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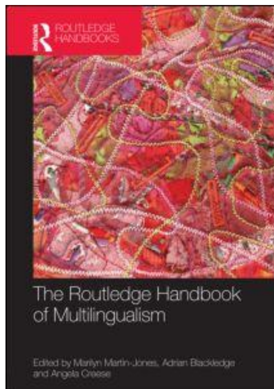

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Immersion education

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11 Immersion education

En route to multilingualism

Anne-Marie de Mejía

Introduction

It is interesting to notice that many of the publications referring to multilingual education use metaphors referring to movement. Thus, we have *Beyond Bilingualism* (1998), *Pathways to Multilingualism* (2008), *Forging Multilingual Spaces* (2008) and *Towards Multilingual Education* (2009), among others. These seem to indicate that although bilingualism and bilingual education are a well-established part of the field, emphasis on multilingualism is still evolving. This is ratified in Genesee's (2004: 570) discussion of key aspects of bilingual education for majority students where he observes, 'The evidence to date concerning trilingual education is encouraging; but we currently lack detailed understanding of the effectiveness of these programs.'

In this chapter I will briefly examine the development of bilingual (or single) immersion education from its beginnings in Canada and trace its progress in such different contexts as Ireland, Paraguay and Australia. Immersion education, in this sense, is a type of bilingual education programme in which majority language students (generally) are exposed to a second (or foreign) language in the classroom, which serves as a medium for subject-matter instruction (Swain and Johnson 1997). I will then go on to look in more detail at multilingual immersion in Canada, Finland, Catalonia and the Basque Country. In these cases, two or more languages are introduced in the school curriculum in addition to the student's first language, either as languages of content area teaching and learning, or as separate subjects. There will be a particular focus on three key aspects: pedagogical issues, the notion of codeswitching and professional development in relation to immersion programmes. I will end by suggesting ways forward and insights for the future.

Early developments in the field of immersion

Canadian (single) immersion

As is well known, the first experimental immersion programme was set up in St Lambert in 1965 to promote functional bilingualism by using French as a language of teaching and learning as well as English, in order to enable Anglophone children to acquire a high level of proficiency in

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French while maintaining their proficiency in their first language. Furthermore, it was also hoped that the immersion programmes would lead to better relationships between members of the Anglo and Francophone communities.

Two types of provision were established. The first took into account the age at which students enter the programme: early immersion (four to five years old), middle or delayed immersion (nine to ten years old); and late immersion (secondary or high school level). The second indicated the amount of time spent studying in the immersion (second or foreign) language: total immersion (100 per cent immersion initially in the second language leading to 50 per cent contact at the end of primary school); and partial immersion (50 per cent immersion in the second language throughout the programme).

A separation or 'sheltered' approach was incorporated into the programmes from the beginning. The principle behind this is that learners of the target language are kept apart from native speakers, 'at least until their linguistic skills are sufficient to permit them to learn academic content on a par with native speakers' (Swain 1982: 84). In addition, Swain claimed that all children in programmes of this type should begin with the same zero level of target language skills. She recommended adopting three basic principles to achieve successful bilingual education. The first was the principle of 'First Things First', or ensuring a sound basis in the child's first language (L1) for second language (L2) learning. The second principle was 'Bilingualism through Monolingualism', by which she argued for the merits of a separation (rather than a concurrent) approach to classroom language use. She called her third principle 'Bilingualism as a Bonus', in which she advocated letting the students know the advantages of bilingualism for them, which would lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy (Swain 1983).

Overall, the results of assessments of the Canadian immersion programmes are positive in academic terms. Student proficiency in understanding and reading French has been evaluated as of native-speaker standard, first language development has not been affected and there are no negative reports on academic achievement levels. Student proficiency levels in speaking and writing French were below native-speaker level, yet higher than results from the regular Core French programme (Genesee 2004). There was, however, no noticeable effect of a change in attitude of the students towards the Francophone community in Canada.

Since 1965 there has been a steady spread of French immersion programmes throughout Canada. In 1977–8 there were 37,835 students enrolled in immersion, whereas in 1998–9 the number had jumped to 317, 351 students in around 2,000 schools. At primary school level the Quebec Department of Education maintains that 60 per cent of all students in the province are enrolled in immersion programmes (Rebuffot 2000).

We may well ask what the importance of this pedagogical innovation is in the future development of bilingual education. First of all, it is important to situate immersion education within the wider field of teaching and learning second or foreign languages. As Heller has noted,

> The basic idea underlying immersion, a notion borrowed from communicative language learning theory, is that by using the target language as a language of communication in authentic situations, such as subject-matter instruction or any other form of teacher-student or student-student communication outside strictly instructional contexts, students' acquisition of the target language will be improved.
>
> *(1990: 73)*

Thus, we can see that immersion with its emphasis on content instruction is an example of a wider approach, that of language as communication and use in authentic, contextualized situations, where the attention of the learner is focused on meaning rather than on form. This

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notion can be linked to concepts such as task-based learning and activity-based syllabuses characteristic of many foreign language teaching programmes, where the emphasis is not directly on language learning per se, but rather language learning results from carrying out tasks or doing activities related to other subjects in the curriculum.

Another important consideration to bear in mind in the rapid spread of immersion programmes is that they have been extensively funded by the Canadian Federal Government Administration as part of a highly publicized initiative designed to support official bilingualism within the country. They may, thus, be described as one of the most thoroughly investigated educational innovations (Stern 1984), being the first educational programme using the second language as a medium of instruction to be 'subjected to intensive long-term research evaluation' (Cummins 2000: 1).

Later developments

The success of immersion education is evidenced by the number of countries in different parts of the world that openly espouse this type of bilingual provision. In this section we will briefly look at some recent developments in Europe (Ireland), in South America (Paraguay) and in Australia.

Ireland

According to Ó Muircheartaigh and Hickey (2008), immersion education is available in the Republic of Ireland at preschool, primary and secondary levels. These programmes differ from the Canadian model in that all subjects are taught through Irish, and English, the L1 of the majority of the pupils, is a subject in primary. A foreign language is added in secondary school. In addition, another modality, denominated 'mixed' immersion, has its roots in the Two Way Immersion programmes popularised in the USA. This caters for both L1 and L2 learners of Irish, but in contrast to the majority of Dual Language programmes in the USA, in Ireland, first-language speakers of Irish are placed together with second-language speakers on grounds of practicality, due to the low density of Irish L1 speakers, particularly in rural areas, and also to avoid charges of discrimination. In research carried out on some of these early 'mixed' immersion groups at preschool level, Hickey (2001) found that their linguistic composition significantly affected the frequency of target language use by both L1 speakers of Irish and by Irish/English bilinguals, as classroom language use was predominately oriented towards English. The researcher recommended explicitly addressing the differing needs of all the children in this type of classroom 'in order to promote the mother tongue enrichment of the L1 children, as well as to encourage L2 acquisition by language learners' (Hickey 2001: 466).

More recently, Ó Muircheartaigh and Hickey (2008) conducted a comparative study into both the outcomes of early as opposed to late immersion students, and the levels of anxiety each group manifested. The results show that after only three years in immersion programmes, the late immersion students achieved similar levels of Irish-language proficiency to those of early immersion pupils. (The authors do, however, make some reservations about the parity of the two groups studied in the project). In this study, the authors urge us to go beyond scores on national examinations to look at the effect of non-linguistic factors, such as anxiety, in the development of proficiency. The researchers noted that in spite of their linguistic achievements, the late immersion students in the study experienced higher levels of anxiety than those in early immersion programmes. They hypothesize that this may be due to the fact that they had poorer communication skills initially in Irish than early immersion students, and this may lead to them feeling less comfortable in classroom interactions. Furthermore, late immersion

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students may also receive more correction, which could lead to higher anxiety levels. Ó Muircheartaigh and Hickey (2008: 574) argue that it is important to introduce and evaluate 'some transitional interventions, [such as] … effective language learning strategies … , for late immersion students so that they can make optimal progress in the target language'.

Paraguay

In Paraguay, Susan Spezzini (2005) carried out research into language learning variability in an elite immersion-type, bilingual programme in Asunción among predominately Spanish-speaking adolescents in twelfth grade. As a result of both qualitative and quantitative analysis, the researcher came to the conclusion that the students 'demonstrated a relatively high functional L2 proficiency, but not necessarily near native' (Spezzini 2005: 92). She also noted that variability in language learning, as well as comprehensibility and language use, may be directly influenced by the opportunities provided from within the specific language learning context as well as through individual investment. She maintains that, 'immersion classrooms are diglossic speech communities with each language reserved for certain communicative purposes' (2005: 93). English is mainly used for academic matters and Spanish for conversational interaction, and, thus, students' use of English is often restricted to a formal register, inhibiting the development of L2 productive skills.

Australia

In the 1970s there were two important developments in the traditional monolingual attitude of English-speaking Australia to the development of other languages. On the one hand, there was growing interest at government level in the Canadian immersion programmes, and, on the other, there was an evident determination on the part of the Australian Federal Government to offer all children a second language at primary school level, 'in order to reach out to the world' (de Courcy 2002: 3).

Consequently, the last three decades have seen the establishment of a number of immersion-type programmes, based on the Canadian model, in some of the major Australian cities. The most frequent foreign languages chosen were either French or German, but there is also evidence of initiatives involving Chinese, Japanese and Indonesian (de Courcy 2002). Most of the immersion programmes started in Australia were of the partial immersion-type, either early or late.

In 2002 de Courcy reported on a qualitative study into the experiences of a group of second-year students in a late Chinese immersion programme in Queensland. The researcher found that the students seemed to pass through four different stages in trying to make sense of classroom interaction in Chinese. Interestingly, the first of these was found to involve the use of translation as a receptive strategy, which seems to be at odds with the language separation approach advocated by Swain (1983).

Developments in the field of multilingual immersion

As Genesee (2004) has observed, multilingual forms of education have been implemented in contexts where more than two languages are used. The different socio-cultural-political circumstances of the communities concerned have given rise to considerable programmatic and pedagogical variation among such initiatives. In this section we will examine the genesis of some of these initiatives, beginning with Canada and then moving to a European context where we

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will look at aspects of multilingual immersion programmes in Finland, Catalonia and the Basque Country.

Canada

The earliest study that I have been able to find relating to multilingual immersion programmes is a piece of research carried out by Genesee and Lambert (1983) in multilingual (French–Hebrew–English) schools in Montreal. This study subsequently formed the basis of a chapter written about multilingual education in Canada (Genesee 1998). The interest of the two researchers was to determine the effectiveness of what they termed 'double immersion'. For purposes of the study, they selected two different types of school: early double immersion and delayed double immersion. The key difference between these two programmes was that in the former, the two second languages were introduced from preschool (kindergarten), whereas English, the students' first language, was only introduced in grades 3 or 4. However, in the second modality – delayed double immersion – so named because the amount of time allotted to the two second languages, French and Hebrew, gradually increased from kindergarten to grade 5, all three languages were taught right from the beginning of schooling.

The longitudinal study evaluated student progress in relation to four aspects, three of which have often been discussed in relation to immersion education: second language learning, the effect on the first language and the effect on academic achievement. The other issue considered was related to the effect of delaying and reducing L1 instruction in the programme. Although analysis of the data in the light of the first three questions led to similar results to those obtained in single immersion programmes in relation to second language learning, first language development and academic achievement, there were some interesting findings in relation to the comparative linguistic development of the students in the two different types of programme. According to Genesee (1998: 250), analysis of the results indicated that, 'there was a tendency for the *delayed* immersion students to score lower on the Hebrew language tests than the *early* immersion students despite the fact that both groups had had equivalent exposure to Hebrew'. The researchers hypothesized that the use of English (the L1) during the early years of double immersion might interfere with the learning of the other languages in the programme, due to it being such a powerful language of influence.

Finland

Scandinavian countries often teach three or more languages at school so that students are able to communicate in other Scandinavian languages and in a world language, such as German or English (Genesee 2004). It was within this general panorama that the first Swedish–Finnish immersion programme began in Vaasa in 1987. According to accounts by Laurén (1991, 1992) Vesterbacka (1991) and Björklund (1997), the immersion school movement in Finland has its origin in the Vaasa University bilingual education project led by Professor Crister Laurén. It was felt that the Canadian immersion programme would be a suitable model for this experimental project in the Finnish context. As Laurén explained,

> One advantage of following this model was that we did not experiment. The model is tested, we converted it for use in Finland, studied how our particular pair of languages, Finnish/Swedish, operates for immersion schools, and considered how the additional language taken in the programme should be treated.
>
> *(1992: 13)*

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However, this time it was not parental pressure (as in Canada) or government policy (as in Australia) but the influence of a group of politically active women, in consultation with members of the Department of Nordic Languages of the University of Vaasa that led to the first Swedish immersion programme. Members of the Department of Nordic Languages gave information about the immersion model and explained why they thought immersion would be a suitable bilingual programme for Finland. Thus, from the beginning the Finnish–Swedish immersion programme enjoyed both political and academic credibility.

In line with early Canadian developments, the immersion modality adopted in the Vaasa project was early total immersion, where bilingual teachers and their assistants use Swedish consistently for the four hours per day that the children spend at preschool, although the children are allowed to reply in their first language if they wish. The pupils' first language, Finnish, is gradually introduced into the curriculum (around 10 per cent of teaching being carried out in Finnish during First Grade Primary) until there is an approximate language balance of 50 per cent Swedish, 5 per cent in a third language and 45 per cent Finnish) (Gustavsson and Mard 1992).

The third language used in the Finnish immersion programmes in Vaasa is English, but in other parts of the country, such as the South of Finland, German is often adopted. In the original design, English was taught as a subject area, rather than a medium of instruction. However, gradually the third language (and at times a fourth language) have become more integrated within the curriculum (Södergärd 2008). In the present programmes, the third language is introduced in Grade 1 for one to two hours per week, and although still classed as 'language lessons', the teachers have introduced content-based teaching and learning and use the third language as a medium of instruction right from the outset (Björklund 2005, cited in Södergärd 2008). Moreover, immersion principles have been applied to the teaching and learning of these languages in that L3 and L4 teachers only use this language with their students (Björklund and Suni 2000).

Although the results of the earlier introduction of the third and fourth language are still being evaluated, Björklund and Suni (2000) report that a small-scale study carried out among students in the Vaasa/Vasa Swedish immersion programme in 1997–8 has shown that students consider that they are active speakers of all four languages taught in the programme.

The enthusiastic reception given to the experimental project in Vaasa led to the creation of other immersion programmes in Espoo, Helsinki and in Kokkola and elsewhere, catering for different age ranges. By the end of the 1998–9 school year there were approximately 2,000 pupils involved in Swedish immersion programmes in Finland, and 2,500 in English immersion programmes. In 2006 data indicated that Swedish immersion programmes were offered in 30 schools and 30 kindergartens throughout the country (Södergärd 2008).

It is interesting to note the role of the immersion model as developed in Canada in these developments. As Laurén (1992) recognizes, its tried and tested status provided a solid platform on which to construct the modifications necessary for the Finnish context. It is also instructive to see the gradual change from foreign language teaching to content-based teaching in line with immersion principles.

Catalonia

The Catalan immersion programme was a politically orientated development, considered by the regional government authorities as a means both to integrate a large non-Catalan-speaking immigrant population into Catalan life and to upgrade the status of Catalan in relation to Castilian (Spanish). An experimental total immersion programme was set up in 1983 in Santa Coloma de Gramat, an area where few people spoke Catalan and where an immersion

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programme was considered the most efficient means to achieve the autonomous government's aim of equal student proficiency in both Catalan and Spanish by the end of the compulsory education cycle (E.G.B.) at the age of 14 (Arenas i Sampera 1986).

The programmes were designed to include working groups of children in a classroom situation where more than 70 per cent were non-Catalan-speakers. The Spanish-speaking immigrant communities are primarily working class, but aspire to learn Catalan because Catalan is seen within Catalonia as a high-prestige minority language associated with social mobility (Mar-Molinero 1989).

Recently, however, a new demand for multilingual competence has arisen due to pressure on schools in Spain to raise their standards in the teaching and learning of international languages, particularly English. Thus, in 2004 the age for compulsory foreign language learning was lowered from sixth grade (12-year-olds) to first grade (six-year-olds). Moreover, in 2006, Decree 1630 officially recognized that a first contact with a foreign language in Spanish schools should begin at pre-primary level (Cenoz 2009). Furthermore, in line with European Union directives, there is evidence of a drive to encourage state schools to offer Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) courses in their curricula (Escobar Urmeneta and Unamuno 2008).

In addition, a complex linguistic scenario has emerged as the result of increasing immigration to Catalonia and other regions of Spain, ensuring that Catalan schools are becoming ever more multilingual (Escobar Urmeneta and Unamuno 2008). As Huguet *et al.* (2008: 234) note, 'Immigrant students now make up 7.4% of the school population … more than 10% in Madrid and Catalonia'. A reference document entitled 'The Languages and Social Cohesion Plan', or 'The LIC Plan', (according to the initials in Catalan), which guides the implementation of educational and linguistic measures to help to incorporate newly arrived pupils into the Catalan school system, promotes, on the one hand, the development of Catalan 'as the mainstay of a multilingual and intercultural education policy in order to achieve greater social cohesion' (LIC Plan: 4, cited in Escobar Urmeneta and Unamuno 2008: 234). On the other hand, the Plan requires that

> By the end of primary education pupils must be able to understand and express simple messages in a given context in one foreign language. By the end of secondary education they must be able to understand and produce oral and written messages in one foreign language … In addition, … have a basic level in understanding and speaking a second foreign language.
>
> *(LIC Plan, Appendix 2: 28 cited in Escobar Urmeneta and Unamuno 2008: 236–7)*

One of the interesting aspects of the development of the immersion programmes in Catalonia over the last few years is that they have moved from being considered a local means of promoting the status and use of the Catalan language by the Autonomous Catalan Government, after years of linguistic repression under General Franco (1939–75), to a vehicle to help Spain position itself within the growing demands for multilingualism in international languages in Europe. Simultaneously, in the LIC Plan there is recognition of the importance of developing the linguistic repertoires of newly arrived immigrants in the country to avoid the social exclusion of the immigrant population, although this is often seen by educational authorities as belonging to the optional after-school activity programme, rather than forming part of the mainstream school curriculum.

However, as Escobar Urmeneta and Unamuno (2008) have emphasized, there are tensions generated between these different visions of multilingualism in institutional practice. Thus,

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there are substantial differences noted between official plurilingualism for immigrants as set out in the LIC Plan, official plurilingualism for mainstream students (i.e. CLIL), and what may be termed 'backstage' plurilingualism, which the authors see as emerging 'from the social conditions, the tensions among opposing goals and the contradictions shown by the agents when they define institutional, educational and social aims [where] the learners' native languages/s … occupy diverse contexts of learning and use' (Escobar Urmeneta and Unamuno 2008: 247). The researchers recognize the reputation of Catalonia as a pioneer in the establishment of an immersion modality where the minority language (Catalan) is used as the main working language. Now the challenge is that of integrating students from many different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, so that by the end of their compulsory education, all learners – regardless of their linguistic origin – should have developed a sound knowledge of at least a third language of international use (2008).

The Basque Country

Trilingual education in the Basque Country is seen as an important means of developing competence in three languages: two official languages, Basque and Spanish, and English, which has replaced French as the first foreign language taught in Basque schools, and which is now studied by more than 95 per cent of pupils (Cenoz 2009).

There have been a number of efforts undertaken by the Basque Government Department of Education, as well as other private organizations, to improve the teaching of English as part of a drive towards the development of multilingual competence, in line with the requirements of the European Commission for students to become 'proficient in at least three European languages' (Cenoz 2009: 86). Thus, in some cases, trilingual education consists of teaching academic subject areas through Basque and Spanish, whereas English is taught as a separate subject beginning in pre-primary, but is not used to teach academic subjects at primary school level. According to Huguet *et al*. (2008), in this type of programme, Spanish is usually the language used for teaching Maths, whereas Basque is the language of teaching and learning in the other areas of the curriculum. In other cases, such as the network of *Ikastolak* – or schools for pupils whose mother tongue is Basque – children start with Basque as the main language of schooling, but also study Spanish as a subject. They also start learning English as a subject at the age of four and at 14, they study Social Science through the medium of English for two years (Cenoz 2009).

There is an interesting development in this respect, reported by Elorza and Muñoa (2008) in relation to Cummins' (2000) notion of linguistic interdependence and transfer. Some trilingual schools have joined forces in order to develop an integrated curriculum to cover work done in the Basque, Spanish and English sections aimed at facilitating joint planning of language and content classes to 'ensure the adequate development of the different languages at the levels needed by Basque citizens of the 21st century' (Elorza and Muñoa 2008: 89). The model of curricular integration proposed first posits some common general competencies to develop between the different languages. These are then incorporated into a common framework for contents with complementary distribution, which, in turn, establishes the specific competences established for each of the languages in the curriculum with differential proficiency levels, based on the scales established in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe 2001). Thus, students need to achieve a B2+ level for Basque and for their contact language (either Spanish or French), a B1+ level for English and A2 level for a fourth language, which could be either French or Spanish. According to the results of evaluations carried out over a ten year period, the early introduction of English at the age of four had no negative

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effect on student linguistic competence in either Basque or Spanish, or on their cognitive abilities. It was also shown that students who started learning English in pre-primary did better than those who started at the age of eight (Elorza and Muñoa 2008).

As Genesee (2004) has recognized, trilingual immersion education raises a number of important issues in relation to programme effectiveness, the developmental relationship among the three languages and their sequencing. He also notes that there is little empirical evidence available to answer these questions and that which exists is highly variable in nature, perhaps because up until now multilingual immersion programmes are far less common than their bilingual counterparts. This can be seen by the three studies presented in this review. In the Hebrew schools in Montreal, English, the first language, is seen as having a possible negative effect on the development of Hebrew, whereas results in the Basque Country and in Finland on the early introduction of English (the third language) show a totally different scenario. Genesee (ibid.) also advises caution as there tends to be a bias to report successful programmes, rather than those that do not do so well. However, the pedagogical initiative in the *Ikastolak* schools is certainly instructive and brings to the fore the importance of pedagogical rather than linguistic issues in the effective development of multilingual immersion programmes, a theme to which we now turn.

Key issues of theory and method

Pedagogy: issues of language and content

Although for the first 25 to 30 years after St Lambert, Canadian researchers in the field of immersion education, such as Merrill Swain, seemed more concerned with linguistic rather than pedagogical matters, these have increasingly taken the floor in recent publications. In 1998 Genesee recognized that, 'the quality of the instruction and the nature of the pedagogy used to teach the language are important factors' (Genesee 1998: 252), and six years later, the same researcher emphasized that the 'nature and quality of classroom instruction are very important' (2004: 560) in accounting for the level of student L2 achievement. Nevertheless, if we look at developments in immersion programmes in other countries, we can see concern for immersion pedagogy has existed for many years.

In Finland, researchers at the University of Vaasa were interested in examining some of the methodological assumptions underlying the Swedish Immersion programmes, claiming that the adoption of immersion principles facilitated 'a pedagogic-didactic renewal' (Laurén 1992: 21). As a result of observation of teaching in the Swedish Immersion Programme, the researcher proposed, 'a two-phase-didactics for school' (Laurén 1992: 71) to create a basic level of linguistic fluency at an early stage of language learning when prerequisites are optimal, which can later be expanded on and extended.

Another member of the Vaasa Immersion research team, Vesterbacka (1991), was interested in the development of meaningful, ritualized routines in context-bound situations in immersion programmes. The researcher examined young children's language use in Swedish in relation to unchanging 'routines' and partially changing 'patterns'. She argued that these ritualized routines and patterns should be recognized as an important teaching and learning strategy at this level in immersion programmes. She saw them as a key means of providing confidence for young children to express themselves at an early stage in their bilingual development and to communicate with others in meaningful contexts in an effort to fulfil their basic needs as efficiently as possible.

In the USA, Elizabeth Bernhardt and her colleagues (1992) provided a much-needed focus on classroom practice claiming that it was important to recognize 'immersion teaching as a

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particular kind of teaching … not just language teaching' (Bernhardt 1992: 3). In their collection they provide detailed discussion of classroom routines and aspects of contextualized student–teacher interactions, allowing a fascinating glimpse of how teaching and learning is accomplished moment by moment in different immersion settings.

Later, Hoare (2001) continued this pedagogical focus by examining different teacher strategies used in the teaching of science in English by 'language aware' and 'non-language aware' teachers. Two Chinese teachers of science were studied teaching the same topic area, energy, to 12-year-old students in a Hong Kong secondary school. One of the teachers had received specific in-service training in the effective teaching of content and language in immersion, whereas the other teacher had not.

An interesting result of the study was that the 'language aware' science teacher provided evidence of enriched language use, using rich examples and fairly complex analogies in which he evoked his students' knowledge of the world, which helped to extend and challenge their knowledge and thinking. Thus, '[T]he language is not simplified so much that the concepts are diminished. Instead, it is enriched through a variety of means to provide multiple ways in which students can understand and learn' (Hoare 2001: 209).

Roy Lyster (2007) is one of the latest Canadian immersion scholars to have concentrated attention on processes of learning and teaching languages through content. He advocates a counterbalanced approach in relation to form-focused and content-based instruction in immersion pedagogy in order to frequently shift the focus between form and meaning. The idea of a 'counterbalanced' or integrated approach to the age-old question of the relationship between content and language teaching and learning is meant to avoid separationist stances, which either concentrate on content without paying attention to language development, or provide separate language instruction in language arts classes. These non-integrated approaches have been used to explain the lack of continued growth in students' proficiency in the immersion language (Harley *et al*. 1990, cited in Lyster 2008).

Recently the debate on the relationships between language and content teaching and learning enshrined within immersion pedagogy has been extended to include discussion about the importance of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) in mainland Europe. According to Gajo (2001, cited in Hélot 2007), CLIL (or EMILE in French, although Hélot maintains that these are not, in fact, synonyms) stems from the experience of the Canadian immersion programmes. In both types of programme there are bilingual teachers and there are different types of levels of contact possible between the two languages in the curriculum (Cenoz 2009). However, this researcher also emphasizes that a key difference between CLIL and immersion pedagogy is that CLIL has its origin in the teaching and learning of foreign languages rather than in bilingual education. Hélot (2007: 143) for her part considers that, 'reflection on the question of the integration between foreign languages and non-linguistic disciplines is still in its infancy' in France.

Codeswitching and language separation in the classroom

There is also a heightened awareness of the role of codeswitching and language choice as a communicative resource and as an indicator of identity among immersion researchers. In a recent review of immersion programmes, Genesee (2004: 574) stated that he considered bilingual classroom discourse a fruitful avenue for research in the future, asking, 'Is there a role for bilingual usage … in bilingual education? In other words, should the languages always be kept separate and if not, how can they be used co-extensively to promote language learning?' More recently, he has stated that, contrary to conventional wisdom, keeping languages completely

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separate in immersion may not be the best strategy and has argued that strategic use of L1 may facilitate L2 reading development, based on evidence of significant cross-linguistic transfer of skills related to reading, especially decoding (Genesee 2008).

Although this is a fairly new departure for Canadian immersion researchers, there has been work carried out on classroom codeswitching in immersion programmes in South America, among other places, which questions the strong separation view of languages that characterized the early work on immersion. This has now given way to a more integrated, 'bilingual' vision of classroom talk. Researchers have turned their attention to the recurrent bilingual routines and communicative practices evident in classroom participants' interaction. As examples of this, I will cite instances of recent work carried out in Colombia and in Paraguay.

The first study is based on qualitative study I carried out on storytelling events with young children in immersion classrooms in Colombia (de Mejía 2002, 2004). I came to the conclusion that far from being a deficit strategy used to supplement imperfect linguistic proficiency on the part of the teachers, the use of two languages in teaching and learning revealed a sophistication and complexity of language development often ignored by educationalists. Furthermore, Spezzini (2005) in Paraguay, has noted that some immersion students are conscious that their codeswitched discourse is significantly different from standard usage, and see this as a reflection of their unique identity as students of a particular bilingual school. The researcher shows that some students were conscious that their bilingual codeswitched school language use reflected a particular 'unique' social/group identity, as evidenced in the following observation,

> The students at the American School of Asunción (ASA) have their own language. When we speak English, we speak ASA English and when we speak Spanish, we speak ASA Spanish.
>
> *(Spezzini 2005: 87)*

The author speculates that this might be evidence of the creation of a non-native language variety based on covert prestige norms.

Teacher professional development

There have been various attempts to formulate guidelines for appropriate teacher education courses for practitioners working in immersion programmes. Hoare and Kong (2001) in Hong Kong maintain that there are six basic attributes required by immersion teachers: bilingual proficiency; immersion teaching strategies aimed at integrating language and content across the curriculum; knowledge of the target language system; understanding of the theories of second language learning and immersion education; commitment to immersion education; and knowledge of the target culture. Banfi and Rettaroli (2008) in Argentina, for their part, postulate a similar list involving knowledge of the languages and cultures used in particular bilingual programmes, as well as content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and understanding of the principles of bilingualism and bilingual education.

In a recent research study (de Mejía *et al*. 2006: 97) carried out in six different regions of Colombia into the state of immersion-type schools in the country, one of the conclusions reached was that there was

> a lack of knowledge and attention paid to the principles and fundamentation of bilingual education, and unconcern on the part of some of the administrative staff of some of the schools visited of the importance of this for curricular development.

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Valencia Giraldo (2007) has alluded to the type of pre-service preparation offered to foreign language teachers in universities in Colombia, which often does not prepare them to face classroom realities. In similar vein, Cárdenas has condemned 'the prescriptive practices for teaching and learning and the promotion of teacher qualification by the [National Bilingual Programme]' in contrast to 'the critical dimension of language education' (Cárdenas 2006: 5).

It is perhaps natural in such circumstances that teachers try to seek the latest 'method' to help deal with the situation, as the following comment by a teacher in a bilingual school in Bogotá reveals,

> At our school, we frequently talk about the needs of our [Second Language Learner] SLL students and how teachers can fulfil those needs. … As educators, we must be proactive and try methods that help our students. As teachers we should be exposed to the latest methods successful teachers are utilizing in their classrooms … this collaboration is discussed, but sadly, our training doesn't really include any methods. … Teach us the methods!
>
> *(de Mejía* et al. *2008)*

However, it may be argued that this reliance on pre-established 'methods' ignores the current emphasis on post-method pedagogies (Kumaravadivelu 1994, 2003, 2006) and perpetuates the state of teacher dependency. The developing, through pre-service and in-service courses, of a critical, reflective capacity (Pennycook 2001) to evaluate current and new developments should help teachers value their own constructed pedagogical knowledge and insights in relation to the knowledge and insights gained from the study of those working in different settings, and aid them in helping their students to construct their own knowledge and meanings, without imposing a particular frame of reference (Gieve and Magalhaes 1994).

New research directions

As I suggested initially, there is much room for future research on multilingualism in immersion programmes. It is interesting to note, that the publications referenced in this chapter mainly stem from Canada and Europe, as there is little that I have been able to find about multilingual immersion in other parts of the world.

If we compare the collection on immersion education edited by Johnson and Swain in 1997 with a recent publication on the same topic edited by Williams Fortune and Tedick in 2008, there are some striking differences, which indicate changing perceptions in the field over the 11-year period. Whereas the earlier volume is concerned with present studies that exemplify the development of different categories of immersion programmes, such as immersion in foreign languages, immersion for language revival and immersion for language support, the emphasis in the later collection is on 'evolving perspectives' on immersion pedagogy, on language development in immersion classrooms and the influence of the social context on immersion programmes. This indicates, I would argue, a change from the justification of the merits of immersion per se and an interest in looking in more detail at classroom interaction, pedagogy and contextual factors. I would also agree with May (2008: 31) in his recognition that 'research on bilingual/immersion education could … expand its base with more ethnographic studies of effective bilingual/immersion education – thus providing a basis of thick description for the more comparative and evaluative studies'.

In this chapter, I have discussed some important developments relating to the evolution of immersion education towards multilingualism. Although single immersion programmes have been very successful in responding to the challenges of helping students develop a high level of

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academic bilingualism, it remains to be seen whether multilingual immersion will help the transition from bilingualism to plurilingualism in an internationalized world.

Related topics

Linguistic diversity and education; regional minorities, education and language revitalization; multilingual pedagogies; codeswitching.

Further reading

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(Update on the development of multilingualism, CLIL and third language learning in Europe.)

de Courcy, M. (2002) *Learners Experiences of Immersion Education. Case Studies of French and Chinese*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
(Research on classroom processes of language learning in two late immersion programmes in Australia.)

Genesee, F. (2004) 'What do we know about bilingual education for majority language students?' in T. K. Bhatia and W. C. Ritchie (eds) *Handbook of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism*, Malden, MA: Blackwell.
(Informative overview on key issues in immersion education.)

May, S. (2008) 'Bilingual/immersion education: What the research tells us,' in J. Cummins and N. H. Hornberger (eds) *Encyclopedia of Language and Education*, 2nd edn, vol. 5: 19–34.
(Overview of research developments in bilingual education, particularly in USA, and some reference to New Zealand.)

Williams Fortune, T. and Tedick, D. J. (eds) (2008) *Pathways to Multilingualism: Evolving Perspectives on Immersion Education* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
(Includes ethnographic studies on immersion classroom interaction and language learning.)

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