EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR ORAL SECOND LANGUAGE USE IN GERMAN AND FRENCH FIRST GRADE IMMERSION CLASSROOMS

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1. Introduction[2]

This research study is directed toward investigating the teaching processes and the learning experiences that take place in first grade one-way immersion classrooms where English-speaking children are instructed in the second language, German or French, starting from Kindergarten. In other words, this study describes what actually takes place in two immersion classrooms. More specifically, the major goal of this study is to find out the effective teaching strategies that the first grade immersion teachers use in order to enhance student oral second language production in a classroom setting.

In immersion programs, the foreign language is the vehicle for teaching the regular school curriculum rather than the subject of the instruction. In other words, immersion programs immerse the learner into the target language, as the elementary school curriculum is taught in the target language (Heining-Boynton, 1998). Rubio (1998) views language immersion as an approach and a method of instruction in which the regular school curriculum is taught through the target language to non-native speakers.

2. Methodology

2.1. Data collection

In this study, I used qualitative methods to construct a micro-ethnographic case study. I collected the data from the first grade German and French immersion classrooms in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA. My role in the classes was that of an

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observer. The data collection took seven months from November 2000 till the end of May 2001.

The data were collected through on-site observations, videotaping and audiotaping in the classrooms. Structured and semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers and program implementors in German and French elementary immersion schools. I also collected classroom-related artifacts, such as teaching materials, lesson plans, students' work, and school-related artifacts, such as curriculum documents, school, and student profiles.

2.2. Participants of this study

The participant teachers of this study showed interest in participating in the study. They were also recommended by the program implementors of each school as exemplary educators. In the first grade German immersion class, there were 24 students (14 girls and 10 boys). Their ages varied from six to seven. All of the students attended the kindergarten in the same school so they were taught in German the previous year. In the first grade French immersion class, there were also 24 students (13 girls-11 boys). Their ages varied from six to seven. The class was a SAGE (Student Achievement Guarantee in Education). Since there were 24 students and SAGE required 15 students per teacher, the class was being taught by two teachers. All of the students attended the kindergarten in the same school so they were taught in French the previous year.

2.3. Data analysis

The data analysis of this study was based on qualitative and quantitative research techniques from ethnography and case study research. During the data analysis, I employed the constant comparison method based on grounded theory. Enumeration of the data was also used in order to examine the nature of teacher and student talk and support my generalized statements in the qualitative analysis of this study.

3. Study findings

This study presents two first grade immersion classrooms in which mostly seven-year old children are instructed in the second language (German or French) starting from kindergarten. The goal of this study was to explore the effective teaching

strategies that first grade immersion teachers (two teachers are team-teaching in the French first grade class) use to facilitate oral second language both in a language arts and a content matter (math) class.

At the end of the data analysis, this study found two types of teaching strategies that the first grade immersion teachers used to increase the students' oral second language production in language arts and math classes. The two types of teaching strategies were analytic and experiential teaching strategies. Analytic teaching strategies focus on the form of the target language, such as syntactic structures, vocabulary, and pronunciation. On the other hand, experiential teaching strategies focus on the use of the target language in a contextualized and an interactive way.

In this study, analytic and experiential teaching strategies were examined in the main learning contexts in German and French first grade immersion classrooms. These learning contexts in both classrooms were calendar time, carpet time, board story time, reading aloud time, puppet theater time, and math time. In this study, my purpose was not to compare and contrast the teaching strategies used in German and French first grade immersion classrooms. The research design of this study was not developed for this purpose. My goal in conducting this study was to show the two different immersion classroom settings and explain what the teachers did in order to enhance student oral second language use. The analytic and experiential teaching strategies that facilitated oral language use in German and French first grade immersion classrooms are shown in Figure 1.

In the German first grade class, Frau M., the teacher, used analytic and experiential teaching strategies in calendar time and board story time. By using analytic teaching strategies, she aimed to increase the students' awareness of the form of the target language and develop the students' vocabulary knowledge. Peer teaching was a frequently used teaching strategy by which the class reviewed sounds, letters, and words. Pre-fabricated language patterns were also used by the teacher frequently in order to model the syntactic structure of the target language.

Learning Contexts	Analytic Teaching Strategies	Experiential Teaching Strategies
Calendar Time (German First Grade Class) *Carpet Time (French First Grade Class)*	Visual Cues; Linguistic Modeling; Peer Teaching; Developing Comprehension Skills and Vocabulary	Linguistic Modeling and Pre-Fabricated Language Patterns; Peer Teaching; Creating Meaningful Communicative Contexts
Board Story Time (German First Grade Class)	Linguistic Modeling; Building Background Knowledge and Vocabulary Learning; Continuous Repetition and Review	Developing Understanding through Comprehension Questions; Group Work Projects Related to the Board Stories
Reading Aloud Time *(German and French First Grade Classes)*		Building and Developing Background Knowledge; Comprehension Questions to Build Understanding; Small Group Reading Time
Math Time *(German and French First Grade Classes)*	Linguistic Modeling (The Use of Pre-Fabricated Language Patterns)	Creating Concrete Learning Experiences; Activating Background Knowledge to Help Comprehension; Continuous Repetition and Review; Cooperative Group Work; Building Background Knowledge
Puppet Theater Time (French First Grade Class)		Improvisation; Use of Comprehension Questions Based on a Story Structure

Figure 1. Analytic and experiential teaching strategies for oral second language use in German and French first grade immersion classrooms.

The experiential teaching strategies used in board story time primarily focused on developing the students' comprehension through the use of questioning. Some of these comprehension questions asked by the teacher were low-level thinking questions which required recall, repetition type of answers, and some of them were high-level thinking questions which enabled the students to analyze and elaborate the content with

their own sentences. This study suggests that high-level thinking questions and teacher prompting facilitated extended student verbal output and encouraged more student initiated talk. The students posed questions or expressed their ideas in response to the teacher's high-level thinking questions and prompting.

Another experiential teaching strategy, group work projects related to the board stories, also provided the students opportunities to use the target language and create interactive learning contexts where they interacted and exchanged information. In this teaching strategy, there was a connection between the use of reading and writing to the use of oral language. The four language skills –reading, writing, listening, and speaking– were integrated in this experiential teaching strategy. In group work projects, the first graders were expected to produce a writing piece, read it in a small group, and then act it out or read their own written product in front of the whole class. The students generally used the target language while they were working in their own groups.

Frau M. used experiential teaching strategies in reading aloud time and math time with the goal of facilitating oral second language use. In reading aloud time, experiential teaching strategies included developing students' background knowledge by enhancing the students' vocabulary repertoire and asking comprehension questions to enhance understanding on a reading topic. Designing small reading groups was another experiential teaching strategy that created a setting for the students to share and discuss the content material. In math time, Frau M. mainly used experiential teaching strategies. Various hands-on activities with the use of mathematical teaching tools were presented to teach the students the first grade math curriculum. The main experiential teaching strategy in math time was the use of concrete learning experiences to make the math concepts more comprehensible for the students. The use of concrete learning experiences facilitated verbal interaction among the students by getting them involved in the content material. In order to enhance student talk, the teacher also activated the students' background knowledge by giving examples from the teaching material and asking questions on it. This also helped the students with their comprehension. Continuous repetition and review were frequently used by Frau M. to reinforce the use of the previously learned concepts and this strategy also increased comprehension.

In the first grade French immersion classroom, the two teachers (Monsieur L. and Mademoiselle F.), used analytic and experiential teaching strategies in carpet time in order to teach the form of the target language and create meaningful settings for the

use of the target language. The analytic teaching strategies used in carpet time were the use of flash cards and cubes to work on words and to practice their pronunciation. The second analytic teaching strategy was building the vocabulary knowledge of the students by learning new words, spelling, and sounding them out. The experiential teaching strategies used in carpet time were linguistic modeling (i.e., pre-fabricated language patterns), and creating concrete and meaningful experiences in which the children used the target language to express themselves and accomplish the objectives of a learning experience. In reading aloud time and puppet theater time, the teachers used mainly experiential teaching strategies, such as booksharing, asking comprehension questions about story, and improvisation.

Math time was generally conducted by Monsieur L. He taught math within the framework of various hands-on and cooperative group work activities. Experiential teaching strategies used in math time included linguistic modeling, cooperative group work, and developing students' background knowledge on a content material in order to encourage their participation and make the content matter comprehensible for the students. Both in the German and French first grade classes, the teachers provided continuous revision and repetition on the content material in order to reinforce the students' language and learning processes.

The immersion teachers participating in this study provided their students with a structured learning environment that was shaped by main learning contexts (i.e., calendar time, carpet time, and reading aloud time) and daily routines within these contexts. Through these learning contexts, the first graders attend to language and content matter knowledge while trying to use the immersion language. The teachers frequently used multisensory experiences reinforced by visual aids, gestures, and manipulatives in order to enhance the students' understanding toward the target language and content matter. As stated above, the analytic and experiential teaching strategies used by the teachers in each learning context supported the oral use of the target language and strengthened students' understanding toward the content matter.

In terms of immersion teaching within these two first grade classrooms, there are several points that drew my attention. The first one is, in German immersion class, there is a more focus on analytic teaching strategies in which the students mainly work on the form of the language as seen in calendar time. For instance, peer teaching is one of the analytic teaching strategies used in calendar time. The students have their vocabulary

cards and the peer teacher (a student) leads the class as they go through the words and target language forms. In French immersion class, I found more interactive learning experiences in learning contexts. For instance, peer teaching is an experiential teaching strategy used in carpet time and the peer teacher (a student) leads the class as they go through more meaning-making activities as they also focus on form of the target language.

Frau M., Mademoiselle F., and Monsieur L. used error correction based on the goals of learning experiences within learning contexts. For instance, the participating teachers explicitly corrected the students' errors by repeating the correct form after the student. The error correction particularly occurred when the class was working on the form of the target language in calendar time or carpet time. The teachers were observant about the students' common errors. For instance, Frau M. used grammar activities and planned grammar lessons in order to work on common errors made by the students. The teachers rarely corrected the students' oral second language while the students were using the second language in order to express and share their ideas. For instance, most of the time, Monsieur L. did not correct the students' mistakes when they were acting out their plays in puppet theater time since he did not want to interfere with the students' performance and the way they were communicating. Basically, the error correction varied for different learning experiences that occurred in particular learning contexts.

The second point is, the development of oral second language in German and French first grade classes are closely linked to literacy learning activities. As mentioned before, group work projects as an experiential teaching strategy integrates the use of oral language use and reading and writing in the second language. Language use also includes active listening in which the students need to listen to one another in order to accomplish the group goals. In the French first grade class, improvisation was one of the experiential teaching strategies used in puppet theater time. Through improvisations on the puppet theater stage, the students learned the story structure orally, and then applied this knowledge to their writing skills when they created and wrote their own stories in the target language based on the story structure they learned. Thus, the development of the oral language skills did not occur by itself; it was supported by the literacy-related learning experiences in German and French first grade immersion classrooms.

In the German and French first grade immersion classes, one of the goals of the teachers was to create a learning community where the students shared, discussed, and learned both the second language and content. Based on my observations in these classes for seven months, I strongly believe that the teachers achieved this goal. The children used the immersion language in the class and sometimes outside of the class without any inhibition in order to communicate with one another.

4. Discussion on immersion teaching

Second language acquisition researchers agree that children acquire a second language most meaningfully when they have the opportunity for comprehensible output along with comprehensible input. In order words, learners need to have a setting in which they are given many communicative opportunities to produce the new language (Swain, 1985). However, providing opportunities for the students to produce their second language is one of the major challenges of immersion teaching (Curtain, 2000). The language model that is most prevalent is the teacher and the classroom setting which presents limited opportunities for the use of the target language. According to Curtain, successful immersion teachers use predictable instructional routines and pre-fabricated chunks of language, such as in songs, rhymes, poems, and chants. Successful immersion teachers also build redundancy into lessons since students may not understand a concept presented for the first time.

Vesterbacka (1991) states that children's use of pre-fabricated language patterns gives them confidence to express themselves in the second language at the early stage of second language acquisition; however, the children might not separate the meaning of each word in pre-fabricated language chunks. Vesterbacka emphasizes that the use of pre-fabricated language patterns is particularly crucial in early, total immersion programs since children start without any knowledge of the second language. This present study showed that both the German and French immersion teachers create contexts which provide children with the use of the immersion language. The teachers model the target language structures and expect the children to use these language patterns within the learning contexts. As Curtain & Pesola (1994) mention, the teachers can increase communication by teaching functional chunks of the target language. This study showed that pre-fabricated language patterns helped the children fulfill a specific

need in a school day and facilitated the use of the target language within language arts and math classes.

One of the main reasons for the participating teachers of my study to use pre-fabricated language patterns is because they want the children to feel safe when they are using the second language. Thus, the teachers provide language patterns to the students to help them proceed in a learning experience and build communication among the students. The teachers mention that the pre-fabricated language patterns will be the first step for the children to produce original and sustained speech.

Although my study specifically focuses on exploring oral language teaching strategies, oral language cannot be separated from the other language areas, such as reading and writing. They all interact with one another. By developing students' oral language skills, teachers also support their reading and writing performance (Cloud, Genesee & Hamayan, 2000). As my study findings suggested, there is a mutual relationship between the development of oral language in the contexts of reading and writing. The teaching strategies used for the oral second language development in German and French first grade classes took place during reading and writing learning experiences.

The opportunity to engage in meaningful oral exchanges in a classroom setting is a necessary component in second language acquisition. During these oral exchanges, teachers use questioning to support students' language interaction and learning. Teachers and students engage in a continuous process of joint negotiation of meaning during these oral exchanges. Questioning is one of the most common strategies used by teachers (Richards & Lockhart, 1996). Questions maintain students' interest and encourage students to focus on the content of a lesson. Questions also allow teachers to elicit particular structures or vocabulary items, enable them to check the students' understanding, and encourage student participation in a lesson (Gall, 1984; Banbrook & Skehan, 1989). In my study, the teachers frequently used questioning in order to elicit responses, check students' understanding, and maintain their participation in the lesson. The participating teachers of this study preferred to use questioning based on the goals of a learning context. For instance, in analytic teaching strategies used in calendar time, Frau M. used more repetitive, recall type of questions in order to review the form of the target language, whereas in experiential teaching strategies used in reading aloud time, the questions tend to be more high-level thinking questions that required original and

sustained level utterances. The teachers also prompted the questions in order to encourage increased student participation.

Swain (1988) states that sustained talk provides opportunities for variety and complexity of language use so that the teachers need to structure the content of the lessons in order to permit more opportunities for the sustained use of language by students. This present study suggests that particularly in reading aloud time and puppet theater time, students produce more original and sustained level utterances since they need to formulate questions about a play or make predictions about the content of a story. They use the target language in a contextualized setting for communication.

Teachers use questioning in order to check students' comprehension and clarify their understanding to the teaching material (Genesee, 1994). Hill (2001) states that there are various types of scaffolding that can be used effectively with young learners. In verbal scaffolding, teachers use prompting, questioning, paraphrasing, and elaborating to facilitate students' language and learning to the higher levels of language proficiency, comprehension, and thinking. In procedural scaffolding or modeling, the teachers repeat children's verbal language to model correct usage. In the German and French first grade classes, the teachers used both verbal and procedural scaffolding. Verbal scaffolding was used when the teachers asked or prompted questions in order to aid students' understanding and helped in their learning process by eliciting student output. Procedural scaffolding was seen when the teachers modeled the target language sentence patterns. Overall, scaffolding aided to build communication among the teachers and the students and teach language.

The focus of immersion classrooms is mainly on tasks and curriculum content (Bernhardt, 1992). However, as Harley (1991) indicated, there is also a place for an analytical approach to the second language in immersion classrooms. Harley thinks that students should constantly be encouraged to analyze their vocabulary and grammar. Lyster (1998) supports the idea that the analytic teaching approach which is a "focus on form" needs to be combined with more experiential ones in order to provide optimal conditions for second language learning. Swain (1987) also recommends that immersion teachers need to encourage students to become more aware of the relationship between form and meaning. The results of my study showed that the teachers in German and French first grade classes used analytic teaching strategies in order to increase the students' knowledge and awareness of the form of the target language. Thus, the

teachers promoted second language awareness and accuracy in the students' oral second language output. Lyster (1998) argues that it is necessary first to notice features in a second language. Thus, analytic teaching strategies make features of the second language more salient for learners. The analytic and experiential teaching strategies are not separate; they are interrelated and both of these teaching strategies contribute to target language development and content learning.

The use of native language among peers in a classroom setting is also discussed in the professional literature. Gayman (2000) and Fortune (2001) found that students preferred their native language in their social interactions with their peers in the upper grades (i.e., third, fourth, and fifth grades). However, in German and French first grade classes, the majority of the children used German or French in their social interactions with their peers in the classroom setting. Here is an anecdote from the French immersion class when Monsieur L. told an incident about two girls in his class:

> The other day, there's a conflict between two girls. She said Sarah has been bothering me a lot and I'm afraid of her. I said go into the hall and talk to her. So they went out the hall and standing there so I wanted just to see if they were speaking in French or English. They had their whole conversation in French. I didn't say have your conversation in French. They didn't know that I was gonna be walking over there, too which I supposed I invaded their privacy, but I wanted to know.(Interview; May 24, 01)

Monsieur L. was amazed and at the same time he was pleased that the two girls were speaking totally in French when they were discussing a personal problem between themselves. Monsieur L. emphasizes building play language in the classroom. Talking in French with their peers just automatically appears; they communicate using French within the classroom so why shouldn't the children use French in their social interactions. I also observed the same situation in German class where the students even argue in German. They do not care whether they use the second language or the native language. This is what the children think they are supposed to do. What they know is, they should use the second language to communicate. Language is for communication. In the upper grades, the situation would be different. As the children become more aware of the status of the languages –English is used abundantly outside of the class, it is the language they communicate with more comfortably– naturally they would prefer to use their first language more during their social interactions with their peers.

However, in a first grade class, the situation can be more different than the upper grades since the children may not yet differentiate regarding the status of language (i.e.,

native language, second language) –at least this seemed to be the case for these first graders. Since the language of the class is French or German and the teachers' expectations in the class is for the children to speak the target language, the students continue to use the second language in their social interactions.

5. Conclusion

This study showed that teaching methods and strategies are not like tools in a tool kit that teachers pick at random and use it in their classrooms. Teaching strategies are inherited in teachers' beliefs and in their teaching philosophies. Every teacher has a particular way to teach a second language that works better for him or her and his or her students. In German and French first grade classrooms, the teachers established learning environments in which they consistently used interactive dialogues, humor, challenge, imaginary characters, pre-fabricated language patterns, and concrete learning experiences in order to teach the second language and content matter simultaneously because these reflect their belief systems toward teaching and learning.

The most important contribution of this study to the field is to demonstrate the pedagogical applications of the teachers' belief systems and teaching philosophies into their immersion teaching contexts. Both pre-service and in-service immersion teachers will benefit from the findings of this study by understanding the immersion teaching process in German and French first grade immersion classrooms, and also examining their belief systems and teaching philosophies.

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