On Solid Ground. Matching Practice and Theory in a CLIL Perspective

Maria Angela Ceruti

Abstract. What differentiates CLIL from simply studying something in another language, as most immigrant students do when they arrive in a foreign country?

In a learning environment that want to promote and sustain BOTH content AND language in a creative and innovative way, language cannot be considered just as a by-product of content, but must have equal status. What does theory say about the cross-fertilization process that allows us to choose the right content to sustain language, and vice-versa? Creativity and innovation in CLIL can only be effective if they stand on solid ground, that is if pedagogical backgrounds and long-term objectives concerning language and learning are clearly defined. This is also in view of a better critical evaluation of what is proposed.

Drawing on the writer’s experience as a language teacher, materials developer and researcher, this paper claims that those who are involved in CLIL - including content teachers - should be aware of the principles that favour also the ‘knowledge of language’. This article tries to raise questions on how creativity and innovation in a CLIL perspective could be made more effective by systematically taking into account:

- the role of ‘probable’ versus ‘possible’ language,
- the notions of input, awareness, noticing, and hypothesis formation,
- the use of corpus-driven tasks in teaching and learning materials,
- awareness of text types,
- studies on language acquisition.

All of the above issues, to various extents and depending on the type of learners, their needs and the related contexts, can contribute to better identifying and developing pedagogical aims and practical activities.

The examples of learning tasks included with this article represent an attempt at putting all this into practice, bearing in mind the constraints of everyday educational situations, and towards the development of ‘parallel’ content and language syllabi.

Key words: CLIL, content-language acquisition, corpus-driven tasks, text awareness.