of our project seemed to have contributed to learner motivation and content learning with peers (Coyle et al., 2010).

Most learners valued that working with videos and our favouring English over Spanish to lead the lessons forced them to pay more attention and develop their listening and speaking skills. One learner expressed that despite having problems with speaking, he felt he had improved his pronunciation:

I can't speak fluently, but I think that I improved my pronunciation of key words. Or I am more careful and pay attention when the teachers speak and notice how they pronounce important words. (Julio)

Another learner said:

The videos were authentic, kind of difficult because we weren't used to real videos, but I managed to pay attention and focus on the main ideas, the most important concepts. Like I learnt to focus on what was important. (Camila)

Julio's and Camila's words are important because they show that language-driven CLIL through the use of authentic materials allowed them to develop their oral skills, which are not usually foregrounded in the literature (Ball et al., 2015; Genesee & Hamayan, 2016).

Concerning authentic materials, most of the learners welcomed the challenge as it provided them with instances of genuine English on topics which were worth including in ELT. On the process of reading and summarising the authentic texts, one learner commented,

We made an extra effort. We made an effort to read, understand, translate and summarise back in English. I think that helped us remember and understand the topics a lot more because we were more conscious of what we were doing. (Camila)

As discussed in Pinner (2013), authenticity proved to be an essential feature of the project. In our language-driven CLIL exploration, authenticity was present at the levels of content, materials, and tasks. Learners engaged in tasks which resembled genuine language-mediated social practices such as summarising or giving an opinion on a given issue.

## Conclusion

Framed in exploratory practice (Hanks, 2017), the aim of this contribution was to describe and discuss a four-week project carried out with state secondary school learners in Argentina which consisted of enthusing learners by combining CSE topics with English language learning. Language-driven CLIL, particularly featuring authentic materials, was employed to provide learners with opportunities for relevant and socially situated content and language learning.

According to learners' views, there was improvement in content learning and language development, especially in relation to vocabulary and oral (speaking and listening) skills. They also exhibited improvement in summarising strategies and higher order thinking skills. CSE in the EFL lesson became a space for citizenship development as gender-related topics were linked to wider issues such as social justice and human rights.

Albeit limited and context-specific, our experience shows that ELT can extend to include critical issues which reflect the diversity and complex landscape within and outside schools. As part of a wider curriculum, ELT in formal education cannot ignore gender and sexuality matters; therefore, it must create opportunities for critical engagement with such topics. To achieve this goal, ELT educators and educational authorities need to work collaboratively and embrace topics which have been underrepresented in ELT curriculum and materials.

Future teaching and research experiences should foster investigation of the effects of CSE through language-driven CLIL with different age groups and contexts and examine materials which reflect diversity and inclusion.

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