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CONTENT-BASED LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

A CLEAR-SPONSORED SEMINAR

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About CLEAR

The lead article in this issue of the ERIC/CLL News Bulletin discusses a seminar that was sponsored in January by the new Center for Language Education and Research (CLEAR), which has a mandate from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement to conduct both basic and applied research of relevance to educators of limited-English-proficient students and foreign language students. CLEAR is located at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and is staffed by an interdisciplinary group of staff and students. Major CLEAR-related projects are also being conducted at the Center for Applied Linguistics, Yale University, Harvard University, and the University of California, Santa Barbara. CLEAR is also collaborating with numerous school districts around the country.

In response to growing recognition of the importance of content-based instruction, the Center for Applied Linguistics, as part of its activities in the Center for Language Education and Research (CLEAR), brought together teachers, administrators, and materials developers from ESL, foreign languages, and bilingual education for a seminar on January 6, 1986, to discuss ways in which language and content instruction can be effectively combined, the kinds of programs and materials that exist, and the needs or problems that must be addressed, by CLEAR and others, to facilitate this integration. Also in attendance were a number of researchers in mathematics and science who are particularly interested in the role of language in inquiry and problem solving, and in the academic achievement of students.

The goals of the seminar were to:

1. identify ways in which language instruction and academic content instruction can be successfully combined, regardless of the language;
2. identify model programs, promising teaching methodologies, materials, and other resources;
3. provide direction for future program development by identifying needs in teacher training, materials, curriculum, and research;
4. summarize and disseminate information about the current status and needs in content-based language instruction; and
5. provide guidance for future CLEAR activities.

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LANGUAGE AND CONTENT LEARNING: FINDING COMMON GROUND

Bernard A. Mohan, University of British Columbia

A majority of second language learners do not learn language for its own sake. They learn because they must learn subject matter through the medium of the second language. They must use the second language to learn. Accordingly, the integration of language learning and content learning is now considered an important question in the field of language research. Many scholars now believe that a second language is learned not so much by direct instruction in the rules of language, but by using the language in meaningful contexts. The success of Canadian French immersion programs is widely known (Swain & Lapkin, 1981). Krashen (1982) argues that learners will acquire a second language only if they receive comprehensible input in it. Talk becomes comprehensible to second language learners through context and reference to background knowledge and experience. But talk is not enough. Cummins (1984) provides evidence that to succeed in school, bilingual students need more than

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INTEGRATING LANGUAGE AND CONTENT INSTRUCTION

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Integration of language and subject content has successfully been accomplished in immersion programs and has emerged as a feature of sheltered-English programs for limited-English-proficient (LEP) students. In both programs students succeed in acquiring language and subject matter content knowledge at the same time.

Immersion programs have very successfully demonstrated for a period of over 20 years that students can learn subject content and language simultaneously and achieve in standardized tests administered in English at the same level or often at higher levels than students in English-only classes (Swain, 1984). In immersion programs, the second language is used as the medium for subject content instruction and students learn the second language naturally, because they need it to communicate about school subjects and what is happening around them. In total

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immersion programs, the first two or three years in the program are conducted entirely through the second language, and students begin initial reading instruction in that language.

The goals of immersion programs are usually four-fold (Genessee, 1984):

1. to provide the participating students with functional competence in both written and spoken aspects of the second language;
2. to promote and maintain normal levels of first language development;
3. to ensure achievement in academic subjects commensurate with students' academic ability and grade level; and
4. to instill in the student an understanding and appreciation for the target language group and their language and culture without detracting in any way from the students' identity with and appreciation of the home language and culture.

Immersion programs are not alone in providing successful content-based instruction for second language learners. Sheltered-English programs, which originated in California, have also proven to be very effective in this regard. Sheltered-English programs are components of bilingual education programs, which are designed to teach English and subject content to LEP students using specially adapted (but not watered-down) curriculums and materials. In the sheltered-English class, as in the immersion class, language is only a tool through which subject content is learned.

The goals of sheltered English programs for language-minority students as articulated by Holt and Tempes (1982) are: that LEP students will (a) attain high levels of oral English proficiency; (b) achieve in academic areas; and (c) experience positive psychosocial adjustment to life in a complex, multi-cultural society.

A third example of successful content-based instruction can be found in "enriched FLES" (foreign language in the elementary school) programs or partial immersion programs in which students receive some subject content instruction in a second language in addition to formal language instruction.

Examples of such programs can be found in Cincinnati, OH, where elementary students are learning Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, or Russian through art, music, and physical education classes, and in Milwaukee, WI, where a group of middle school students are learning Spanish and mathematics taught through Spanish. Elementary students in the Maple Dale-Indian Hill School District just outside of Milwaukee, participate in an interdisciplinary Spanish program. Spanish and selected science, art, and social studies lessons are taught in Spanish.

Recent second language acquisition research gives theoretical support to the success that content-based second language learning programs have shown. The distinction that has been made between "acquisition" and "learning" (Krashen, 1981; Stevick, 1980) shows that acquisition occurs when language is "picked up" naturally--a subconscious process almost like learning a first language. Research further suggests that acquiring a second language is dependent on sufficient understandable linguistic input that the brain processes in order to generate speech. Krashen (1981) uses the term "comprehensible input" to describe this process.

Some characteristics of comprehensible input are:

1. It must contain some language already known to the students and some language not yet acquired.
2. The language that is acquired is acquired through context, gestures, and linguistic modifications.
3. The message must focus on meaning and not on form, and must be interesting to the student.
4. The input is not necessarily grammatically sequenced.
5. Affective factors that are present are self-confidence and low anxiety.

Additional second language acquisition research that supports content-based instruction is that of Cummins (1981) who states that first or second language proficiency can be looked at in terms of the degree of contextual support available for expressing or comprehending through a language and the degree of cognitive involvement necessary to do an activity. Asher (1977) talks about the role of a "silent period" in second language instruction when students are not required to produce utterances before they are ready. Dulay and Burt (1978), among others, point to the importance of the separation of primary and target languages in second language programs.

It is interesting to note that all of the aspects of second language acquisition research that have been mentioned here are present in immersion and sheltered-English programs:

1. There is a focus on meaning rather than on form. There is no overt error correction.
2. Linguistic modifications such as simplified speech and controlled vocabulary that are necessary for comprehensible input are used.
3. Instructional language has contextual clues to help convey meaning.
4. Conversational interaction--usually the subject content--is interesting and real to the students.
5. Languages of instruction are kept very carefully separated.
6. Students are allowed a silent period and do not have to speak until they are ready.

The successes of content-based instruction as evidenced in immersion programs and sheltered-English programs need to be carried further into other more traditional foreign language programs, at the elementary, middle school/junior high, and high school levels. Especially in the area of elementary foreign language programs, the incorporation of content-based instruction would give increased impetus to language study at that level, not only because of the increased language learning success it would bring, but also because it would provide a solution for the perennial problem of what to take out of the curriculum in order to find time for elementary foreign language instruction. If content-based instruction were incorporated into elementary foreign language programs, the classroom teacher who must struggle to schedule a multitude of curricular areas into a limited amount of time would see the elementary foreign language teacher as an ally in this effort, rather than someone who is taking away another valuable block of time.

Serious consideration should be given to incorporating the successful elements of sheltered-English and immersion programs into other types of language programs. With everything that is already known about the success of content-based instruction and the theoretical basis underlying it, and considering the ever greater need for second language instruction in an increasingly interdependent world, we cannot afford to do otherwise.

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