

Science Across the World: Interview with Monica Tosi, Argentine Representative for SAW (Transcript of Podcast)

Science Across the World: Entrevista con Mónica Tosi,
representante por Argentina de Science Across the World
(Transcripción de podcast)

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Abstract

In this podcast, Susan Hillyard interviews Monica Tosi, the Argentine Representative for Science Across the World (SAW). Tosi explains the focus of SAW and how teachers can get involved. Comments are offered on benefits for teachers and students, as well as the status of CLIL in Argentina.

Key Words: CLIL; ELT; Science; *LACLIL*

Resumen

En este podcast, Susan Hillyard entrevista a Monica Tosi, representante por Argentina de Science Across the World (SAW). Mónica Tosi explica el enfoque de SAW y la manera en que los docentes se pueden involucrar. Se incluyen comentarios sobre los beneficios para docentes y estudiantes así como la situación del CLIL en Argentina.

Palabras Claves: CLIL; ELT; Ciencia; *LACLIL*

ACCESS TO PODCAST

- Link to online audio of podcast:
<http://laclil.unisabana.edu.co/index.php/LACLIL/article/view/2644/2850>

TRANSCRIPT OF PODCAST

Part A

Hillyard: Hello Monica. Thank you for giving me some of your time. Tell us a little about yourself.

Tosi: I was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. I am an English language teacher; I am a graduate of a public Teachers' Training College called I.S.P. Dr. J. V. González. At present, I coordinate Idiomas MT, and I am in charge of in-company courses and teacher training. And I am also the coordinator of the Science Across the World Project for South America.

Hillyard: What first interested you in SAW?

Tosi: The British Council gave me a grant to attend a Science Across the World workshop in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil in 2003. The workshop was given by Professor Keith Kelly, (Factworld coordinator, SAW consultant, Nile trainer) the host was the ELT manager of the BC Brazil, Mr. Michael King, and it was then when I became acquainted with the project and saw that it was a wonderful tool, not only for science teachers, but also for us: language teachers.

What I immediately loved about Science Across the World was the ready-made, printable resources on different science topics related to everyday life. I think the topics are very appealing and motivating for kids from eight to sixteen years old and the idea of exploring science locally and exchanging globally was what I loved best.

The programme is great not only for science teachers but for language teachers, like me, who are sometimes afraid of dealing with science topics. So, this is a great opportunity to explore, learn, and teach content through language and vice versa.

The first topic that I was immediately interested in is "Talking about Genetics around the World". The issue of genetically modified animals and plants is very interesting, and it triggers off ethical discussions. It seems to me that dealing with this topic naturally makes our students engage in debates. So, we can use this as a tool for teaching them the language for arguing and thinking, for instance.

Hillyard: Please explain what SAW is.

Tosi: Science Across the World is an internet-based exchange programme between schools all over the world with standardised student materials.

It includes about sixteen resource topics, introduction to the issue, support data, and a pack which contains teachers' notes, students' pages and an exchange form. All the packs come in at least six languages. These are ready-made, downloadable, printable materials (in PDF format).

Some of the topics are acid rain, renewable energy, drinking water, eating and drinking, global warming, domestic waste, road safety, keeping healthy, chemistry in our lives, biodiversity, taking about genetics and plants.

Through Science Across the World, we encourage our students to carry out small-scale ethnographic research between different cultures. Students collect data, facts and opinions locally and exchange this information with other students in other countries, from our school database.

Hillyard: How does it fit into your understanding of CLIL?

Tosi: These resources make an ideal basis for CLIL and are used by science teachers working in a bilingual context and also language teachers teaching English as a Foreign Language.

Hillyard: How do you try to encourage other teachers to start the programme?

Tosi: First, we discuss the advantage of encouraging our students to use web-based materials, why it is important to carry out ethnographic research in the classroom and also the significance of intercultural studies.

Then, I show them how easy it is to join in. Teachers just have to:

- Register as a SAW member
- Choose a topic
- Download and print the ready-made guides
- Students study the info and carry out activities (at school/home/in groups/individually)
- Students collect data on the Exchange Form
- Select a school or schools globally from the database
- Send and receive Exchange Form (email, post, fax)
- Discuss global findings

Hillyard: Is it a lot of extra work for the teacher?

Tosi: On the contrary, all the materials were already made by experts. The teacher just has to register and contact the partner school from the database. Then, the teacher prints the materials for the students and they start working on the project.

Hillyard: How many programmes have started here in Argentina?

Tosi: In Argentina there are 113 schools registered and 147 teachers participating on the project. The statistics show that the main language the students in Argentina use for their exchanges is English and the main topics they choose are: Eating and Drinking, Global Warming and Road Safety.

Hillyard: With which countries have you exchanged? Other teachers?

Tosi: I have exchanged with Brazil, but other colleagues exchanged with China, Germany, Italy, and other countries, and it was a very rewarding experience. Not all the exchanges are in English. They can exchange in French, Italian, Spanish, Chinese, etc. Some of them scheduled video conferences, and the students from both schools met online.

Part B

Hillyard: What do you think the students actually learn from the experience?

Tosi: As we know, the Internet provides access to up-to-date materials and that means going beyond the classroom walls, it is motivating, dynamic, and real. By doing research on the web, students become active participants (knowledge is searched for and built by them, not delivered). Students become involved in the wider aspects of science, make links with other countries, use foreign languages and Information and Communication technologies. So, without realizing it, students will be developing some cross-curricular skills like Research, Identification, Prioritising,

Interpretation, Surveying, Presentation and ICT. By exchanging with different cultures, students gain insights into cultural differences and the impact of science on people's lives.

Hillyard: Can you tell us something of the ethnographic research from the twinned schools in the SAW project?

Tosi: Yes. Through this exchange programme, students carry out small-scale ethnographic research. In the same way ethnographers gather information about a particular group of people (location, geographical environment, customs, food, transport, and clothing); students will be observing and collecting actual data (about themselves). Then they exchange the information. Finally, they will compare the info and present it. So, this helps to raise our student's awareness of attitudes, values and customs in their own society and other societies.

In the case of topics like Eating and Drinking the partner schools exchanged information about their eating habits, food, worked on the nutritional pyramid, discussed why food is important, etc.

In the case of Talking about Genetics, the topic brought about heated discussions about ethical aspects (Are all the products labelled? Is it right? Wrong?) And so they resorted to the use of language for arguing and thinking

Hillyard: Do you think the team will be preparing more material for the 8-12 age range?

Tosi: Yes, I think so. You will see that we group the topics into broad age bands. These are not rigid and you should feel free to use a topic with students outside the suggested age range if the subject fits well with the interests of your students and the needs of the curriculum.

Hillyard: What is the future of SAW?

Tosi: Collaboration is essential. Science across the World is a non-profit organization, so it needs sponsors to survive. Acquiring enough sponsor money to support this organization is key to its future. Also, there are other ways to help. Publicity and networking are important too.

In Argentina, the British Council has helped; Essarp and Jardin Japonese lent us their premises in 2005 to organize the Young Ambassadors for Chemistry event. The T.S. Eliot Institute also helped. We organised the second YAC event, the first one was in Taiwan. Professor Keith Kelly from UK and Doctor Lida Schoen from Holland came to Argentina. The initiative was sponsored by the International Union for Pure and Applied Chemistry ([IUPAC](#)) and [GlaxoSmithKline](#) through [Science Across the World](#). The workshop was hosted by ESSARP, the English Speaking Scholastic Association of the River Plate in the heart of Buenos Aires and JARDIN JAPONES. Without sponsors, it would have been impossible to organize it.

My objective at the moment is to be able to introduce the programme in public schools in Argentina. I am sure it is easier than it seems and it would be a total success, but we definitely need the help of the local authorities.

Hillyard: What is the future of CLIL in Argentina? In the world?

Tosi: Well, this is the debate that has been going on in many areas recently; there are different perspectives and different opinions. The EFL world has adopted the term, and this has led to muddy discussion.

In personal correspondence, Keith Kelly says it depends what we mean by CLIL: If we mean children learning their subjects like science in a foreign language, it's bound to keep growing in the future. If we mean language teachers bringing more content into their classrooms, he doesn't know how long the acronym will last. And I totally agree.

The first group has a focus on subject teachers and teaching. The second one has a focus on language teachers and teaching, and we think it will only be called CLIL for the second group until something else comes along. But for the first group the attention to teaching through languages isn't really affected by the EFL world, and they will go on, like we have been doing in Argentina for many years.

But there is this distinction to be made between EFL and content teaching perspectives. So that's the distinction for us: does it come from the content curriculum?

In a nutshell, we might have to differentiate and say that we are following an "EFL perspective on CLIL", or something, but definitely there should be a differentiation. We could talk about CLIL and EFL CLIL, or something like that.

Hillyard: Would you like to make any concluding remarks?

Tosi: Join the programme! You can go to www.scienceacross.org or, if you need further information, you can write to me at monicatosi@hotmail.com.

Hillyard: Well, thank you for your time and for sharing your experiences with us. It's been really enlightening.

Tosi: Thank you very much, Susan. It has been a pleasure.

Hillyard: Goodbye.

Tosi: Goodbye.

BIODATA

Susan HILLYARD is a teacher, teacher-trainer, course designer, and author in the field of CLIL. She began her career with a B.Ed. (Hons) from Warwick University (U.K.), and since then has worked in fifteen countries. She currently works as a NILE Associate Trainer, training European teachers on intensive courses on methodology among other projects. She has taught Language IV at two major ITT colleges in Buenos Aires and on-line courses on *Creativity*, *TKT* and on *English in the World*, MA TESOL at the New School Uni, New York. She served as the Educational Advisor for The Performers Theatre. Her numerous publications include (as a co-author) the resource book for teachers, *Global Issues* (Oxford University Press) and (as an author) *Language and Globalisation* (Master in ELT, La Sabana University, Bogotá, Colombia). She was a member of the writing team for the on-line module for *Inglés, Inglés, English: ESP for South American Teachers* for the British Council, designed the Hong Kong, British Council *Summer School Courses for Teens*, and co-authored the *TDI-TKT on-line course* for Pearson, New York. She is presently the Coordinator of English in Action, a new pilot project where she is training twenty English language teachers to teach English through educational drama to students in special schools, hospital schools, orphanages, and home visits.