

Exploring Teacher Perceptions of Immersion Professional Development Experiences

Diane J. Tedick, University of Minnesota
(with Caleb Zilmer, graduate research assistant)

*2016 CARLA International Conference on Immersion and Dual
Language Education: Connecting Research & Practice Across Contexts*

21 October 2016, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Dearth of Research

- Scholars agree that immersion teaching requires a particular knowledge base and skill set (e.g., Cammarata & Tedick, 2012; Day & Shapson, 1996; Evans et al., 2001; Freeman et al., 2005; Fortune et al., 2008; Lyster, 2007; Lyster & Tedick, 2014; Snow, 1990; Tedick & Cammarata, 2012; Tedick & Fortune, 2013; Tedick & Wesely, 2015; Young, 1995).
- Growing body of literature on effective immersion teaching, yet the research base on bilingual/immersion teacher preparation and professional development is somewhat scant.

Research Questions

- What professional development experiences do immersion teachers perceive to have a positive impact on their teaching or other practices?
- In what ways do immersion teachers perceive participation in an online community and engagement in collaborative work contribute to their professional development?

Focus for this Presentation

- What professional development experiences do immersion teachers perceive to have a positive impact *on their ability to integrate content and language in their teaching?*

Theoretical Framework

- **Communities of Practice (CoP)** (Eckert, 2006; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015)
- “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 1).
- The notion of CoP was developed as the basis of a social theory of learning.

Four Realms of Communities of Practice



Wenger, 1998

Study Context

- 15-credit graduate level online professional development (PD) certificate program at the University of Minnesota for practicing immersion educators
 - “one-way” second/foreign language immersion
 - “two-way” bilingual immersion
 - “one-way” developmental bilingual education
 - Indigenous language immersion
 - international, bilingual schools
 - Other (occasional foreign language teacher)
- Most participants from U.S.; others from 10 different countries

Study Context

- Four 15-week courses (of 5 that comprise program)
 - *Foundations of Dual Language and Immersion Education*
 - *Curriculum Development and Assessment for Dual Language/Immersion Classrooms*
 - *Language-Focused Instructional Practices and Strategies for Dual Language/Immersion Classrooms*
 - *Biliteracy Development in Dual Language/Immersion Classrooms*

Study Context

- In this study, the CoP was comprised of immersion educators enrolled in these online courses to further their professional development.
- Within the larger CoP, smaller CoPs emerged in assigned groups for weekly discussions, which were organized by grade level or role, and in collaborative work on assignments.
- 109 educators surveyed beginning with cohort that began classes in Fall of 2010

Data Collection

- Phase I: Extensive Survey (Fall 2015)
 - Teacher version
 - Other educator version (other educators = program administrators, teacher educators, coaches, program coordinators, pedagogical directors)
- Phase II: Focus Groups (with volunteer survey completers) (Spring 2016)
- Phase III: Analysis of weekly online discussions for 1 course, student written reflections (Spring/Summer 2016)

Data Analysis

- Survey analysis yielded both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data are reported descriptively
- We completed coding (Saldaña, 2013) of the **qualitative survey data** based on the CoP theoretical framework – community, practice, meaning-making, and identity – and identified themes.
- **Focus groups** yielded a total of 6 hours of discussion; transcripts were analyzed based on the CoP framework. Online discussions and written reflections were analyzed similarly.

Study Participants: Survey

Role	Number Invited	Number of Completed Surveys	Response Rate
Teachers	75	59	79%
Other Educators	34	25	73%
Total	109	84	77%

Study Participants: Focus Groups

Role	FG#1	FG#2	FG#3	FG#4	Total
Teachers	1	4	2	1	8
Other Educators	2	1	2	2	7
Total	3	5	4	3	15

What professional development experiences do immersion teachers perceive to have a positive impact *on their ability to integrate content and language in their teaching?*

High Impact Assignments

- Video analysis
- Instructional Sequence
- Text analysis
- Lesson plan/unit development
- Biliteracy lessons (collaboration for cross-linguistic connections)

Practice – learning as doing

- Enactment
- Feedback from instructor & peers [process of feedback, revision, more feedback]
- Durability – lasting impact given evidence that new practice was making a difference with students

Enactment/Durability

[The instructional sequence] assignment **completely revolutionized the way I teach in my immersion classroom**. It not only prepared me to identify problems in students' L2, it provided me with the skills and knowledge to create lessons and activities that will help students develop much higher levels of proficiency. [survey response]

Enactment/Durability

[The video analysis] was by far one of the most influential activities that has affected my teaching the most. **This was a difficult assignment, but one that really changed the type of feedback I give to students. It lasted several weeks and showed that learning had occurred.** I have since presented at both a district and our state foreign language conference on corrective feedback. I now am much more efficient at using prompts and **I see the results in the production of my students.** [survey response]

Enactment

This was by far the best assignment in the course. **Recording myself, then analyzing what I could do differently, implementing it and then recording myself again and seeing how things had changed was amazing. It was a fantastic way to practice everything I was learning** about corrective feedback and how to use it to push students to self-repair their language errors in meaningful ways. [survey response]

Enactment

It was just fascinating **to see how much language they were able to produce, and how much I was able to help the students**, to kind of foster more of that second language acquisition in the classroom. [Gr. K#1, Spanish immersion, US, FG#2]

...and because we were actually doing it in the class, and then discussing well what is working? ... **By actually applying it and trying ideas, we came to find that “how”**. [Gr. K#2, Spanish immersion, US, FG#2]

Feedback

I really appreciated that we **could do like one version and then get feedback, and then turn in the next draft and get your feedback, a lot, like throughout the process**, so that our finished project was really something that I could use and feel confident using.
[Gr. K, Spanish immersion, US, FG#3]

Meaning-making – learning as experience

- Feedback from peers and instructor
- Enactment
- Collaboration (natural and “forced”)
- Models
- Reflection

Feedback

For me it was the feedback. I felt like everything I did, whether it was an assignment I turned in, and I appreciated the feedback, I got really good feedback on, and really good “this is a good idea, this is not a good idea.” The conversations within our base groups, there was always feedback there. ... **it wasn't just my ideas in a vacuum, and thinking through the ideas, but it was somebody else then responding to those ideas,** either positively or negatively, or taking it in a different way. [Gr. 7, Spanish immersion social studies/lang arts, US, FG#4]

Enactment

Having gone through the process of selecting an authentic text and then **carrying out an in-depth text analysis helped me understand how important it is to reflect on the texts that I will be using for content-based instruction** in an immersion context. After this assignment I adopted a simpler text analysis (based on the model we used in this assignment) in order **to ensure that the texts I use in class are not only content-area teaching tools, but also tools for teaching language and culture.** [survey response]

Enactment

The **process of creating this sequence was challenging and helped me truly understand notice/awareness/practice sequence.** I began to plan out my weeks by selecting my language focus, then working through this instructional sequence throughout the week with students. What a difference this made! [survey response]

Feedback

We had to send [the unit and assessments] to each other, and **we got constructive criticism from other peers, and I remember that one was also interesting to see how other people understood or conceptualized the integration of content and language coming from a different perspective** ... And hearing their perspective made it easier to understand more broadly what the concept meant ... [Gr. 3, English immersion, Brazil, FG#1]

Natural Collaboration

I would say collaboration was a strong factor in making those concepts [content and language integration] clear, because we hear it from the teacher and we read it in theory, **but hearing from a peer, that collaboration brought it to a more concrete level for us.** [Secondary teacher, international school, outside of U.S., FG#1]

“Forced” Collaboration

Many of the projects were with partners, and . . . It was something that I didn't like, but I'm so appreciative. . . . because **it gave me the opportunity to stretch myself in ways that otherwise I would never have**. Doing a bilingual project with . . . our foreign language Chinese teacher at the school . . . **was something that was so rewarding and so rich and I would've never done if I hadn't...**

[Gr. 3, English immersion, Brazil, FG#1]

(laughing) **... been forced to figure [it] out** [Secondary teacher, international school, outside of US, FG#1]

...verbally having to go back and forth, and **to really hash things out with a partner, I think solidified the learning even moreso for me**. [Gr. 2, Spanish immersion, US, FG#2]

Reflection

I think every time I have to do the stop and think back, stop and look at your practice, stop and reflect on your implementation, stop and discuss what you did in the classroom. **All of those moments where I have to stop and reflect made me realize (1) what I should be doing or could be doing and (2) the importance and the impact that would have in my classroom, in the kids' development, and then the community at large.**

[Gr. 3, English immersion, Brazil, FG#1]

Identity – learning as becoming

- Intentionality
- Self-awareness/growth
- Empowerment
- Becoming a collaborator
- High expectations

Intentionality

Becoming has an idea of intentionality ... I'm a specialist in something, and it's not just teaching content and they'll just learn language. I think that the whole idea about, there are strategies, there are skills that we need to know, there's information, there's knowledge and there's exchange, and there's research to support, **so becoming this professional that is a little bit different than your normal language arts teacher or content math teacher [because] you're also dealing with the language and with the academic language.**

[Gr. K#2, Spanish immersion, US, FG#2]

Self-awareness

I find myself constantly aware of how I interact with students and the corrective feedback I give. [survey response]

I feel like **it's been a process of becoming throughout all of these courses, balancing language and content and figuring out how to do both.** And learning what it means to think of myself as a content and language teacher. [Gr. K, Spanish immersion, US, FG#3]

Self awareness / Growth

Through that and throughout the years [of the program] **I became a teacher who naturally integrated language and content really, not perfectly, at all, but very naturally, and when I wasn't doing it, I knew I wasn't doing it, and when I was, it felt right and it felt good.** And it just changed who I was as the teacher. I think I could never, **even if I were to teach in a traditional English [medium] classroom in the US to a monolingual English speaking population, I would still be a language and content teacher. That's I think who I have become.** [Gr. 2, Spanish immersion, US, FG#2]

Becoming a collaborator

Designing this [biliteracy] lesson **helped me see how it is possible to collaborate with my teaching partner, with whom I had not collaborated before.** We have since implemented a collaboration system in our school and it has impacted both our teaching in positive ways because we are making progress towards maximizing our instruction time by building on what students are learning in each language. [survey response]

High expectations

...just like **not ... dumbing down the language but giving them the tools to use that academic language** and understand the academic language and then the cross-linguistic awareness specifically. [Gr. K, Spanish immersion, US, FG#3]

And also realizing that kids could do it, **realizing that, yes, it is more taxing that they focused on both language and content, but they are absolutely capable** [Gr. 2, Spanish immersion, US, FG#2]

For me one of the big things was **just my expectations being raised and my own planning and preparation in scaffolding them to reach those expectations.** [Gr. K#2, Spanish immersion, US, FG#2]

Implications for PD

- High-impact assignments:
 - Authenticity, relevance, meaningfulness
 - Provision of models
 - Enactment: Practical application – immediate and lasting impact (durability) visible evidence that student learning improves
 - Feedback and opportunities to refine the work (a process of enactment with ongoing feedback)
 - A collaborative component
 - Reflection on current practice, awareness-raising

Revisiting 4 Realms of CoP

Through participation in this **community** of practice, where individual and group **meanings** are made, educators experience, shape, and take on new **identities** that are informed by and that transform their **practices** (adapted from Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011).

