

The Bridge: From Research to Practice

The Importance of Sequencing and Planning When Integrating Language and Content

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Lesson Plan Inside

As a first-year teacher, hired to teach in a new French immersion program, I was often overwhelmed by the challenge of teaching my first and second graders everything required by the district, as well as improving their ability to speak, read, write, and understand French. My understanding of immersion education was that if you immerse children in a second language, they will become functionally bilingual. As I struggled through my first year, I noticed that my students did make tremendous progress in French.

Nevertheless, I frequently wondered: how are students supposed to learn native-like linguistic structures, and how do I teach my students grammar, vocabulary, and culture in a day that is already too full with district and state requirements? At the end of the year, I was still alive (a bit to my surprise), but I was filled with questions. Happily, I participated in the 1998 Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) Summer Immersion Institute entitled, "Meeting the Challenges of Immersion Education," where I was introduced to Mimi Met's ideas about integrating language into content instruction. Her approach to this issue and the research articles I was introduced to during the institute provided some answers to the questions I had posed so many times throughout the year.

As I began to explore research findings on integrating language and content instruction, I wanted to have a better understanding of where immersion research had been and where it is going. I started by reading Roy Lyster's "Speaking Immersion" (1987). Like myself, Lyster thought "'Start young, learn fast' . . . immerse a child in a language, and he'll learn it just as he learned his mother tongue through osmotic process," (p. 701). However, as a former French immersion teacher, Lyster had noticed that his students, although they were able to communicate almost any message in French, did not demonstrate native-like fluency. In observing other immersion classrooms, he also noticed that although students were able to communicate in the second language, they were unable to do so with any degree of consistent grammatical accuracy. Lyster suggested that this might be due to immersion teachers placing more emphasis on communication than on accuracy. Teachers did not want to stifle students' attempts to speak in the second language by constantly correcting their use of language. As a result, a type of "immersion interlanguage" evolved (p. 714).

As part of the solution, Lyster (1987) advocates “a new linguistic syllabus for French Immersion which would combine the program’s communicative aspects with a more systematic and graded language component aimed at second language learners” (p. 715). Lyster recommends that this linguistic syllabus be part of any immersion program from its inception. And, in order for it to be effective, the linguistic syllabus needs to be taught in a meaningful, culturally rich context.

In addition, Swain (1996) writes that we need to be aware of the language that is not naturally present in our classrooms and to provide for it. The content of lessons becomes the scaffold and the systematic acquisition of language is added to this scaffold.

As immersion teachers, how can we incorporate a linguistic syllabus into our existing curriculum? Furthermore, how can we meet the demands of our content-intensive curriculum, when our students’ language abilities may be insufficient? To meet this challenge, immersion teachers need to maximize their use of planning time. By identifying what Mimi Met and colleagues call content-obligatory language and content-compatible language, teachers can establish long- and short-range curriculum goals (Snow, Met, & Genesee 1989). Content-obligatory language is language necessary for meeting specific content objectives. In contrast, content-compatible language supports content of a lesson, as well as the linguistic and cultural objectives of the curriculum.

Met (1994) also encourages teachers to strategically sequence their language and content objectives, such that lessons requiring the introduction of new concepts be taught only after students have been exposed to necessary vocabulary and structure. For example, in planning for an upcoming unit on city life, which provides an opportunity to use the imperative form as students give and receive directions to various city buildings, the teacher might choose to focus on the imperative form and adverbs of location in a prior lesson. Thus, teachers sequence and embed language objectives within content lessons in a systematic way. In sum, immersion teachers are encouraged to view each lesson not only as a content lesson, but as a language lesson as well.

Reflecting on research and Met’s recommendations for practice, I have chosen as example a lesson that I taught for the first time in my first- and second-grade classroom in January of this past year. As a culminating activity to the unit on time and as a form of assessment, students create a book of daily activities. My initial approach didn’t yield quite the results I had hoped for: I had briefly introduced the reflexive verbs and then had asked the students to write what they do at a given time (using the reflexive form) underneath a clock on which they had drawn the corresponding time. Clearly, this was not the best way to do this. In order to perform the task the way I had envisioned, students need to be able to use reflexive verbs to express daily activities. Consequently, for this lesson, three kinds of language were content-obligatory: 1) the reflexive verbs forms, 2) daily activity vocabulary, and 3) language for talking about time.

Below, I will discuss how I can teach the lesson more effectively, through strategic sequencing, setting long- and short-range goals, and identifying content-obligatory and content-compatible language. First I will offer possible lessons which introduce time vocabulary earlier in the year. Next, I will outline my lesson plan for the unit on time, which depends on knowledge of language that I will need to introduce in prior lessons. This strategic sequencing of time vocabulary paves the way for later lessons where the same language becomes content-obligatory.

Prior to the lesson

In the lesson that follows, the content-obligatory grammatical structure I've chosen to incorporate is reflexive verbs. Knowing that I plan to teach this lesson in January, I can now plan to incorporate the reflexive verbs as content-compatible language into lessons during the fall.

One way to incorporate the reflexive verbs in a content-compatible capacity is to include a reflexive question into the morning meeting. As this may be new vocabulary for most students (S), the teacher (T) will need to act out the question. For example, in the first week of school, the teacher could focus on the verb "to get up".

T: Raise your hand if ***you get up*** before 9:00.

S: I do.

T: Tre, ***you get up*** before 9:00?

The teacher then pretends to be Tre and models his response, both for him and the rest of the class: "Yes, ***I get up*** before 9:00."

T: Thank you Tre, ***who*** else ***gets up*** before 9:00?

The teacher writes the sentences on the board, creating a list, and adds to it throughout the week. The activity continues on a daily basis, incorporating a new reflexive verb each week and changing the questions as time goes on to include different pronouns. Each week, the new reflexive verbs are added to a word wall.

Another topic covered in second grade is a review of the bar graph and the pictograph. Students are asked to graph various things. However, instead of graphing what they ate for breakfast, as suggested in the curriculum, the students can graph responses to a survey (which they conduct orally) whose content is driven by reflexive verbs. Again, this uses the reflexive verbs in a content-compatible context. Students will be familiar with reflexive verbs from using them during the morning meeting. This provides a meaningful, interactive way for them to use the reflexive verbs.

The Lesson: Creating Family Activity Pop-Up Books

Theme: Time

Grade: 2

Materials

- Master of the blank clock face with dotted lines on bottom half of paper
- Model of pop-up book

Objectives

1. Students will draw time on blank clocks.
2. Students will correctly write the corresponding time in a full sentence.
3. Students will correctly write a full sentence describing time-specific daily activities using a reflexive verb and a different subject pronoun on each page.

Content-obligatory language

Students must be able to recognize which verbs are reflexive and be able to use them accurately with a variety of subject pronouns. (There are other examples of content-obligatory language for this lesson; however, I have chosen to focus on the reflexive verbs.)

Activities

1. Introduce the activity by showing students a completed model of the pop-up book they will be making.
2. Invite students to suggest things they might want to write in their own family activity book.
3. Remind students they will always want to include answers to three different questions on each page:
 1. Who is doing the activity?
 2. What are they doing?
 3. At what time of day are they doing the activity?

On an overhead write the three questions, leaving a blank space for students to brainstorm possible words to answer the questions. For example, a page in a student's book might have a picture of her mom going for her morning run. The text the student creates might read:
My mom gets up every morning at 6:00. She likes to run.

4. As a class, brainstorm a list of words that will be helpful for the activity. Write these words on the overhead. Verbs will be written in the infinitive form only.

5. Remind students that they need to have a different subject pronoun on each page. Students will also include different times: on the hour, quarter after, at the half hour, and quarter to the hour (they choose the hour in all cases), and two additional examples where they choose both the hour and minutes-after-the-hour. Write subject pronouns on the board and give examples of the different times.
6. Students will illustrate their books when they are finished writing their sentences. Students need to write out their sentence ideas on a separate sheet of paper first, so that the teacher can check for the reflexive verbs before students write the sentences in their pop-up books.

Closing

Tomorrow, you may continue working on this. Then at the end of the week, I will show you how to cut out and assemble your books. You will have a pop-up book like mine to take home to read to your family.

Conclusion

We now know that we cannot simply immerse children in an immersion classroom and expect them to attain the level of proficiency required to function in a native-like capacity in the target language. One step immersion teachers can take to ensure that students are headed in that direction is to provide for systematic language acquisition by integrating language and content. In order to integrate language and content successfully, teachers must spend a significant amount of time planning for strategic sequencing of linguistic and cultural objectives as determined by the curriculum. Through specifying long- and short-range goals, teachers can identify and sequence content-obligatory and content-compatible language. Using these ideas as a point of departure, immersion teachers can plan meaningful lessons which include both content **and** language objectives. ○

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