

Reviewer: Adam Simpson

Title: CLIL Activities

Authors: Liz Dale and Rosie Tanner

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Items reviewed: Book and accompanying CD-ROM

Summary:

A thoroughly worthwhile addition to the Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers series and an indispensable tool in the advancement of content and language integrated learning.

Review:

Ever since David Marsh and Anne Maljers ushered in the era of CLIL in 1994, this new methodology has remained a source of hot debate in ELT. While many teachers are suspicious of or indeed resistant to the very notion of Content and Language Integrated learning, others view it as the future of language teaching. For those unfamiliar with the concept, CLIL is an approach which aims to marry the learning of content to the acquisition of an additional language, thus teaching both the subject and the language simultaneously. While several notable books have been written on this methodology, our profession has been crying out for a definitive guide to CLIL: it is with this mission in mind that Liz Dale and Rosie Tanner have created this book.

Turning to the content pages, it immediately becomes evident that *CLIL Activities* stands out when compared to other publications on the subject. This resource book has clearly been written by experienced CLIL practitioners. *CLIL Activities* is split into three parts; Background to CLIL; Subject pages, and; Practical activities. This no-nonsense layout serves to suck the reader in from the start: first you are told what this phenomenon is,

you are then shown clearly how this might play out in your specific subject area, before finally you are given a large number of adaptable activities to help you in your teaching.

In part one, the Background to CLIL section, we are offered a clear explanation of what CLIL is and its benefits and challenges. This section is extremely informative and maps things out very clearly. Whether you regard yourself as a proponent or opponent of CLIL, this first section explains what it is all about, how it differs from content-based language teaching, as well as examining the role that the CLIL teacher plays in the classroom. Each section of part one is short, sharp and to the point, making it easy to digest. There are also self reflection tasks, most notable being the one that guides you into assessing 'how CLIL' your teaching is. All in all, you'll have a fairly comprehensive idea of what CLIL is and how it might relate to your teaching by the end of part one.

It would seem logical that anyone reading *CLIL Activities* might ask the question, 'how exactly is CLIL going to work for my particular subject?' This is precisely the issue the authors deal with in part two. The range of subjects included is impressive; art, design and technology; economics and business studies; geography; history; ICT; maths; music and drama; physical education; science. This part of the book begins, however, with a discussion how CLIL challenges learners. The challenges discussed are examined in terms of; 1) the affective barriers to learning; 2) the linguistic problems faced by learners, and; 3) cultural issues. This section, although only constituting a handful of pages, was a nice addition to the book; it was pleasing to see the other stakeholders acknowledged in this way. Part two continues with the subject pages. Each subject is presented to the reader over the course of four pages. Firstly, there is a description of the language of the subject, along with common examples. In maths, for instance, the importance of being able to define is exemplified with the sentence, '*in a parallelogram the sides are parallel and equal.*' In science, the importance of conditionals is highlighted: '*If an object is submerged completely, it displaces its own c-volume of fluid.*' The examples given for each subject provide a concise yet clear overview of the linguistic norms of the discipline.

These examples take up the first two pages of each subject and are followed in each case by an annotated sample text and a list of sample lesson aims. The sample text is particularly useful in terms of how it highlights what the teacher should be looking for when analysing materials. Granted, one page for an entire subject isn't comprehensive coverage, but even experienced language teachers could learn a lot from these succinct analyses of textual conventions. The lesson aims again are just examples of what teachers might want to teach in terms of speaking, writing, grammar and vocabulary. These are presented according to the descriptors of the Common European Framework (these descriptors are given in tabular form at the back of the book for those not familiar with the CEF). My overall impression of part two is that it does a fine job of orienting the teacher: here are the conventions of your subject, these are the kind of things you should be looking for and these are the sort of aims you should have in mind when teaching.

Part three - the main body of the book - has been organised into five chapters: Activating, Guiding understanding, Focus on language, Focus on speaking and Focus on writing. The logic of this is immediately evident, as these are clearly the different areas in which those wanting to implement the CLIL approach would consider using the activities in this book. A final chapter provides practical ideas for assessment, review and feedback. These six chapters contain between fourteen and nineteen different activities, all of which follow a formulaic layout. At the start of each activity is a preparation box which provides a one-sentence overview of what the activity involves, a quick overview of the thinking skills, language focus and language skills that the activity aims to develop, the time it will take, the suggested language level and the necessary preparation involved. This is followed by a procedural list of how to conduct the activity. Where necessary, there is either a graphical representation of what the board work may look like or a photocopiable handout. Each activity page is rounded off with teaching tips about how to conduct the activity and ideas as to how it might be implemented in particular subject areas.

The *Activating* chapter explores effective ways of stimulating student knowledge. Consequently, there are a number of activities based around graphic organizers, with others attempting to activate schemata, such as 'Guessing the Lesson' and 'Word Wall'. In *Guiding Understanding*, the authors explore ways of leading the learners into the subject with such activities as 'Interview as Input' and 'Gist Statements'. This chapter continues the exploration of graphic organizers, as well as considering how to make PowerPoint an interactive tool. The aims of the activities in the *Focus on language* are, obviously, geared at developing grammar and vocabulary. There is an activity based on the Academic Word List, another looking at vocabulary strategies, while others are based on classic word games. The productive skills are afforded a chapter each. *Focus on speaking* has activities themed on role plays, presentations and describing graphs, while *Focus on writing* contains activities looking at brainstorming techniques among others. Included in the *Assessment, Review and Feedback* chapter are activities geared towards creating rubrics and fashioning error correction codes, as well as ways of providing feedback. All in all, part three of the book is solid rather than revelatory or innovative. While experienced language teachers might work through these chapters and feel that they have probably done most of these activities in one form or another during their teaching careers, what shouldn't be overlooked is the value of being able to apply them to a range of situations and subjects. In a profession such as ours which has a tendency to throw the baby out with the bathwater, it is genuinely nice to see that classic, worthwhile activities are presented well and explained thoroughly. What part three lacks in innovation, it more than makes up for in detailing how the activities can be used and adapted to suit many situations. While it feels like it is aimed more towards subject teachers who have to deal with language than vice versa, I'd still suggest that experienced ELT professionals could gain a lot from revisiting these tried and tested techniques, especially given the expert way they have been presented in this book.

In discussing this title, authors Liz Dale and Rosie Tanner noted that they had worked collaboratively on each and every activity included. Whereas some co-authored books very much have the feel of different chapters having been solely prepared by one person, this book has a continuity of style which clearly stems from the two writers having written this in tandem. Consequently, the book contains a huge range of easily accessible and readily applicable activities that can be used in any order, as and when you see a need.

As far as the accompanying CD-ROM is concerned, those of you who are expecting an all singing, all dancing interactive experience will be disappointed. That's not to say that the disc isn't useful; on the contrary, what they have done with this resource is simple yet very clever. The CD-ROM contains print-ready PDF versions of the activities presented in the book, so rather than having to bend back the pages to try and get a decent looking photocopy, you can print one off from the disc itself (this is also invaluable for those of us who like to project such things onto whiteboards). The activity indexing system from the book is replicated on the disc, so the activities are easy to find. All in all, while it would have been nice to get some extras on the disc, it nevertheless serves as a useful and well thought out supplementary resource.

The Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers series is, arguably, the great handbook collection in English language teaching. Having offered practical ideas, techniques and activities for the teaching of English and other languages over the course of many decades, the books in this collection have provided inspiration for generations of both teachers and trainers. The series, despite now boasting over 40 titles, doesn't allow new members into its club without good reason, though. Consequently, any book entering the collection does so with something of a pre-ordained stamp of approval. With this in mind, I'm glad to report that CLIL Activities is fully worthy of its place in the Cambridge Handbooks pantheon.