

2012 Dual Language and Immersion Education Researcher Convocation

PANEL: IMMERSION PEDAGOGY AND CLASSROOM INTERACTION

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Current Knowledge Base

Immersion Pedagogy

1. Exposure to a target language through subject-matter instruction enables students to develop comprehension skills and communicative abilities that far exceed those attained by students studying the target language as a subject (Harley, Cummins, Swain, & Allen, 1990).
2. It remains unclear whether the advantage derives simply from a greater amount of exposure to the target language or from the cognitive benefits of target language exposure specifically through subject-matter instruction.
3. Use of the target language to deliver subject-matter instruction has limitations in terms of the range of the language forms and functions to which it exposes students (Swain, 1988); this is one of the reasons that immersion students do not attain higher levels of proficiency, especially in terms of grammatical accuracy, lexical variety, and sociolinguistic competence.
4. Immersion pedagogy needs to integrate a greater focus on language, because the high levels of oral and written proficiency underlying the academic literacy required for school success are not attainable through only incidental references to language (e.g., Met, 2008).
5. The instructional integration of language and content is challenging for teachers (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012) and needs to be systematically addressed through pre-service teacher education and in-service professional development.
6. Different proposals for integrating language and content have been made:
 - a. encourage meta-talk (Swain, 1998) during content-based collaborative tasks designed with a linguistic focus to promote “linguaging” (Swain & Lapkin, in press);
 - b. integrate form-focused and content-based instruction through a counterbalanced approach that requires shifts in attention between form and meaning (Lyster, 2007);
 - c. convey subject matter through knowledge relationships (i.e., cause-effect, hypothesis, comparison) actualized in language forms made explicit by teachers (Kong, 2009);
 - d. emphasize how linguistic features construe particular kinds of meanings in discipline-specific ways (Llinares, Morton, & Whittaker, 2012).
7. Research in French immersion (see review in Lyster, 2007) has shown linguistic gains made by students exposed to form-focused instruction that include noticing activities (e.g., typographical enhancement, increased frequency), awareness activities (e.g., tasks drawing attention to contrasts between L1 and L2 or between target and non-target forms), and opportunities for guided practice with feedback (e.g., linguistic games, role plays); in addition, studies of meta-talk suggest that such tasks provide propitious opportunities for language learning to take place (e.g., Swain & Lapkin, 2002).

Classroom interaction

1. Teacher-student interaction is pivotal in promoting language development in immersion through questioning and feedback techniques that teachers use to provide learners with the scaffolding they need in order to understand, participate, and learn both language and content (e.g., Lyster, 2007).
2. Display questions are useful in immersion for checking comprehension and verifying content mastery, but students' language and content learning may benefit from fewer questions eliciting facts and more questions requesting further elaboration, justification, explanation, or exemplification (Dalton-Puffer, 2007).
3. One way for teachers to counterbalance language and content is to provide corrective feedback during meaningful interaction. Recasts are especially frequent in immersion classroom interaction, because they serve discourse functions that facilitate the delivery of subject matter and provide helpful scaffolding to learners when target forms are beyond their abilities, although prompts have proven more effective for targeting specific language features such as grammatical gender. However, students are more likely to benefit from a range of feedback types than from one type at the expense of others (Lyster, 2007).
4. Immersion classroom discourse patterns vary according to specific instructional settings; for example, in response to teacher feedback, most learner repair followed recasts in Japanese immersion classrooms and prompts in French immersion classrooms (Lyster & Mori, 2006).
5. The use of the L2 among peers in one-way immersion seems to peak around grades 4-5 (Blanco-Iglesias, Broner, & Tarone, 1995). Students in two-way immersion, regardless of language background, show an overall preference for English when interacting with peers (Carranza, 1995; Potowski, 2007).
6. Native speakers of the higher-status language in two-way classrooms may dominate classroom discourse and negatively impact classroom conversational dynamics (Bekerman, 2011; Palmer, 2009).
7. In two-way immersion, teachers' expectations can play a pivotal role in determining their students' language choices (Ballinger & Lyster, 2009) and, through skillfully managed classroom discourse, teachers can create opportunities for more equitable talk patterns among minority language and majority language students (e.g., Palmer, 2008).
8. To reap the benefits of pairing students of different language dominance, it is feasible for teachers to explicitly teach students the strategies they will need for collaborating and learning language from one another (Ballinger, in press).

Questions/Issues for Future Research

1. Research on form-focused instruction and collaborative tasks has been conducted more in the context of language arts than during subject-matter instruction, leaving open many questions about the feasibility and effectiveness of focusing on language during subject-matter instruction. How can a focus on language be best integrated into subject-matter instruction?

2. What immersion-specific skills do teachers need to acquire in order to integrate language and content instruction effectively?
3. Can discipline-specific language (i.e., the language of science, of mathematics, of history, etc.) be identified in ways that would help teachers integrate language and content?
4. Given that different groups of learners (e.g., Spanish-dominant, English-dominant, bilingual) in two-way immersion classrooms have different language learning needs, in what ways can form-focused instruction be adapted to accommodate these different needs?
5. Do the observed differences in corrective feedback patterns across different immersion contexts differentially affect target language development?
6. How can the L1 be used most effectively to benefit L2 learning? What are the points in instructional activities when using the L1 to scaffold L2 learning is an efficient route to L2 learning? What role does student L2 proficiency play in responding to these questions?
7. What is the role of immersion students' "languaging" (e.g., collaborative dialogue, private speech) in developing content knowledge and awareness of its intrinsic links with language? How can teachers support students' languaging to mediate the construction of language and content knowledge?
8. What are the most effective types of (a) collaborative tasks that create optimal conditions for using the non-dominant language in peer interaction and (b) instructional practices that integrate two languages in ways that enhance biliteracy development?
9. Given that multicultural competence has been identified as a goal of immersion, are there curricula that have been developed to teach culture? If so, what are the effects and, if not, what can be done to remedy the situation?
10. To what extent and in what ways is immersion pedagogy driven by culture? What is the effect of culture-based pedagogy on students' identity development, language development, and academic achievement?
11. What assessment tools can we use in immersion that will move students' language and content learning forward while at the same time satisfying external evaluation requirements?

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