Immersion Education: An Introductory Guide for Teachers

Adapted from
An Tumoideachas / Immersion Education (2006)
By
Dr Eugene McKendry, School of Education
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Urraithe ag **Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta**,
Béal Feirste
agus
An Chomhairle Um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta,
Baile Átha Cliath

Contents

Immersion education

Immersion education is now firmly established as a successful and effective form of bilingual education. It aims to develop a high standard of language competence in the immersion language across the curriculum, but must also, and can, ensure a similar level of achievement in the first language as that reached by pupils attending monolingual schools.

Essentially, language achievement in immersion education, when compared to subject teaching, can be attributed to three fundamental variables of successful second language acquisition namely:

- the extent of time
- the intensity of use
- the quality of exposure to the second language.

Successful immersion programmes have been characterized by instruction that incorporates the following key concepts:

- children learn other languages best **when their native language is not used for instruction**
- successful second language learning emphasizes comprehension rather than speaking **at beginning stages** and uses the insights of second language research in the development of all aspects of the program
- Learning occurs in a meaningful communicative context and use is made of **subject-content instruction, games, songs and rhymes, experiences with arts, crafts, and sports**
- considerable planning goes into the use of **visuals, realia, and hands-on activities**
- language learning activities are **interdisciplinary**
- opportunities for **movement and physical activity** are incorporated
- learning activities are geared to the child's **cognitive level, interest level, and motor skills**
- learning activities are organized according to a **communicative syllabus** with focus on **linguistic forms** rather than according to a grammatical syllabus
- learning activities establish the language as a **real means of communication** in authentic situations
- programmes make provision for the **reading and writing of familiar material as appropriate** to the age of the pupils, even in early stages
- learning is **evaluated** frequently and regularly.

(Adapted from Chowan 1999)

An Overview of Theory in Language Teaching Methods and Approaches

Irish-medium Education (IME) teachers daily face the practical challenges of teaching the full curriculum through an immersion language with the resources currently available. Classroom teachers are generally open to applying theory and practice in a pragmatic but informed manner. It may not always be obvious to teachers, however, how theory can be put into practice, and it should be useful to provide an overview of the theories, methods, and approaches which language teachers have been using over the years.

Tradition, Theory, and Method

The use of a second language as the medium of classroom instruction has been commonplace throughout history. There are many different forms of second language teaching and teachers now acknowledge the need to adopt an informed eclectic approach, incorporating elements from the range of methods available. Most language teaching today aims to achieve oral communication, and immersion programmes aim to achieve competence in all four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Listening for Understanding in the context of the Revised Northern Ireland Curriculum). Indeed the importance of communication as a cross-curricular skill within the Revised Curriculum is described as follows:

> Communication is central to the whole curriculum. Pupils should be able to communicate in order to develop as individuals, to express themselves socially, emotionally and physically, to engage with others and to contribute as members of society.
>
> Pupils should be given opportunities to engage with and demonstrate the skill of communication and to transfer their knowledge about communication concepts and skills to real life and meaningful contexts across the curriculum.
>
> The modes of communication include Talking and Listening, Reading and Writing. However, effective communication also includes non-verbal modes of communication, wider literacy and the use of multimedia and ICT technologies which may combine different modes. Pupils are therefore encouraged to become effective communicators by using a range of techniques, forms and media to convey information and ideas creatively and appropriately (CCEA 2007: 1.6-1).

The debate in immersion education, including Irish-medium, has centred around the balance between immersion language teaching which focuses on grammatical form and a communicative approach which often pays minimal attention to Irish language grammar forms.

Psychological Traditions

Psychology is the scientific study of behaviour. Since the middle of the 20th century, psychological views of teaching and learning have been dominated by **Behaviourist** and then **Cognitive** theory. There is an abundance of sources describing and discussing these theories (e.g. Atherton).

Behaviourism

The behaviourist view of learning emphasises the repetitive conditioning of learner responses. Behaviourism is based on the proposition that behaviour can be researched scientifically and that learning is an automatic process which does not involve any cognitive processes in the brain.

<u>Behaviourist Learning Theory</u> is a process of forming habits. The teacher controls the learning environment and learners are 'empty vessels' into which the teacher pours knowledge.

<u>Behaviourist Language Theory</u> is based upon Structuralist Linguistics and is identified with the Audio-lingual/Audiovisual method, associated with the use of rote learning with repetitive drills.

Behaviourists argued that teachers could link together content, building towards higher skills. Nevertheless, while circumstances and classroom practice might still benefit from such an approach, the limitations of behaviourism are apparent as it lacks recognition of problem solving and learning strategies.

Cognitivism

As a reaction to behaviourism, the 'cognitive revolution' in the 1950s combined new thinking in psychology, anthropology and linguistics with the emerging fields of computer science and neuroscience.

<u>Cognitive Learning Theory</u> emphasised the learner's cognitive activity, involving reasoning and mental processes rather than habit formation.

<u>Cognitive Language Theory</u> emerged from the Chomskyan Revolution which gave rise in Language Method to Cognitive Code Learning where material was organised around a grammatical syllabus while allowing for meaningful practice and use of language.

Learners are encouraged to work out rules deductively for themselves. Cognitivism focuses on building a learner's experiences and providing learning tasks that can challenge, but also function as 'intellectual scaffolding' to help pupils learn and progress through the curriculum. Broadly speaking, cognitive theory is interested in how people understand material, and thus in the aptitude and capacity to learn, and learning styles. As such it is the basis of constructivism and can be placed somewhere in the middle of the scale between behavioural and constructivist learning.

Learning Styles and Multiple Intelligences

There is currently much discussion around learning styles: Visual, Auditory, Kinaesthetic, etc, and around Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory which encourages the development of a range of intelligences (verbal/linguistic; visual/spatial; logical/ mathematical; bodily/kinaesthetic; musical/rhythmic; intrapersonal; interpersonal; naturalist), and emotional intelligence. How and to what extent Multiple Intelligences, or Gardner's more recent theory of 'Minds for the Future' should be employed in and outside the classroom remains an open question.

Language Learning Methods

> The teacher should not be concerned with searching for the best method but, rather, should be concerned with the students and trying to find out what works for them (Gebhard & Oprandy 1999:209).

The Grammar-Translation Method (cf. An Modh Aistriúcháin)
The focus is on studying grammatical rules, doing written exercises, memorizing vocabulary, translating texts from and prose passages into the language. Communication *per se* is not a priority**.**

The Direct Method (cf. An Modh Díreach)
The principles of the Direct Method can be summarized as follows (Richards and Rodgers 2001: 12):
- Classroom instruction was conducted in the target language
- Only everyday vocabulary and sentences were taught
- Oral communication skills were built up in a carefully graded progression organized around questions-and-answer exchanges between teachers and students in small intensive classes
- Grammar was taught inductively
- New teaching points were taught through modelling and practice
- Concrete vocabulary was taught through demonstration, objects, pictures
- Abstract vocabulary was taught through association of ideas
- Both speech and listening comprehension were taught
- Correct pronunciation and grammar were emphasized.

The Audio-Methods (cf. An Modh Closamhairc)
The emphasis was on memorisation through pattern drills and conversation practices rather than promoting independent communicative ability.

Characteristics of the Audio-Methods:
- New material is presented in dialogue form;
- There is dependence on mimicry, memorization of set phrases, and overlearning;
- Structures are sequenced by means of contrastive analysis taught one at a time;
- Structural patterns are taught using repetitive drills;
- There is little or no grammatical explanation. Grammar is taught by inductive analogy rather than by deductive explanation;
- Vocabulary is strictly limited and learned in context;
- There is much use of tapes, language labs, and visual aids;
- Great importance is attached to pronunciation;
- Teachers make very little use of the mother tongue;
- Successful responses are immediately reinforced;
- There is a great effort to get students to produce error-free utterances;
- There is a tendency to manipulate language and disregard content.
  (adapted from Prator & Celce-Murcia 1979)

The Oral-Situational approach, like the Audio-lingual approach, is based on a structural syllabus but it emphasises the meanings expressed by the linguistic

structures, not just the forms, and also the situations or context chosen to practise the structures. Audio-methods in Irish can be found in courses such as the *Buntús* methods of the 1970s.

Alternative or 'Designer' methods
The 1970s saw the emergence of some alternative, less-commonly used methods and approaches, such as **Suggestopedia; the Silent Way; Total Physical Response**. Methods such as these may find some success initially when introduced by skilled and enthusiastic teachers and are delivered in experimental or well financed situations with well behaved, responsive and motivated students and small classes. Problems arise, however, when attempts are made to widen such methods out to less ideal situations, with large classes, low motivation and discipline issues. Nevertheless, such methods may continue to thrive in privileged circumstances with motivated teachers.

Cognitive Code Learning
In Cognitive Code Learning learners were encouraged to work out grammar rules deductively for themselves. Cognitive code learning (sometimes referred to disparagingly in terms such as 'a jazzed-up version of grammar-translation' (Johnson & Johnson) achieved only limited success as the cognitive emphasis on rules and grammatical paradigms proved as off-putting as behaviourist rote drilling.

Chomsky is identified with the *Innatist* or *Nativist theory.* He claims that children are biologically programmed to acquire language, as they are for other biological functions such as walking which a child normally learns without being taught. While the everyday environment provides people who talk to the child, language acquisition is an unconscious process. The child activates the **Language Acquisition Device (LAD)**, an innate capability or blueprint that endows the child with the capability to develop speech from a universal grammar.

The Natural Approach
The Natural Approach, with echoes of the 'naturalistic' aspect of the Direct Method, was developed by Krashen and Terrell (1983). They argued that learning cannot lead to acquisition. **The focus is on meaning, not form (structure, grammar)**. The goal is to provide learners with the means to communicate with speakers of the target language.

Krashen contends that learners will climb to the next level and then repeat the process through context and extralinguistic information, like a mother talking to her child (hence the 'natural' approach). Teachers will be familiar with extending to the next level or 'input + 1' in the following way:

Is maith liom bainne **te**
→Is maith liom bainne **te a ól**
　　→Is maith liom bainne **te** a ól **sa chistin**

Communicative Language Teaching

The Natural Approach advocated a **communicative syllabus** based on a broad range of classroom activities and topics derived from learner needs. The primary aim is to promote comprehension and communication with a focus on meaning, not grammatical form. **The teacher is the primary source of comprehensible input,** using an approach with a strong emphasis on realia and activities promoting such comprehensible input.

Influenced by Krashen, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged as the norm in second language and immersion teaching approaches during the 1980s and 1990s. Classroom tasks were designed with the aim of providing students with the skills necessary to communicate naturally outside the classroom. While fluency and accuracy are considered as complementary principles, the focus on fluency often took priority over accuracy in order to encourage language use. This emphasis on communicative production often led to a neglect of linguistic structures.

The communicative approach was developed mainly in the context of English Second Language (ESL) teaching. But how universal can its application be? One can relatively easily reach a fair level of communication in English, which has a comparatively simple morphology (e.g. simple plurals with 's', no adjectival agreement). In Irish however, the apparently simple notion 'Where do you live?', for example, is not rendered by a simple question form of the verb 'to live', but by an idiom denoting state 'Cá bhfuil tú i do chónaí?' linking it not with a verbal construction, but with other idioms denoting state by means of the preposition, personal adjective, and noun construction, 'i do luí, shuí', etc. This construction, and the other distinctive features of Irish, are not inordinately difficult when taught in structural context, but it is different to English and other languages and requires appropriate adaptation if the communicative approach is to be adopted. The same can of course be said about other languages as well.

Post-Communicative Language Teaching

Immersion programmes in Canada were found to achieve good listening and reading comprehension in the target language, but relatively poor achievement in the productive skills of speaking and writing where there was a tendency to 'plateau' with certain errors becoming habitual in the learners' usage. This has led to a reassessment of practice.

Focus on Form

In immersion education a greater attention to grammar (focus on form/structure) has now re-emerged as well as the appropriate, contextual integration by teachers of structures into content-focused lessons. But the explicit teaching of grammar in isolation is not recommended nowadays, although many classrooms have, for example, verb wall charts for reference.

The revised Northern Ireland Curriculum places emphasis on connected learning and the use of Thematic Units. The use of thematic units aims to highlight how the Areas of Learning can be connected through successful topic work which in language teaching implies the teaching of grammar where it naturally occurs.

Schmidt (1994, 2001) argues that 'focus on form' should be on specific forms, rather than a global approach. He emphasises the noticing by learners of specific linguistic items as they occur in input, rather than as awareness of grammatical rules.

Output. Intake. Interaction.

Merrill Swain (1985) argued that the failure to achieve native-like competence in grammar and other features may be due to the learners' lack of opportunities to actually use their immersion language. In a classroom environment, particularly where the emphasis is on rich input, the teachers do most of the talking while the pupils listen. Pupils get few opportunities to speak and tend to give short answers to questions. This is a crucial dilemma for immersion education. If the teacher needs to supply input, usually through a higher proportion of 'teacher talk' than characteristically found in non-immersion, how can s/he ensure that individual pupils have enough opportunities to speak and practise the input received?

Gass and Selinker (1994) have advanced the idea of *intake*, wherein the input, (vocabulary, grammar and expressions) needs to be internalised by the pupil before meaningful output is possible. The teacher needs to ensure that the input is 'taken in', that is, recognised, understood, and acquired by the pupils.

Long (1996) developed the *Interaction Hypothesis* which focuses on the notion of *interaction* as a stimulus for effective output. Genuine communication through interaction can clearly be linked to constructivist theory. In this hypothesis, acquisition is created through the process of interaction when a problem in communication is met and learners take part in discussion or *negotiating for meaning*. Input becomes comprehensible through the modifications from interaction. Again, feedback also leads learners to modify their output.

In summary, using the target language enhances fluency, but also creates pupils' awareness of gaps in their knowledge. Through collaborative dialogue, they are encouraged to experiment but also obtain vital feedback on their performance which in turn encourages further effort.

The emphasis on developing Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities within the revised Northern Ireland Curriculum would support this collaborative approach to learning.

Genuine communication through interaction can clearly be linked to constructivist theory where:
- Group and pair work give learners language experience
- A task-based approach permits problem solving negotiation
- The role of the teacher is to find suitable tasks.

Constructivism and Post-communicative Language Teaching

Constructivist Theories of Learning
The emphasis on the role of the teacher as a scaffolder to learning signals a move to the focus on learning and teaching that is evident in the Revised Curriculum.

Cognitive Constructivism

Jean Piaget (1896-1980)
Children cannot undertake certain tasks until they are psychologically mature enough to do so. The readiness to learn and progress is different for each individual. There is an emphasis on discovery learning rather than teacher imparted information. Piaget maintained that language develops through interaction with the physical world.

Social Constructivism

Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934)
Vygotsky developed the theory of the **Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)**. 'Proximal' simply means 'next' and the ZPD is the distance or gap between a child's actual level of development as observed when working independently without adult help. The learner is 'stretched' and ZPD is about 'can do with help'. The teacher's role is to locate learning in the ZPD.

Jerome Bruner (1915-)
Bruner was influenced by Piaget and later by Vygotsky. He saw learning as a process of actively acquiring knowledge in which learners construct new ideas based upon their current and past knowledge. **'Learning how to learn' is central.** The process of learning is as important as the product, and social interaction is crucial.

Bruner's term **Scaffolding** (Wood, Bruner, and Ross 1976) has come to be used for the support for learning provided by a teacher to enable a learner to perform tasks and construct understandings that they would not quite be able to manage on their own as the learner moves towards mastery and autonomy, when the scaffolding is gradually phased out. It enables the teacher to extend the pupil's work and active participation beyond his current abilities and levels of understanding within the ZPD.

Common elements of scaffolding include:
- defining tasks
- direct or indirect instructing
- specification and sequencing of activities
- modelling and exemplification; simplification
- reinforcing
- questioning

David and Heather Wood developed the theory of **Contingency** in instruction. Contingency developed from work on face-to-face tutoring. It attempts to strike a balance between:
- ensuring that learners solve for themselves as many of the problems in a task as possible,

and
- intervening when the task is too difficult in order to avoid prolonged failure

The goals of contingent tutoring in assisted problem solving are:
  * The learner should not succeed too easily
  * Nor fail too often.

The principles are:
  * When learners are in trouble, give more help than before *(scaffolding)*
  * When they succeed, give less help than before *(fading)*

As well as scaffolding provided by the teacher, pupils collaborating in small groups can provide scaffolding for each other. The role of scaffolding can also be clearly linked to assessment for learning and active learning as suggested in the revised curriculum

1. Sharing Learning Intentions
Agreed learning intentions gives students a deeper understanding and ownership of their own learning process. This brings increased motivation and the desire to stay on task for a longer period of time.

2. Sharing and Negotiating Success Criteria
Created by pupils or in conjunction with teachers, clear success criteria aid self-assessment and helps identify the steps needed to complete a task.

3. Feedback
This is essential for effective learning and teaching. Strategies such as '2 stars and a wish', comment-only marking or providing prompts for improvement, can help plan the next steps in learning.

4. Effective Questioning
Using more open-ended questions, giving more thinking time, using pair share and so on can help pupils feel more confident to put forward new ideas, think out loud, explain their reasons and explore their understanding.

5. How Pupils Reflect on their Learning
(Peer and Self-Assessment and Self-Evaluation)
Allows pupils to reflect on what they have learnt and how they have learnt it. Using strategies such as traffic lights, thumbs up or useful thinking prompts can encourage pupil self-evaluation.
(CCEA 2007 http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/assessment_for_learning/index.asp)

Experiential learning
Experiential education is based on a tradition derived from Dewey, Piaget and Vygotsky of 'learning by doing' or 'active learning' wherein the teacher makes the knowledge to be learnt available to the learners, who experiment and make discoveries themselves. They learn through their own experience. Through reflecting on these activities, they develop new skills, insights, and attitudes.

Experiential and analytic immersion teaching
In experiential language teaching, teachers tend to do much or most of the talking, which risks limiting the learners' actual language productive experience. This highlights the need to develop classroom strategies, such as those employed in Task Based Language Learning, that encourage pupils' use of the target language.
Task Based Language Learning
This task-based approach can be effectively delivered with due attention to the aspects of teaching and learning now identified in research and good practice, such as focus on form, interaction, delivered by confident teachers with good resources to hand.

While tasks are of course used in Communicative Language Teaching, a Task Based Language Learning (TBLL) approach, based on constructivist principles, is now recognised as a means of developing good practice in language teaching and learning. A booklet of TBLL exemplars is available on the CnaG website (http://www.comhairle.org/english/publications.php)

The task may simply involve an exchange of information, or it may result in a problem, linguistic or other, being solved, or a set of instructions carried out. The teacher draws up a list of **topics** which learners can identify with, and then asks them to carry out a series of **operations** which can be combined in a task cycle design. Such operations could include, listing; ordering and sorting; comparing; problem-solving; sharing personal experiences; creative tasks. Every task cycle should include a focus on form and a focus on accuracy in order to promote more effective learning. Otherwise, learners will develop a 'classroom dialect' which may allow them to communicate, but at the expense of accuracy.

There is an emphasis on promoting independent learning in the revised curriculum. Many tasks can be completed by students working alone or in small groups to create **Student-Generated Materials (SGMs)**. In the classroom, texts for language learning need not always be chosen by the teacher. Pupils too can create learning materials, for example by bringing to class a news story, a text that s/he has written, a song, some realia, etc.
Pupils:
- Choose language and topics of interest to them;
- Focus attention on language they are ready to acquire/ consolidate;
- Become more independent as learners;
- Develop language-learning strategies;
- Become motivated.

Thinking Skills
Current developments in curricular approaches emphasise thinking skills and learner autonomy. Mei Lin and Mackay (2004), for example, provide insights, strategies, and exemplars of how teachers might **use thinking skills strategies** to promote independent language learning and use.

Receptive listening skill activities could include:
- Listen and label a /picture/diagram/map etc.
- Listen and fill in a table etc.
- Listen and make notes on specific information (dates, figures, times)

- Listen and reorder information
- Listen and identify location/speakers/places
- Listen and label the stages of a process/instructions/sequences of a text
- Listen and fill in the gaps in a text

Typical speaking activities include:
- Question loops - questions and answers, terms and definitions, halves of sentences
- Information gap activities with a question sheet to support
- Trivia search - 'things you know' and 'things you want to know'
- Word guessing games
- Class surveys using questionnaires
- 20 Questions - provide language support frame for questions
- Students present information from a visual using a language support handout
-

Examples within the revised Northern Ireland Curriculum can be found in the following guidance materials:

Thinking Skills & Personal Capabilities Guidance Booklet
http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/skills_and_capabilities/thinking_skills_and_personal_
capabilities/guidance_and_resources.asp

Active Learning and Teaching Methods
http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/irish_medium/IM_ActiveLearningTeachingMetho
ds.pdf

CLIL

The term *Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)* has been adopted to describe a model of bilingual education where pupils are introduced to new ideas, content, and concepts in traditional curriculum subjects using the target language as the medium of communication *Content Based Language Teaching* (CBLT) describes a similar approach. While CLIL, like Immersion Education, focuses on teaching and learning content through the second or target language, it does not normally have the same amount of curriculum time through the second language as immersion education, which goes beyond one or two subjects.

CLIL uses the target language for a curricular purpose, so that the language becomes a means to an end rather than an end in itself. The focus is not on language learning, but on acquiring new information. While devised for language enrichment in mainstream schools, the CLIL approach now encompasses immersion education and the 'long tradition (in Ireland) since the 1920s' is recognised (Eurydice 2006: 15). Accordingly, the CLIL approach to teaching and its resources should be of relevance to IME.

How does CLIL work?
A core principle is that the subject content should always be the primary focus in the CLIL classroom, not the teaching of the language itself as a subject. Knowledge of the language becomes the means of learning other subject content. The target language is encountered and developed in real-life situations, thus increasing motivation. This leads to acquisition and a willingness to communicate across a wider curriculum. CLIL, like immersion, is a long-term project. Students can be expected to become academically proficient in the second language (L2) after 5-7 years in a good bilingual programme.

A successful CLIL lesson should adopt and adapt the '4Cs', the 'Four Fundamental Principles' of the languages curriculum:

- **Content**
Progression in knowledge, skills and understanding related to specific elements of a defined curriculum
- **Communication**
Using language to learn – whilst learning to use language
The key is interaction, not reaction.
- **Cognition**
Developing thinking skills which link concept formation (abstract and concrete), understanding and language processing
- **Culture**
Exposure to alternative perspectives and shared understandings, deepening awareness of otherness and the self

The CLIL approach contains nothing essentially new to the teacher in a language classroom. Teaching strategies for reading and listening, and structures and vocabulary for spoken or written language, need to be taken into account for CLIL, and also for wider immersion. A list of such strategies can be adapted from Dellar (2005):

- Students need the necessary language support to take in and participate in lessons
- Teachers and learners need to memorize high frequency chunks and [phrases] related to their subject
- Teachers need to learn about multiple intelligences
- The limited and appropriate use of the mother tongue in class is legitimate
- Active involvement of the learners is essential
- As are repetition and recapping
- Visual support (pictures, charts, diagrams, tables etc) ease understanding
- Learners need to be trained in learner training techniques and to read more efficiently, plan their writing and use the Internet and other sources to prepare for coursework and tests
- The teacher needs to build in processing and thinking time and adjust the speed of the lessons accordingly
- Checking understanding frequently is very important.

Adapting a text: a CLIL example

Schools need to design materials and plan lessons to suit the needs of their learners and to enable them to develop until they are working at high levels of cognitive and linguistic challenge. Reading is an essential skill and source of input. The following Irish example for geography has been adapted from An Vicipéid/Wikipedia

An Iodáil (1)

Tír mhór i ndeisceart na hEorpa í **Poblacht na hIodáile** le thart ar 57 milliún duine ina gcónaí inti. Is ballstát den Aontas Eorpach í. Tá na hiamhchríocha San Mairíne agus an Vatacáin istigh san Iodáil. Bhíodh lira na hIodáile i San Mairíne agus i gCathair na Vatacáine. Úsáideann na tíortha sin go leir an euro anois.

Tá cruth buataise ar an leithinis, an chuid is mó den tír, agus is cuid den tír freisin an dá oileán is mó sa Mheánmhuir, an tSicil is an tSairdín.

Tá an Iodáil deighilte i 20 réigiún (*regioni*, uatha *regione*). Is í an Róimh príomhchathair na tíre. Tá teorainneacha aici leis an Ostair, an Fhrainc, an tSlóivéin, agus an Eilvéis sa tuaisceart.

Is í an tsliabh is airde ná Monte Bianco in iarthar na nAlpa.

An Iodáil (2)

Tír mhór i ndeisceart na hEorpa í **An Iodáil** le thart ar 57 milliún duine ina gcónaí inti. Is ballstát den Aontas Eorpach í. Tá na stáit bheaga San Mairíne agus an Vatacáin istigh san Iodáil. Usáideann siad an t-euro. Is leithinis mhór go príomha í le dhá phríomh-oileáin, an tSicil agus an tSairdín.

Tá an Iodáil deighilte i 20 réigiún agus is í an Róimh príomhchathair na tíre.Tá teorainneacha aici leis an Ostair, an Fhrainc, an tSlóivéin, agus an Eilvéis sa tuaisceart.

Is í an tsliabh is airde ná Monte Bianco in iarthar na nAlpa.

(Adapted from An Vicipéid http://ga.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iodail)

Montet and Morgan (2001) analyse how the CLIL approach can be seen in terms of constructivism:

a. The task – Name the country and regions by reading text and looking at an atlas
b. Individually – silent reading : underline words and sentences they understand
c. In pairs – compare and share
d. In groups of four – compare and share
e. Whole class exchange of information
f. Outcome – pupils can name regions.

Research and Irish Immersion

On the whole, international research encourages and supports the practice of immersion, but the particular circumstances of context, nationally and locally, must always inform any interpretation and implementation of research. One cannot assume that research findings from elsewhere will transfer directly to practice in Ireland. Any discussion or research must take into account such factors as the difference in international status between, for example, French or English in Canada, as dominant world languages, and Irish as a minority language; the availability of staff and resources; the role of the immersion language in society and the workplace. While the research on immersion education in Ireland is relatively limited, there have been a number of valuable studies.

Teacher Provision

Knipe (2004) outlines the professional profile of teachers in IME. While the last ten years have seen significant developments in initial teacher education for IME, there are still significant gaps in the provision of suitably qualified teachers north and south, and in all sectors: preschool, primary and post-primary (Coady 2001:199, Mac Donncha et al. 2005, McKendry 1995). Eagleson (2002) emphasises how reflective practice can improve teachers' professional practice. A culture of action research is also advocated in current professional practice.

Pre-School Education

Owens' (1992) study of the acquisition of Irish by a child for whom Irish is a second language, while limited to one individual, shows how language emerges through interaction, but highlights mainly the child's own contribution to acquisition. McKenna and Wall (1986) study Irish first language acquisition in the Gaeltacht but are aware of how their study is of relevance to the early acquisition of Irish as a second language. Hickey and M. Mhic Mhathúna's work on Irish outlines the positive outcomes of pre-school immersion.

Hickey has carried out several studies on preschool playgroup education in the Gaeltacht (1999) and Galltacht. Her 1997 study on Na Naíonraí (preschool immersion education) in Ireland reviews the research literature and analyses the results from a nation wide survey. The rationale behind Naíonraí is based on the belief that:
- Pre-school education is beneficial to the child, family, and community
- Young children acquire a second language naturally in appropriate conditions
- Pre-schooling through Irish assists in expanding the use of Irish in the realm of the family, which in turn helps to promote integration in the community.(Hickey 1997: 4).

Hickey finds that children in Naíonraí reach an 'appreciable' level of achievement. This corroborates Göncz and Kodzopeljic (1991) who report that pre-school immersion develops young children's metalinguistic awareness and analytical approach to language, thereby making them well-placed for the acquisition of literacy skills, as was also found by Bialystok (1986).

The vast majority of pupils in Naíonraí develop basic comprehension, with over half achieving relatively advanced comprehension and a limited ability in expression. These results are significant as few of the children, North or South, have Irish as a

home language. Parents were very satisfied with the level of achievement in English and their children's general education through participation in the range of play activities. Hickey notes that the Irish situation fulfils three important criteria for success identified by Artigal (1991): the social status of the first language (English), positive attitudes to L2 among parents and pupils, and a pedagogy of comprehensible input that encourages children's efforts to speak Irish. Mac Corraidh (2005:47), however, summarises a series of preschool nursery inspection reports in Northern Ireland, and an as yet unpublished conference paper by Hickey, which underline the need for adequate Irish-speaking skills among preschool supervisors. The Hawaiian programme (2004:3) advises that (the most) highly proficient teachers should be placed in the beginning years of immersion education as language development in the early grades has implications for the reading and writing skills.

Community Support
Hickey reported that the Naíonraí movement has led to wider use of Irish in the pupils' homes and the wider community and stimulated demand for further schooling at primary and post-primary levels. As such, the movement is 'a vital link in the chain of language revitalisation' (p.189). Research in Northern Ireland (O'Reilly 1999, Gallagher & Hanna 2002) has also shown that parents, teachers and pupils regard IME itself and the language and culture positively.

Introducing Reading
Ní Bhaoill and Ó Duibhir (2004) discuss whether reading should first be introduced in English or Irish or in both simultaneously. Research in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland reports successful introduction of the second language first, but they cite other research that suggests that the choice and order of first reading language is less important than the pedagogic approach, "the ability of the teacher to teach literacy takes precedence over the language of instruction" (Ewart and Straw, 2001:196). Cummins (2000: 215), referring to research from Africa, Europe and the USA, writes "The research indicates that the language of initial introduction of reading is not, in itself, a determinant of academic outcomes". Nevertheless, the fundamentals must be mastered.

The transference of basic reading and math skills from [Irish] to English is dependent on the mastery of these skills through [Irish] language instruction, adequate practice applying previously obtained skills in an English context, and purposeful transitional instruction (Dept. of Education, Hawaii 2004:18).
Coady (2001: 148) reports from an interview with the director of *Gaelscoileanna* that schools were "playing it safe" by introducing reading in English and Irish together, although *Gaelscoileanna's* policy was to provide a grounding in Irish before introducing reading in English. Her research uncovers a great deal of uncertainty among teachers in IME around the question of introducing reading initially in Irish. The NCCA (2006) consultative paper on language and literacy in Irish-medium primary schools describes practice in 6 schools. In some of the cases described, reading in English is introduced first. While advising further research into the various policies on sequence of language introduction, Ó Baoill and Ó Duibhir advise flexibility, but that in the meantime schools should start with reading in Irish.

Support for Reading

Hickey (2001a, 2001b) reviews issues surrounding reading in Irish, particularly in the context of the Revised Curriculum, which recommends for English:

> that the child's language competence, attention span, concentration and perceptual abilities should be well developed before being introduced to a formal reading scheme. Consequently, much of the child's first year at school will be devoted to oral language and informal reading activities.

For Irish, following Day & Bamford (1998), Hickey considers the best way to teach L2 reading is to focus more on producing readers who can and want to read, rather than concentrating solely on developing reading skills. She identifies a number of ways to help and encourage children to read Irish more:

- Target decoding problems (e.g. difficult consonant clusters such as initial eclipsis, e.g. *ts-, mbr-, bhf-*) directly using materials such as those developed in the Muintearas *Scéim Foghraíochta.*
- Read aloud to children daily, simplifying text as necessary initially, and helping children to arrive at the meaning through discussion.
- Focus on increasing children's motivation to read in Irish by moving away from dependence on a class reader and using instead a wide range of Irish reading materials comprising real books and graded readers. She advises 'Book Floods' that offer children access to a large amount of minimally controlled, comprehensible reading materials in Irish, and 'Extensive Reading' programmes that "give pupils the time, encouragement and materials to read pleasurably, at their own level, as many books as they can" (Hickey 2001: 76). (This reflects Krashen's highlighting of reading as a rich source of input).
- Prepare [recordings] to accompany the Irish books used, to help with decoding and offer good models of reading.
- Give children daily opportunities to hear storybook reading (from teacher or [recording]) in Irish, and later to read independently or in small groups.
- Provide where possible (and demand from publishers) recordings for the Irish books used, and provide opportunities for children to read along with their tapes/ recordings in class and at home.
- Actively elicit parental support for Irish reading by setting up Shared Reading programmes, providing parents with recorded models of the Irish books being read in school by the child, and informing parents of the importance of their praise for children's progress in Irish
- Encourage and promote watching of Irish videos and TV programmes.

These recommendations should now be considered in the light of current developments in multimedia and the availability of computers.

The Hawaiian programme encourages the use of 'Literature Circles'. Literary selections are used instead of textbooks in this activity which lends itself to a variety of content and integration possibilities (Dept of Education Hawaii 2004: 16) and encourages fuller use of the limited resources available to minority languages.

Phonics

Ní Bhaoill (2004) reports that teachers require and requested guidance on phonological and phonemic awareness. As noted above by Hickey, Irish has some decoding problems such as initial mutations, but Ní Bhaoill also records (Ní Bhaoill

2004, Ní Bhaoill & Ó Duibhir 2004) that schools reported less difficulty in Irish reading than English, since the orthography of Irish is more regular than English.

The Linguistics Phonics approach has been adopted by Belfast Education and Library Board for English, and is being developed for Irish. Linguistic Phonics differs from traditional phonics in that it does not ask pupils to look at letters and say what sound the letter makes, but begins with what the children bring to school, namely the phonemes of their existing spoken language and progresses to marry sounds with the written word (Gray *et al.* 2006:!0). In Irish immersion, the *Fónaic na Gaeilge* scheme continues to be developed along similar lines to Linguistic Phonics. It initially develops phonological awareness, with aural familiarisation of initial sounds, syllables, and rhythm. As suggested by Hickey above, the Muintearas *Scéim Foghraíochta* and the materials developed from it could also be used.

Gaeltacht and Gaelscoil teachers need to be aware of the phonemic structure of the Irish sound system, in particular the contrast between velar and palatalised consonants, 'Caol agus Leathan'. In his Introduction to the Linguistic Atlas and Survey of Irish Dialects, Wagner commented as follows on the sound system of spoken Irish:

> …it is the vowels [of Irish] which present difficulties when trying to transcribe a word or a sentence. The reason for this is that the phonemic system of Irish is based on the consonants – rather than on the vowels, which latter show great variety…..On the other hand, consonants are fairly stable and therefore easier to define. Slight changes of consonant often result in misinterpretation, while the vowels have a wider phonetic radius (Wagner 1981: XXII).

Unfortunately, teachers are not always familiar with this fundamental phonemic distinction between broad and slender, leading to faulty models being presented in the classroom, and ultimately to faulty reproduction and difficulties in understanding among learners (McKendry 1996). In her discussion of International English, Seidlhofer (2003) cites Jenkins' "pedagogical core of phonological intelligibility" (Jenkins 2000:123). An introductory course in applied phonetics in Irish, using one of the excellent course books available, such as *Bunchúrsa Foghraíochta* or *Cúrsa Tosaigh Foghraíochta*, and the principles underlying the *Lárchanúint,* should enable teachers to recognise the "Croí Coitianta Foghraíochta," the pedagogical core of phonological intelligibility of Irish, while striving to successfully implement the new phonics courses.

Linguistic Accuracy
Henry *et al.* (2002) found that children in Irish-medium primary schools become highly competent communicators and that the "Acquisition of most major aspects of Irish grammar takes place effectively through use of Irish in the classroom, without needing specific instruction in grammar" (Henry *et al.* 2002:1). But importantly, in a small number of language areas, the amount and type of input available does not allow the children's Irish to develop accurately and needs specific focused input *(ibid.:*14).

Mac Corraidh (2005:46-48) also summarises Department of Education (Northern Ireland) primary school inspection reports in Northern Ireland. There is general acknowledgement of the levels of fluency achieved, while recognising "the use, in

the children's speech and writing, of forms of expression that do not conform to accepted practice" A 1993 DE report states that there was also "too great a concentration on factual writing and on exercises designed to improve grammatical accuracy". This raises fundamental questions about the role of form-focused language teaching as against a predominantly experiential approach of comprehensible input, and how the balance can be achieved. Mac Corraidh's 2005 thesis on Irish-medium Primary Teachers' Beliefs and Practices in Northern Ireland draws important conclusions which reflect more closely the current international views surrounding form-focused language teaching. Nevertheless, language tasks and activities are not consistently planned in order to develop pupils' Irish language skills. Accordingly, pupils in years six and seven use Irish as they did previously in years four and five without discernible development. Teachers are unsure as to how linguistic accuracy can best be achieved by pupils and struggle in affording pupils opportunities for extended use of Irish. It is claimed that time and the amount of content to be taught prevent them from consistently considering accuracy in the use of Irish by pupils. Pupils' underdeveloped writing skills in Irish demand a more formal approach to the teaching of Irish. Pupils need to experience other peer and adult speakers of Irish, both native and competent non-native speakers. Correction strategies for the pupils' production of Irish vary widely among schools and within them (Mac Corraidh 2005:133).

The Hawaiian immersion programme sets out basic guidelines for the grammatical structures and features that should be acquired in kindergarten and grade one (Warner n.d.). A similar programme could be devised for Irish.

Language teaching, both immersion and second language subject teaching, has now moved from a straightforward emphasis upon communicative input to a more eclectic approach, recognising *inter alia* the importance of output as well as input, strategies for production, interaction, and linguistic form. Effective practice will develop through these broader perspectives.

Resources

Theory and the good practice it should give rise to are, however, hampered by the availability of resources in IME generally. In the republic, textbooks are developed and marketed by private publishing companies, following the curriculum guidelines set down by the Department of Education. As Irish-medium schools make up only 4% of primary schools, they are not an overly attractive market for publishers. The situation is even more acute in Northern Ireland. While materials can be brought in from the south, Irish medium materials specific to the Northern Ireland Curriculum are even more difficult to provide, although the Áisaonad in St. Mary's University College Belfast is working to fill gaps in resources provision. The potential for developing materials through ICT is recognised. *Learning Northern Ireland (LNI),* C2k's new web-based learning environment holds great promise, as do environments such as the Primary Curriculum Support Programme, *Foghlaim agus Forbairt,* in the Republic.

There is now a range of organisations supporting IME, such as COGG, An Gúm, An tÁisaonad, Muintearas, Gaelscoileanna, etc., as well as generic resource projects supported by the European Union, etc. Under Article 31 of the Education Act (1998), COGG has responsibilities in the following areas:

- The provision of textbooks and resources for teaching *through* Irish
- The provision of textbooks and resources for the teaching *of* Irish
- To make available support services through the medium of Irish
- Strategies with the aim of improving the effectiveness of the teaching of Irish.

Nevertheless, in spite of all these positive developments, it must be recognised that IME will always be struggling against the comparison with resources in English. There is moreover a need to ensure that such resources as are available be disseminated effectively in the schools. While funding will remain an issue, the provision of reading and other resource materials should be prioritised. One can nevertheless recognise that the number of good reading and other resources has developed strikingly in recent years, with projects such as *Séideán Sí* (An Gúm 2005). A pressing need is also identified for areas of the curriculum other than reading and literacy. Coady (2001: 143) investigated the difficulty teachers had in finding primary school materials in Irish, comparing her results with a 1974 survey. While some slight improvement was recorded between 1974 and 2000, her survey found that it remains difficult to obtain materials and textbooks in many subject areas.

Curriculum Developments

The Revised Curriculum/An Curaclam Athbhreithnithe in the Republic provides opportunities to implement an integrated skills approach (listening, speaking, reading, writing) to teaching Irish in Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools. It encourages a wide range of resources and activities:

> At the heart of the Gaeilge curriculum, is a communicative, task-based approach to language learning, in which the child learns to use the language as an effective means of communication. Topics are based on the children's own interests, concerns, and needs, and children are encouraged to speak the language in real contexts and situations. The emphasis is on enjoyment and on using the language in activities such as games, tasks, conversations, role-playing, sketches, and drama. The language the children use in these activities is relevant and reusable from lesson to lesson (NCCA 1999: 44).

Ní Mhóráin (2005) has criticised the Curaclam for its lack of consideration of Irish in the Gaeltacht or in Gaelscoileanna. The Irish language area in the Curriculum is geared towards Irish Second Language Learners in English-medium schools. Native speakers in particular are poorly served by the curriculum and the examination system towards which it is geared. In comparison with the English language area of the Curaclam, the Irish area is impoverished and not suitable for purpose in the Gaeltacht or in Gaelscoileanna. There is need for a new curriculum designed specifically with their needs in mind. Ní Mhóráin quotes from David Little's NCCA discussion document on Languages in the Post-Primary Curriculum:

> The failure to make separate curriculum provision for the teaching of Irish as (i) mother tongue/ medium of schooling and (ii) second language is linguistically and educationally indefensible (Little 2003: 36).

The revised Northern Ireland Curriculum (CCEA 2007), covering Foundation Stage, Key Stages 1 and 2 in Primary, and Key Stages 3 and 4 Post-primary up to GCSE, changes the focus from subject knowledge to the development of skills, personal capabilities and developing thinking. It promotes:

- A reduction in the level of prescription in the statutory requirements
- Building on new understanding about how children learn and how they develop
- Putting learning for life and work at the centre of the curriculum and not at the periphery
- Giving much greater emphasis to what children can do in terms of their skills and competences
- Making connections across different parts of the curriculum more explicit
- Using assessment more as a tool for improving learning rather than just a means of reporting on it
- Meeting the needs of all learners.

In post-primary, subjects no longer stand alone with their own discretely defined areas of knowledge and skills. Rather they are set out as 'strands' within 'Learning Areas'. The statutory requirements are set out as statements of minimum entitlement, rather than as syllabuses or specifications.

While there is some considerable debate about these developments, they should be seen as an opportunity for IME, which will no longer need to contend with specific and detailed programmes of study for individual subjects and the difficulties in materials which the previous curriculum gave rise to. IME schools will have more flexibility and control over the curriculum they offer under the common, but less prescriptive curriculum objectives proposed.

The English Language in IME

The role of the mother tongue in immersion education is a key concern. The formal introduction of English in Irish Medium Education is usually delayed until year 3 or 4, but some researchers call for a more systematic use of the first language.

Immersion education aims "to strengthen and to use both languages to a high level in order to develop balanced and confident bilingual pupils" (C. Williams 2002: 47). Up until curriculum revision, Irish-medium primary education in Northern Ireland has had a specific programme of study for English in Key Stage One which normally begins in year 3 or 4. The use of English in early years teaching is viewed as inappropriate (Mac Corraidh 2005: 84). It is expected that literacy skills, initially acquired through Irish, transfer to the contexts of English. The curriculum for English at Key Stage Two as applied in English Medium Education is followed. This later introduction of formal instruction in the mother tongue is common practice internationally. In Hawaii, for example, where English is the mother tongue, use of English as the medium of instruction begins in grade 5 for one hour a day. Because immersion aims for equal proficiency in Hawaiian and English, basic skills must be emphasized and assured in Hawaiian in order to provide a basis for transference to English. "If skills are not developed through Hawaiian language instruction there can be no application of those skills to English when it is introduced" (Dept of Education, Hawaii 2004:3)

In the Republic, Curaclam na Bunscoile/ Primary School Curriculum states:
> In Gaeltacht schools and Scoileanna Lán-Ghaeilge, Irish is the language of the school. The curriculum for these schools provides a context in which children will achieve a more extensive mastery of Irish. Their proficiency will be further enhanced by experiencing Irish as a learning medium (NCCA 1999: 43).

There is no mention in the Curaclam Introduction document or in the English Language Area document of the role of English in Irish-medium schools, or indeed of dual Irish and English literacy at all. This is in contrast with Wales where the issue of dual literacy, indeed triliteracy, including a third, usually mainland European language, is discussed in various documents (Estyn 2002; ACCAC 2003). The Curaclam sets a guideline of 4 hours per week of Language 1, 3.5 hours per week for Language 2 (NCCA 1999:70). It is not clear how this relates to Irish medium schools (Ni Mhóráin 2005).

By the end of primary schooling, it is expected that IME pupils will achieve in English and other core curriculum areas at comparable levels to their peers in English Medium Education. As IME pupils have exposure to information in two languages, IME teachers can exploit this competence both in classroom and at home. The pupils' proficiency in English is an additional learning resource and a means to check for the transmission of meaning and the affirmation of comprehension.

Mac Corraidh records that in the presence of teachers IME pupils generally use Irish with each other, but English in the teacher's absence. The use of English by teachers is as far as possible limited to the instruction of that language. In order to

make connections in pupils' learning within a thematic planning approach, English and specifically subject-related terminology in English is sometimes taught. While the use of English by pupils in Irish medium schools is frowned upon (Mac Corraidh, 2005: 83), encouraging the use of Irish as opposed to prohibiting the use of English is more prevalent. Target language use is practised more in pupil/teacher interactions than in pupil/pupil interactions. Mac Corraidh also reports that in contrast to pupils in early years in IME, pupils in higher primary years generally use less of the target language in peer/peer interactions and he claims that pupils fall back into using English as soon as they feel it is safe to do so and also prefer to write in English.

English is used to various degrees in the presentation of curricular content. Concurrent translation is reported as occurring frequently, where the teacher uses English to clarify and reinforce concepts delivered in the pupils' second language, Irish. Teachers often use English to ensure the pupils understood important concepts, but also to prepare final primary class pupils for secondary school the following year when many of them would be going to an English medium school. Another reason given for using English was the availability of textbooks, suitable resources, and familiarity with the appropriate vocabulary.

Teachers in IME are uncertain about the use of English across the curriculum. Similar concerns have been voiced in Wales. S. Williams (1997: 7) reports one teacher using English for some topics for reasons of 'convenience, as there is no real structure'. The availability of textbooks was mentioned, as was a sense that English was more widely used for teaching across the curriculum due to the prescriptive nature of the National Curriculum programmes of study. The more flexible approach to the curriculum now being proposed in Northern Ireland should lessen the pressure imposed by the current subject programmes of study.

Mac Corraidh records two opinions among IME teachers: on the one hand that English should be used more widely and on the other that the use of English should be restricted to the teaching of the language as a core subject in the curriculum. He concludes that the status of English in teaching and learning, as the mother tongue of most learners and teachers, should be re-examined.

Butzkamm (2003) investigates the role of the mother tongue in foreign language classrooms, primarily in conventional classrooms where exposure to L2 is restricted. His view of the ability of the child to use the mother tongue as a cognitive and pedagogical resource will be more important for pupils of 7 or 8 upwards, by which time the mother tongue has taken firm root, rather than for early immersion which aims for the development of these basic cognitive processes in both languages, utilizing what Cummins hypothesized as the Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP). Butzkamm's views are nevertheless of relevance across the immersion environment.

Butzkamm's description of the target language orthodoxy in foreign language classrooms holds even more strongly for immersion and echoes the Welsh and Irish classroom teachers' experience and practice described above:

> A consensus has been reached in favour of a kind of monolingualism with small concessions: "There is little point in trying to stamp it out completely" (Harmer, 2001: 132). The mother tongue is generally regarded as being an

evasive manoeuvre which is to be used only in emergencies (Butzkamm 2003: 29).

His views can be summarised in the one sentence "You can banish the Mother Tongue from the classroom, but you cannot banish it from the pupils' heads". The immersion pupil's life experience and learning are inevitably encountered in both languages. Butzkamm cites:

> Ignoring or forbidding English will not do, for learners inevitably engage in French-English associations and formulations in their minds (Hammerly, 1989: 51).

> Translation/transfer is a natural phenomenon and an inevitable part of second language acquisition…, regardless of whether or not the teacher offers or 'permits' translation" (Harbord, 1992:351).

From this basis, and accepting it, one can further the development of acquisition in both languages. Butzkamm borrows Bruner's phrase *Language Acquisition Support System* (LASS) which along with scaffolding can assist learners in acquiring L2. "Our job is to assist them in this task instead of ignoring or even trying to suppress what goes on in the pupils' minds." (Butzkamm 2003: 31). This is no easy challenge, as evidenced by Mac Corraidh and S.Williams. Citing Hammerly (1991: 151), Butzkamm argues that the judicious use of the Mother Tongue in carefully crafted techniques "can be twice as efficient (i.e. reach the same level of second language proficiency in half the time), without any loss in effectiveness, as instruction that ignores the students' native language."

Further research into good practice and strategies for appropriate and effective L1 use in IME would be beneficial. It would appear however, that resource and terminology difficulties, and possibly teacher provision, are particular issues in IME.

One of the strategies suggested by Butzkamm is recommending that pupils look at the L2 versions of favourite books read in their mother tongue. He reports that German pupils have been known to read the *Harry Potter* books in English after they had read the German version or seen the film in German. Pupils will certainly be aware of the stories even if they have not read the book or seen the film, and so texts such as *Harry Potter agus an Órchloch* (Rowling 2004) could be effectively used to encourage reading and access to richer comprehensible input and faster acquisition.

Another positive response to the quandary of English is *Translanguaging*, where the learner receives information in one language, using passive (or receptive) language skills (listening and reading) and then producing it in another language using active language skills (talking and writing) (C.Williams 2002: 47). It is described as:

> The hearing or reading of a lesson, a passage in a book or a section of work in one language and the development of the work (i.e. by discussion, writing a passage, completing a worksheet, conducting an experiment) in the other language. That is, the input and output are deliberately in a different language, and this is systematically varied. In translanguaging, the input (reading or listening) tends to be in one language, and the output (speaking or

writing) in another language. The students need to understand the work to use the information successfully in another language (Baker 2002: 281).

Translanguaging has two potential advantages. It may promote a deeper and fuller understanding of the subject matter. It is possible in a monolingual context for students to answer questions or write an essay without fully understanding the subject. Whole sentences or paragraphs can be copied or adapted from a textbook without really understanding them. This is less easy in a bilingual situation. To read and discuss a topic in one language, and then to write about it in another, means that the subject matter has to be properly 'digested' and reconstructed. Translanguaging may also help students develop skills in the weaker language (Baker 2000: 104-105).

In order to effectively convey a concept from one language to another, the learner must have a thorough understanding of the content or idea. Language and cognitive development are stimulated through interaction with peers and the teacher. C. Williams notes that translanguaging is a method for children who have a reasonably good grasp of both languages and is a strategy for retaining and developing bilingualism rather than for initial teaching of the second language.

Since the aim of bilingual education is to develop to a high level in and facilitate use of both languages, the pupil's knowledge of English, in the Gaeltacht or the Galltacht, should be seen as a natural and beneficial resource and phenomenon. The research emphasises the importance of the bilingual child's mother tongue for their overall development. The Common Underlying Proficiency can be harnessed to progress the development of both languages through strategies such as translanguaging. The use of English in the Irish-medium school classroom, however, is often due to the lack of suitable textbooks or resources, a situation which should be addressed as fully and as soon as possible.

Summary and Recommendations

Irish Medium immersion does not solely aim to teach the Irish language. It seeks high levels of proficiency in Irish and English and to deliver a full academic programme through Irish where possible, except in English classes.

The findings from evaluations of immersion programme have been consistent in showing that pupils in immersion education gain fluency and literacy in their immersion language at no apparent cost to their first language academic skills. Harris et al. (2006) highlight the achievements of immersion in the Irish context. It is clear from the international research, however, that one can usually distinguish between native speakers and immersion pupils.

The experiential, communicative approach has resulted in a high level of fluency, but pupils' grammatical competence tends to 'plateau', with particular common errors becoming embedded in the learners' usage. Whatever the methodology employed, time, quality, and extent of exposure are the most important variables.

The communicative, experiential approach underpinning immersion language teaching since the 1970s emphasised the rich input in the target language, but undervalued grammar instruction. The development of pupils' Irish language receptive skills often does not mirror their production skills. More recent literature and research recognise the importance of input, but recommend approaches such as those that are task-oriented, and encourage learner autonomy.

Practical support for teachers and parents is constantly developing. Accessible but authoritative publications such as *Cúnamh* (Uí Ghradaigh 2004) and *Two Windows on the World* (Andrews 2006) provide invaluable support to teachers and parents alike. Nevertheless, there is still a need for further resources and guidance for teachers and parents.

In the Gaeltacht, the arrival of pupils into the area who have limited or no Irish and who may have already commenced their education adds to the burden of the teacher. This is a model of 'Delayed Immersion' which must also be considered.

Recommendations

For teachers / practitioners/ school managers and policy makers:

- While instruction should focus primarily on meaning, instruction also needs to ensure that learners focus on linguistic form.
- Successful immersion requires extensive teacher talk but also opportunities for students to use the target language.
- Encouraging classroom conversation, with interaction between pupils, and task-based education will develop pupil interaction, increasing involvement and motivation
- Class focus across the curriculum should be on learning content. The emerging approach to CLIL should be allied to existing, long-standing good practice in Irish Medium Education
- Strategies for interaction between teachers and pupils, and peer and teacher feedback should be encouraged
- The 'Delayed Immersion' model must also be considered when it arises in Gaeltacht schools

- The role and status of English, as the mother tongue of most learners, should be considered and re-examined as a key issue in teaching and learning. Further research into good practice and strategies for appropriate and effective first language use in IME would be beneficial.
- Irish and English should be kept separate as much as possible as languages of instruction
- Oral language work is recognized as a vital part of the curriculum particularly during the early years period before the formal teaching of reading is introduced. The transition to a formal programme should be as gradual and natural as possible.
- Instruction needs to take account of differentiation of learners' abilities
- The whole school staff, classroom, ancillary and administrative should, as far as possible, endeavour to work through Irish, particularly when interacting with the pupils

Those responsible for provision of resources:
Department of Education / Education and Library Boards / CCEA/ PMB, etc.

- Sufficient high quality classroom resources should be available across the curriculum
- Development and provision of ICT resources should be prioritised.
- More use of existing resources such as Learning NI materials.
- Appropriate and linguistically sensitive staff and resources support should be provided for pupils with identified additional needs in Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools
- A wide range of reading resources, general and graded, should be provided
- Implement Phonics programmes currently being developed for Irish with appropriate support at all levels
- Appropriate instruments of assessment in Irish, including standardised tests, should continue to be developed
- Access to and training in assessment practices and resources should be assured for teachers
- At school level the sharing of resources at local and national level should be encouraged.

Third level education and CPD providers:

- Appropriate Teacher Education programmes for Gaeltacht schools and Gaelscoileanna need to be assured from pre-school to A-level, from Naíonraí to Ardteist
- A supply of highly proficient teachers, with professional and linguistic competence for the beginning years of immersion education must be assured as language development in the early grades has implications for the further development of pupils' skills
- The issues surrounding the challenge for staff teaching in their second language must be addressed
- The fluency of teachers in IME must be maintained and developed
- Appropriate preservice and inservice training and support must be provided on immersion and bilingual pedagogy and theory

- Teachers in IME will require continuing, appropriate professional development in their own language skills, their pedagogic skills, and the specific content areas.

- A series of accessible books or pamphlets should be prepared to discuss and advise on areas such as teaching methods, professional development etc. in IME. Resources such as *Cúnamh* (Uí Ghradaigh 2004) could be read independently or in staff discussion and provide practical suggestions for classroom practice.

- Resource and terminology difficulties in IME should be resolved.

Exchanges and Visits

- Gaelscoil teachers and student teachers in IME should have opportunities for extended periods of residence in the Gaeltacht, and possible experience of Gaeltacht schools

- North/South exchange schemes for teachers and pupils should be developed for Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools

Research institutions

- 'The Teacher as Researcher' and Action Research projects should be encouraged in IME

- Collaboration between teachers and researchers should be developed

- Research into developmental sequences in Irish to assist teachers to see progress in terms other than accuracy alone

- Such research should lead to the development of a linguistically sequenced language syllabus for Irish.

- Further qualitative research/case-study research should be carried out on existing good practice in IME

- The findings of research into international good practice in immersion/bilingual education should be regularly incorporated into IME

Policy Makers

- Conradh na Gaeilge's 1+1+1 education policy should be adopted i.e. Irish, English, and a foreign language

- Careful consideration of the outcome of the review of Irish Medium Education and consultation documents.

- A coherent languages policy should be developed for Irish Immersion Education, linking in with the report from the Royal Irish Academy's Committee for Modern Language, Literary and Cultural Studies on *Language Planning and Language Policy in Ireland,* (Ó Dochartaigh & Broderick 2006,) and any future Languages Strategy in Northern Ireland,

- An ongoing review of policies should be introduced for use of Irish in Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools, inside and outside the classroom.

- The role and support of parents and the wider community should be consistently encouraged

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