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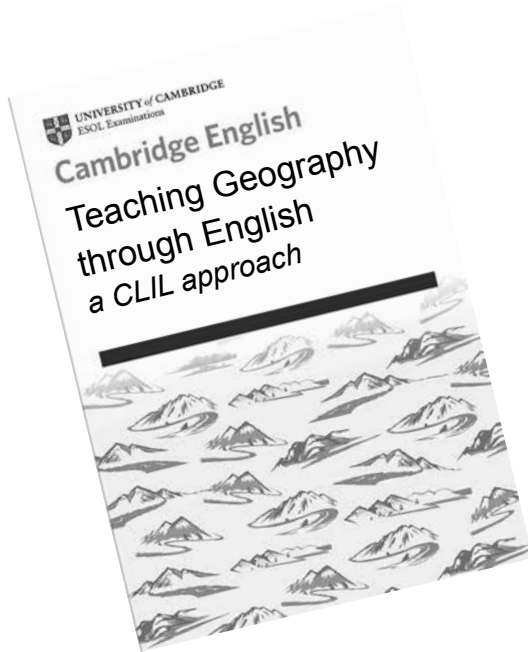


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# Teaching Geography through English A CLIL approach\*

A book review with updating suggestions

Ezana E. Habte-Gabr\*\*



It's not very often that exam preparation manuals are reviewed in journals. However, considering the global scope and impact of Cambridge testing on knowledge, seemingly feedback from educators and content practitioners would serve in terms of updating manuals and their pedagogical paradigms. *Teaching Geography through English – A CLIL*, a manual that can be accessed online, is part of the teaching material designed for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). The manual provides an overview of Content and Language.

Integrated Learning (CLIL) theory along with examples from lessons derived from Physical Geography. As the manual is designed for ESOL and potential content area or geography teachers, teaching geography to English, emphasis is largely placed on the principles and practices of CLIL so that teachers are aware of how to go about simultaneously teaching geography content and language. This review suggests that geography tends to be limited to aspects of physical geography in the manual and could also encompass *human geography* and more synchronized examples of simultaneously teaching language through content.

A definition of CLIL is provided at the beginning, stressing that content “leads language learning” (p. 2) and then proceeds to give a definition of geography, noting that it is a discipline which seeks to explain and describe the unfolding of human relations within space. “Learners are expected to ask geographical questions”. An example of the nature of coastline change as a generative theme, which requires both subject vocabulary from

\* Cambridge University (2012). *Teaching Geography through English – A CLIL approach*. Boston: Cambridge University press.

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content and grammar from the language to be able to complete the task.

Next, the Coyle's 4 Cs are presented as important components for geography. These include Content (geography), Communication (being able to talk about cause and effects of spatial change such as flooding and landslides), Cognition (being able to analyze changes through maps and explaining environmental change) and Culture (bringing in the student's own background and experiences). Citizenship and culture are also considered part of the culture component.

Geographic language, which is referred to as "content-obligatory" and language acquired from general English classes, and "content-compatible" are considered as other important aspects of the CLIL Geography class (p. 6). A table pairing vocabulary under both categories is presented. For example, under content-obligatory "Estuary" and under "content compatible water".

Geography CLIL lesson planning follows the language component by looking at activating prior knowledge by permitting first language usage when necessary. Input and output must also be planned: considering how the teacher plans to present material and how students are expected to demonstrate knowledge based on written and oral production. "Wait-Time", considering extra time for questions and answers as a strategy to overcome language difficulties, is the second aspect of lesson planning. Collaborative tasks and the need to provide extra support to cognitive skills are also recommended in lesson planning through scaffolding, such as providing prompts for vocabulary and grammar structures to explain processes. Accordingly, Higher Order Thinking skills (HOTS) and Lower or Order Thinking Skill LOTS (What and where must be considered).

The manual goes on to address challenges affronted by teachers (p. 7). In the case of

language teachers teaching geography, the challenge is to gain confidence with the content and, conversely, content teachers are faced with the challenge of language skills and language teaching. Learners require more support in understanding content as language could impede acquisition. Outcomes, task and support materials must be provided by instructors for content and language to be acquired, by having students complete charts and tables for scaffolding. The need to be able to develop material suited to the learner's environment is considered a challenge in Geography CLIL as material adapted to specific countries and language groups is scarce. Finally, the assessment challenge it tackled by looking at the "formative" and "summative" aspects. Here, progress in content and language progress must be considered. Collaborative and Task Based Learning are important components of the evaluation process and specific criteria must be employed in evaluation. Furthermore, the manual recommends assessing aspects of the 4 Cs as well.

Then, a CLIL lesson based on Physical Geography, which focuses on the rivers and their geomorphology is presented, stressing the need for obligatory and compatible language. Tables and charts are used to determine language in order to develop oral, written and collaborative tasks, which constantly integrate language and content, culminating the use of a local physical map to demonstrate knowledge and the HOTS.

The briefness and the presentation of the manual make for a very user friendly document at a global level as the text is brief and not too jargon-laden. Its usefulness goes beyond the ESOL exam preparation as it provides a well summarized overview of CLIL Geography an emerging area within CLIL. Given the limited published material for CLIL Geography, the manual gives into planning a lesson with limited sources through the use of

graphic organizers, which constantly organize and categorize content and language.

At the level of content, a broader concept of geography could be presented by integrating physical and human geography as the lesson tends to heavily lean towards the Earth Sciences or even a natural science course. Equal weight should be placed on defining geography as has been on language. The manual would benefit from providing a working definition of geography as the subject matter may not be clear to the language teacher, hence limiting the concept of discipline to Physical Geography or the Earth Sciences. Aspects of Human geography such as Culture, Economics and States easily lend themselves to Geography CLIL courses, which could easily be calibrated to LOTS and HOTS as through a shift from description and location of human activity to providing a spatial analysis for the unfolding of human events. The lessons on coastline and rivers could be a starting point to introduce human geography by locating these physical features on a global political map, for example.

In terms of bringing in the 4 Cs of Coyle, culture and citizenship would be on the backburner in task, which is largely derived from Physical Geography devoid its human component. Perhaps one approach to tackling this would be to look into the The National Council for Geographic Education's (NCGE) 5 themes of geography: Location, Place, Human Interaction, Movement (people), Region -which were developed in 1994 to provide a geography which is more encompassing when it comes to nature and mankind. Perhaps organizing CLIL activates within this NCGE scheme would allow for the discipline of geography to easily attain the 4cs and language skills.

Finally, the clearness and length of this 30 page manual provides a clear demonstration of CLIL as it provides its theoretical underpinnings along with a lesson. From a geographical perspective, importance to the nature of geography warrants more coverage and understanding should "content lead learning".