



Carmen Moreno Huart a teacher of English and Spanish as a Foreign Language, teacher trainer and materials developer in the Balearic Islands, as well as in England and the United States, Carmen has been director of the Spanish Socrates National Agency at the Ministry of Education in Madrid and has coordinated the International Programmes Unit at the regional Ministry of Education of the Balearic Islands. After returning to teaching in 2010, she is currently the Head of the Foreign Languages Department of Bendinat High School in Mallorca. She is one of the founding members of APABAL and the coordinator of the CITA project.

Looking ahead with the “CITA PROJECT”

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We are certainly going through a period of thrilling changes in the teaching profession.

The economic crisis, from which we are finally starting to envisage a recovery, and the new scientific and technologic developments, as well as the frequent population shifts for work, leisure or study, are bringing about new trends in the labour market, encouraging European governments to reform their education systems and adapt them to the current social needs. Unfortunately, in many cases the funding that should accompany those measures in order for them to be efficiently implemented does not materialize. One of the most disregarded areas in this respect is the one dealing with in-service teacher training.

Teachers tend to respond to these modifications with a sceptical attitude, regarding them as unjustified, useless or irrelevant. At the same time, we are all aware that it will be our responsibility to implement them, making the most of the resources available and providing the best service possible for our students.

Flexibility, I should say, is one of the key skills for a teacher nowadays. It is not only higher education teachers having to assimilate the Bologna process who are facing the winds of change. Secondary and primary teachers are also feeling the pressure of having to adjust their classes to new curricula and educational updates. Some see how the subject matter they have been teaching for years disappears from the system, thus forcing them to recycle themselves or retire. And most still have to provide the best instruction in spite of dwindling resources, budget cuts and frozen salaries.

Nevertheless, foreign language teachers have not as much to complain about as other teachers. Communication in today's multicultural society is vital. English has become the most commonly used language in international exchanges of all kinds and on the social networks all over Europe. Therefore, students are usually motivated to study it and the universities support its teaching and learning, requiring their students to take foreign language courses or prove their knowledge of a foreign language in order to graduate. Moreover, politicians



of all stripes tend to include this aspect of education as a star promise in their election campaigns.

All that being said, do we have an easy job? I wouldn't say so. Precisely because of that pressure from the education community, our job as foreign language teachers is somehow more difficult than ever. We need to acquire new skills and master new methods in order to teach our students not only academic English but also communication skills; we need to expose them to a variety of language registers that will enable them to survive in different situations, as well as to a sufficient number of semantic fields so that they can continue their studies or work in another country. Supporting content teachers in CLIL programmes and learning how to apply new technology effectively (when it happens to be working!) are two more of the demands we must confront.

And it is within this panorama that the role of teachers' associations is emerging as institutions that facilitate networking for both professional and personal development.

And it is also within this context that we first thought it was important to develop and modernize our organisations through international cooperation, by sharing common interests, experiences and ways to face our common challenges.

The European Union, which has been strongly committed to Education throughout the years, has come to the rescue again with the launching of the new generation of programmes known as ERASMUS +. These programmes, while trying to overcome some of the serious drawbacks of their predecessors, have opened some new ventures for European collaborative work.

That gave us our chance and that's how the project "CITA: Cooperation and Innovation in Teachers Associations" was born.

E-mails were sent all over Europe to similar associations, colleagues from different European countries were contacted, and, happily, IATEFL-Hungary were the first to answer and were immediately on board. Then came others from which we chose LAKMA from Lithuania as the ones we felt would fit best in the partnership. A tedious application process followed but the project was approved and here we are less than a year later and already nearly half way through our two-year adventure.

But what is CITA all about? The project aims at expanding the European dimension of regional teachers' associations by providing not only teachers but the community in general with professional support and interesting and innovative activities that may lead to formal, informal and non-formal training or which are just aimed at promoting a greater interest and motivation towards the profession.

CITA focuses on validating informal learning and defining innovative profiles for the teaching profession and teacher training, especially in regards to the challenges involved in CLIL teaching and the use of ICT in the classroom. It also aims to support the sustainability and management of the three associations and to implement engaging activities for the entire community in order to facilitate the construction of shared knowledge and the promotion of plurilingualism. The innovation instilled in our institutions thanks to the European Union grant will surely be reflected in the daily teaching practice of our members, thus providing a direct impact on the education system.

APABAL (*Associació de Professors d'Anglès de Balears*), IATEFL-Hungary (International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language-Hungary) and LAKMA (Lithuanian Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language), all of them non-profit teachers' associations, share the objectives of promoting and exchanging ideas among teaching professionals,

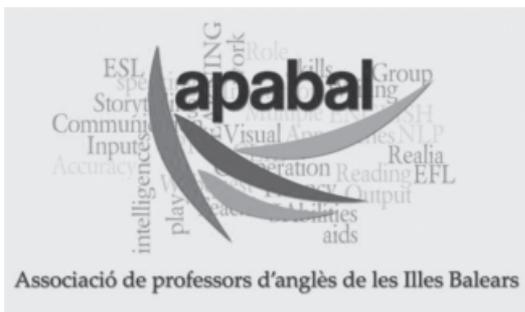
organising activities aimed at improving the quality of the teaching profession and exploring new directions in methods and approaches. All of us being associations of English teachers gives us a common ground to work on, whereas the variety of national languages and cultural backgrounds involved, the different fields of expertise of our members and the activities realised in each context will provide us with a lot to share and to learn from.

We intend to achieve our final intellectual output, "Guidelines for Running Sustainable Teachers' Associations", through the implementation of a series of activities: a survey on the contexts and needs of our associations, two short staff training courses (one on CLIL and another one on the new foreign language teacher's profile), eight job shadowing opportunities on CLIL and the implementation of a variety of selected common activities within the annual programmes of our associations. The CITA Guidelines will be promoted and disseminated at the final CITA International Conference that will take place in Palma (Mallorca, Spain) in June 2016.

Our cooperation has already started with a lot of enthusiasm and strength. We want a plural, participative project where all our members can have a say. That's why our first activity has been the development of a questionnaire, which many of you have been so kind as to answer, in order to know how you feel about us and, most important, how you think we should be, which activities we should carry out and what role we should play in each of our countries.

Many more activities are still to come; courses, job shadowing opportunities, debates, film series and lectures will all hopefully be energised by the European dimension that CITA brings.

From the CITA project steering committee, we invite you all to participate. You have an "appointment" (a *cita* in Spanish) with us. Please do not stand us up. We need you!!!



On June 22, 2010 APABAL (*Associació de professors d'anglès de les Illes Balears*/ English Teachers Association in the Balearic Islands) was presented publicly for the first time in Palma de Mallorca. It was created by a group of enthusiastic teachers of English, belonging to different educational levels, with the main objectives of raising awareness of the importance of quality English language teaching and supporting educational practices in this field.



It is therefore a very young association but quickly growing and becoming well-known in our community. Today, we have a membership of almost 150 people which is not bad when you think of a region of approximately 1 million inhabitants.

Other more specific aims of the association are to:

1. Keep the level of professional and educational competence in our region up to date as regards not only those who teach English there, but also those who teach other subject matters in English. Teachers and students of all levels, whether in the public or private sector, as well as all those citizens interested

in the English language and culture are welcome to become members.

2. Promote the development of research on the teaching of English, establishing links with the University of the Balearic Islands and other higher education institutions, foundations, enterprises and publishing companies.

3. Facilitate communication among English teachers, to share experiences, methods, materials and ideas.

In order to achieve these aims, the following types of activities are being organised:

1. The annual Conference, lectures and film series, cultural evenings and more...

2. The APABAL magazine whose first issue was launched in 2011.

3. Research projects within the framework of the University of the Balearic Islands.

4. Local and international projects

Now we are involved in a new exciting adventure, the development of the CITA project (Cooperation and Innovation in Foreign Language Teachers Associations), funded by the European Union, Erasmus+ programme, and we hope to learn a lot from our more experienced partners associations, IATEFL-HU and LAKMA. It is going to be a wonderful opportunity of sharing good practices, discussing common concerns and looking together for the best answers to benefit our members and the teaching profession in general.

If you want to know more about us, please visit our webpage <http://apabal.com/>





LAKMA (*Eng.* Lithuanian Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language) is a voluntary community of ELT professionals in Lithuania founded in 1993. It links pre-service and in-service teachers of English, teacher trainers, educators and publishers who are interested in interaction, sharing experience and communicating innovatory ideas in ELT. The association offers individual and institutional membership and links 250 members registered at the association database every year.

The members representing all different education levels are encouraged to participate in professional development events, conferences, SIGs activities, and inter/national projects. LAKMA members are actively involved in educational policy

decision-making processes, such as the Curriculum of Secondary Education, Programmes of State Examinations, National Contest of English, CLIL integration in primary and general secondary education.

LAKMA is an associate member of IATEFL and is open to partnership with teacher associations in Europe and worldwide.

It should be admitted that in the course of its activities, the association has gone through difficulties and failures in terms of membership retention, active voluntary participation, commitment and collaboration. It is also true that LAKMA can pride itself in being able to successfully

respond to challenges and find workable solutions.

All LAKMA past and upcoming activities are shared on the association website www.lakmaonline.lt.

LAKMA team is glad to join the CITA project seeing it as a wonderful opportunity to cooperate with Hungarian and Spanish colleagues in promotion and exchange of creative and innovative ideas. Sharing and learning from each other is an ideal way to grow personally and professionally.

