

Discussion Session:

What Should We Expect in Fluency and Accuracy from Immersion?

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1. What were the features of the original full-immersion model and why?

From: Cohen, A. D. & Swain, M. (1976). Bilingual education: The 'immersion' model in the North American context. *TESOL Quarterly*, 10, 45-53. Reprinted in J. E. Alatis & K. Twaddell (Eds.), *English as a second language in bilingual education* (pp. 55-63). Washington, D.C.: TESOL, 1976; and in J. B. Pride (Ed.), *Sociolinguistic aspects of language learning and teaching* (pp. 144-151). London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979.

- (1) All instruction initially (i.e., in kindergarten and grade 1) is in L2.³
- (2) In second, third or fourth grade, L1 language arts (reading, writing, etc.) are introduced in L1.
- (3) By fifth grade, content subjects such as Geography or History may be taught in L1.
- (4) All kindergarten pupils are unilingual in L1. In essence, the successful program starts as a *segregated* one linguistically. This segregation eliminates the kinds of ridicule that students exert on less-proficient performers. In immersion education, all learners start off linguistically "in the same boat." In later grades other children with more advanced L2 abilities can be brought into the class with positive effects.⁴
- (5) In first grade, native speakers of L2 may be introduced into the classroom to provide native peer models of L2, to foster interethnic interaction and friendship, and, in essence, to make the program a two-way bilingual education program. For the native speakers of L2, it may be in actuality a native language program.
- (6) The learners are selected without special attention to social class, intelligence, personality factors (such as shyness) or any language disabilities they may have.⁵
- (7) The teachers are bilingual, although they only speak L2 in the classroom. They need not be native speakers of L2, but must be perfectly fluent in it and possess the appropriate adult-speaking-to-child register. (Particularly if it is intended that the students get the message that it is desirable for everyone to be bilingual, then there are advantages to having a blond-haired blue-eyed teacher as the Spanish-speaking model in a California Spanish immersion or bilingual education program.)
- (8) The students rarely hear the teachers speaking L1 to each other. If L1-speaking visitors wish to address the teachers in the classroom, the teachers use students to interpret for them. At the kindergarten level—before the children can perform this task well—the teacher may step outside with the visitor. Outside the classroom, the teacher is also careful to use L2 whenever the students are around. Although this procedure may appear to be excessive, it *does* emphasize to the students that L2 is a language the teachers use—not just when they "have to" in the classroom.
- (9) In kindergarten, the children are permitted to speak in L1 until they are ready to speak in L2. The teacher makes it clear that she understands L1 by responding appropriately. The teacher will often repeat the children's remarks or comment on them in L2. (For a description of teaching strategies used in response to the use of L1 by the students, see Stern and Swain 1973.)
- (10) In first grade and beyond, the teacher requests that only L2 be spoken in class, except during L1 medium classes (see nos. 2 and 3 above). Ideally, a teacher other than the immersion teacher teaches L1-medium classes so as to keep the languages separated by person, at least at the early grade levels.
- (11) The program follows the regular school curriculum. Sometimes this is difficult if L2 materials are not available in the same series that the school is using for L1 instruction. Careful curriculum planning and development are essential.
- (12) In the early grades, there are no structured L2 lessons (pattern practice drills, etc.) in class. This avoids the selection and sequencing of structures in a way that is inconsistent with how children actually learn language. L2 is the medium of instruction rather than a separate subject. Formal discussion of persistent problem areas in pronunciation (e.g., aspiration of voiceless stops) and grammar (e.g., gender agreement) may be introduced in later grades.
- (13) The teacher has the expectation that the children will learn L2 and content material through immersion.
- (14) When attrition occurs, new unilingual L1-speaking children may or may not be permitted to enter. Programs allowing replacements have varied in the procedures they adopt, some only allowing new entries at the kindergarten level and some at various points up through the grades.
- (15) The program is optional. Students participate in the program voluntarily and only with the consent of the parents.
- (16) In many cases the program has been initiated because of parental pressure. Support of both the community and the educational administration is essential.
- (17) Some programs elicit and receive parent volunteer support in the classroom.

2. What language do kids in an immersion program actually think in?

Cohen, A. D. (1994). The language used to perform cognitive operations during full-immersion math tasks. *Language Testing*, 11(2):171-195.

The findings from this study, impressionistic as they may be, seemed to indicate that the full-immersion students were using their native language more for solving maths problems, especially numerical problems, than they were using the foreign language. Both according to their self-reports and as observed through their introspective and retrospective verbal reports, the subjects *usually* started processing a word problem in Spanish by reading it to themselves or out loud, and then either 1) performed online translation to English before solving the maths problem, or 2) continued in Spanish until or unless they encountered a conceptual problem. Whereas it would seem obvious that the learners had to read the problem in Spanish in order to gain access to the task, there were other ways they could perform the task, such as through asking the teacher or another student for an explanation and, as we have seen, in the latter case this could be in English.

3. What would the impact be from an intervention to enhance the academic language of immersion students? What impact would such an intervention have on their academic grammar?

Cohen, A. D. & Gómez, T. (2008). Towards enhancing academic language proficiency in a fifth-grade Spanish immersion classroom. In D. M. Brinton, O. Kagan, & S. Bauckus (Eds.), *Heritage language education: A new field emerging* (pp. 289-300). NY, NY: Routledge.

The aim of this study was to determine whether students' academic language could be improved. An intervention was planned which involved: (1) exposing the students to modeling by the instructional staff on solving science and history problems in Spanish academic language, and (2) enhancing the students' inner voice in academic Spanish. The intervention emphasized problem solving in academic Spanish using the L2 inner voice and collaborating with classmates.

The students' development of their inner L2 voice appeared to assist them in solving problems in science and history. In addition, the qualitative analysis of Spanish academic language performance over time provided some evidence that the treatment may have had a positive effect on language development. Students tended to show some improvement over the course of the intervention in their ability to describe academic problems in Spanish and define academic terms with greater accuracy (see Cohen & Gómez, 2004, for more detailed examples).

4. What is the current state of language proficiency among immersion students? Does this vary by language – e.g., in Spanish L2 vs. Chinese L2?
5. How good can the oral and written language of students be in language immersion programs?
6. How would we move the students from where they are to where they could be?
7. What would be the ingredients in an ideal immersion program?