

THEORETICAL AND RESEARCH FOUNDATIONS OF INTENSIVE FRENCH

**JOAN NETTEN, MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND
CLAUDE GERMAIN, UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL**

Abstract

This article gives the reasons for, and the history of, the conceptualization of Intensive French. The major characteristics of core French and French immersion are reviewed, giving the principal advantages and limitations of each program. The findings of empirical research that impact most directly on the development of communication skills are presented, and examples of intensive programs reviewed. From this information, characteristics deemed to be essential for the development of a new approach are described, and a definition of Intensive French is offered. The article concludes with a description of the five underlying theoretical principles on which Intensive French is based.

Résumé

Dans cet article, nous présentons brièvement les origines du français intensif et les motifs qui ont conduit à sa création. Pour cela, nous passons tout d'abord en revue les principales caractéristiques du français de base et de l'immersion, en montrant les mérites et les difficultés. Nous présentons ensuite les résultats des recherches empiriques qui ont un effet majeur sur le développement des habiletés à communiquer, et passons en revue quelques exemples de régimes pédagogiques intensifs. Suite à ces renseignements, nous décrivons les caractéristiques qui nous paraissent essentielles pour le développement d'un nouveau régime pédagogique, et définissons ce que nous entendons par français intensif. L'article se termine par une description des cinq principes de base sous-jacents à notre conception du français intensif.

In Canada, there have been two major programs for the teaching of French-as-a-second language; core French and French immersion. Core French, which begins usually at grade 4 (at about 9 years of age), and consists normally of periods of French for 30 to 40 minutes for a set number of periods in a cycle, is offered to the majority of students learning FSL, about 90% of the total population. French immersion, of which there are several varieties (early, middle and late), teaches French through the learning of other subjects matter, such as mathematics, social studies, etc. Only about 10% of the population learning French is enrolled in this option. Results of the two programs have been very different.

In general, students in the core French program develop minimal abilities to communicate in French. Often they are able to construct accurate sentences, but they are not able to communicate with ease in French. Traditionally, the program has put an emphasis on the learning of French as an object of study in the same way as other subjects in the curriculum, such as mathematics or social studies. Students tend to analyse the language, learn grammar rules, and attempt to apply them. In a study undertaken by the North York Board of Education, it was estimated that only about 23% of the time in grade 5 was spent on teaching communication; the best scenario was that 50% of the time was spent on communication, the other 50% being spent on more formal language study (Calman and Daniel, 1998). In addition, because of the limited time at their disposal, teachers of core French tend to follow quite closely the teaching materials recommended by departments of Education. These materials usually give short model conversations, which the students tend to memorize; teaching can rarely be directed by the interests of the students. The limited time and teaching resources explain why students of core French have difficulty communicating with any degree of fluency (Calman and Daniel, 1998). They are able to create short sentences, but they do not have sufficient competence in aural

comprehension or oral production to communicate effectively in an authentic situation. They tend to develop declarative knowledge about how the language works, but do not develop procedural, or intuitive, knowledge so that they can use the language to converse.

Despite the limited amount of empirical research about the core French program, several reasons can be advanced for the inability of this program to produce large numbers of students possessing both communicative competence and communicative confidence. The major factor is the lack of sufficient time. Overall, students spend only about 1000 hours learning French from grade 4 to grade 12. In addition, the time is spread over 8 or 9 years of schooling, in short periods of 30-40 minutes in length. Consequently, the program has been referred to as the drip-feed method of learning French (Lightbown and Spada, 1989). This type of organization is not conducive to learning to communicate for several reasons. There is not enough time for teachers to undertake any sustained language activity; a lesson is hardly begun when it is time to end. As a result, students are unable to remember from one lesson to the next what they are supposed to have learned. The time devoted to learning in each lesson is reduced by the amount of time required at the beginning of the period to review what was done the day before. Students do not have time to use the language; therefore, they are neither cognitively implicated in their learning nor are they able to use the language sufficiently for the language forms to be retained and used intuitively. In addition, students are discouraged because of their perception of their inability to learn, although it is the conditions rather than their ability which is the problem. Lack of motivation among students makes the teaching situation even more difficult for the teacher. In recent years, with the introduction of teaching materials based on the recommendations of the National Core French Study and the implementation of the multidimensional curriculum (LeBlanc, 1990), some progress towards achieving communicative goals has been made.

However, the effects of these changes are still limited because of the lack of sustained periods of time in which to use the language. Learning to communicate is a question of skill development, and as such, requires large amounts of sustained and authentic use, particularly at the beginning stages.

On the other hand, students in the immersion program develop the ability to communicate with ease. The emphasis in this program is on the use of French in the classroom, and a large percentage of the curriculum is taught in French. Thus, while there are different types of immersion programs, in general they all represent a large number of hours of instruction in French, 6000- 7000 for early immersion and about 3500 for late immersion programs that begin at the intermediate grades. In addition, students communicate in French in the classroom for the greater part of the school day. As a result, French is the means of communication; the students learn by communicating. Research has shown that most students who have participated in an early immersion program are able to communicate fluently in French; for example, students from an early immersion background were shown to be able to communicate with ease (Lapkin, Hart and Swain, 1991). The major difficulty with the immersion programs is that students are not able to communicate with accuracy (Rebuffot, 1993). Several reasons for this result can be advanced. Because they are often in the same class for a number of years, students are able to communicate with themselves, and the teacher who understands their language, despite the grammatical errors; as a result there is no real motivation to improve accuracy. In addition, because of the organization of the program, the accent is on learning subject matter rather than on learning the forms of the language. In particular, the question of correction of errors presents a difficulty. Students, particularly those who perform less well in school, tend to have problems in distinguishing whether the comments of the teacher are related to the content of their answer or

to the grammatical forms used (Lyster, 1998a). In fact, research on the techniques used to correct errors in the immersion classroom highlight the ambiguity that is created for many students by the teaching strategies used (Netten, 1991; Lyster and Ranta, 1997; Lyster, 1998b). The numerous factors involved in determining the purpose of a message from the teacher makes learning the language a difficult cognitive process for many students, and makes it especially challenging to learn to use the language accurately. Furthermore, students in immersion are learning language in an academic context. The language of the classroom is more complex than that used in general conversation, and does not possess the same contextual clues (de Konnick et Boucher, 1993). Consequently, students in immersion cannot readily adapt their language to social interaction (Lapkin and Swain, 1984; Rebuffot, 1993, Swain and Lapkin, 1982).

Although French immersion possesses some limitations, it is the most successful means of developing communicative abilities in French in a school situation. Overall, there has been considerable satisfaction with the results of the program; a survey conducted in 1986 by the North York Board of Education showed that 80% of the parents whose children were in immersion were satisfied with the program. In contrast, only 40% of the parents whose children were in core French were satisfied (Calman and Daniel, 1998). In general, parents feel that more time should be given to core French. In a survey about French-second-language (FSL) learning conducted by Canadian Parents for French among approximately 1500 anglophone parents, '68% of respondents think that when students learn French for one period a day, they do not learn enough to become bilingual' (CPF, 2000 p.11). Furthermore, the immersion program has received considerable resources and attention from researchers; it is claimed that the program is the most studied of any educational innovation. Core French has not received the same degree

of support or interest (Calman and Daniel, 1998). Yet, the majority of young anglophones learning FSL in Canada are in core French.

Intensive French (IF) was developed in order to respond to the serious difficulties of teaching communication in the core French classroom. The first step in the conception of the program was to review empirical research about second language learning. Three findings appeared to be crucial:

- 1) the level of achievement attained in a second language is closely related to the amount of time spent learning the language (Swain, 1981; Carroll, 1975);
- 2) students exposed to *intense* periods of language learning attain a higher level of achievement than those who receive the same amount of time spread out over a longer period (Lightbown and Spada, 1993; 1989); and
- 3) students exposed to a period of *authentic* use of language, such as is the case in immersion programs, attain a higher level of communicative competence than that achieved by their peers who are exposed to the language only as an object of study (Swain, 1981; Stern 1976).

These findings appeared to indicate that in order to improve the results of the core French program the integration of an intensive period of exposure to French, in which French was used as the language of communication, would be necessary. In the light of this conclusion, three models of the intensive teaching of second languages were then examined: intensive English, intensive French (generally referred to as *bain linguistique*¹) and block scheduling.

Intensive English in Quebec remains the most large-scale implementation of an intensive program in Canada. From its beginnings in the mid seventies in the *conseil scolaire des Mille-Îles*, it continued to exist in the schools of Montreal, and since the 1990's has provided a popular

¹ See *Introduction* to this issue.

alternative to the core English programs in the francophone schools of Quebec². Intensive English is offered in many different organisational options(five months, five months; two unequal semesters of six and four months; and also an option of 8 to10 hours a week offered throughout the school year (Comité de travail sur l'enseignement intensif de l'anglais langue seconde, 1996). All options are offered primarily in grade 6, with only about 18% of the intensive English classes being offered at grade 5. Consequently, intensive English in Quebec is used for a variety of programs; organisation, outcomes, results, pedagogical resources and teaching strategies vary considerably from one school to another (Dussault, 1997; Watts and Snow, 1993). The Ministry of Education of Quebec has not adopted a program of studies for the program, but has published some guidelines for its implementation (Comité consultatif anglais langue seconde - primaire, 1990). Nonetheless, intensive English has been viewed in Quebec by parents and teachers as a very successful program. Indeed, in 1993, in an article written on the directions for future second language research in Canada, the intensive English programs in Quebec were cited as a model for second language learning which should be explored in the anglophone school system for the learning of French as a second language (Lapkin et al., 1993).

In the intensive English classrooms, the accent is placed on learning to communicate in the second language. In this respect they are similar to French immersion classrooms; however, the major difference is that English is not taught through the learning of other subjects in English, but through the utilisation of a great variety of interesting activities. The aim of the program is to improve the communication abilities of the students, and the results of the program indicate that the majority of learners develop the ability to communicate with fluency in English. The principal problems that have been identified with the program relate to the inability of students to communicate accurately and the lack of cognitively demanding tasks (Spada, 2000).

² See *Introduction* to this issue

In addition, the intensive English program is generally offered to selected students. In order to be chosen for the program students must show considerable motivation for learning English, as well as achieving above average levels overall in their school program. These selection criteria are in part imposed because of the increased work load which students must accept in the second semester when they complete the entire regular curriculum for the other subjects. Thus, despite its many advantages in improving students' ability to communicate in English and their attitudes towards learning the language, the program has some limitations in the results achieved.

An experiment in intensive French, referred to as *le bain linguistique*, based on the model of intensive English in Quebec, was undertaken by the Ottawa School Board in 1995-96. Two classes of students (11 in grade 5³ and 18 in grade 6) received 450 hours of instruction in French; the comparison group of 23 students (9 in grade 5 and 14 in grade 6) received 120 hours in the same time period, one school year. The tests administered showed that the students in the intensive program made substantial gains in all four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) compared to the group of students following the regular core program. In addition, students in the intensive program increased their self-confidence and their attitudes towards French (Peters, 2000). Generally, the students reacted favorably to this program which enabled them to improve their language skills as well as develop more positive attitudes to French (Wesche et al., 1994a, 1994b). While this experiment was interrupted in 1997 due to the unavailability of the French teacher, it was revived with two classes in grade 5 in 1998-99 (Peters, personal communication). Again, while generalizations from this experience must be made with caution, it appears that this option could make a considerable difference to the

³ See article entitled *Le bain linguistique : programme intensif du français langue seconde à Ottawa* in this issue.

teaching of core French in the school context. In summarizing the value of the project one of the researchers said,

Cette recherche laisse entrevoir une lueur d'espoir pour les élèves qui suivent le programme de français de base. En effet, une année de français intensif paraît être profitable non seulement en ce qui a trait au développement des habiletés langagières mais aussi pour le changement des attitudes des élèves faces à l'apprentissage d'une langue seconde.⁴

An experiment in block scheduling was undertaken in 1993-94 by the Carleton Board of Education, primarily for administrative reasons. Instead of the regular 40 minutes a day for 10 months, two alternate models of delivering core French in grade 7 were examined: a half-day of French for 10 weeks, and 80 minutes per day during five months. As may be seen, the amount of time devoted to French was intensified, but not increased. The curriculum followed was the same as that for regular core French; the recommended texts were covered in a shorter space of time. In addition, the teaching strategies were not changed; the same teacher taught all three options. A pre-test and a post-test measuring all four language skills were administered to the students. Results indicated that, even though the total amount of time was not increased, the students in the more intense programs achieved higher results, particularly in reading and writing. Results in aural comprehension and oral production were not as great, but the researchers suggest that this result may have been a function of the tests used, which were not primarily communicative in nature (Lapkin, Harley and Hart, 2001). While generalization of the findings of this experience must be undertaken with caution, the results would seem to suggest that the learning of a second language by a 'drip-feed' method, as is currently the case for core French, is not the most effective way of learning a second language in the school situation.

⁴ This research indicates that there is a glimmer of hope for core French students. It seems that one year of intensive French is valuable not only in that it improves language skills but also in that it also improves attitudes towards learning a second language. See article entitled *Le bain linguistique : programme intensif du français langue seconde à Ottawa* in this issue.

The major characteristics of these programs may be summarized as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1

Models of intensity in L2: Characteristics of Intensive programs

	Increase in time	Concentration of time	Language learning (not content learning)	Communication (not language as object of study)	Emphasis on Developing fluency	Developing accuracy	Accessible to all students
Intensive English	X	X	X	X	X		
<i>Bain linguistique</i>	X	X	X	X	X		
Block scheduling		X	X			X	X
Immersion	X	X		X	X		
Intensive French	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Through the examination of these programs, and their effects, the factors necessary for an ideal program for learning to communicate with accuracy and fluency in a second language were developed. These essential factors appeared to be the following:

1) *amount of time devoted to learning French greater than approximately 100 hours per school year.* A limited amount of time has been shown to be insufficient for students to learn to communicate in a second language, as is evident from an examination of the results of the core French program;

2) *concentration of the time devoted to learning French in the academic year.* The results of intensive programs, such as French immersion and intensive English, indicate that students need a concentrated period of second language study to be able to use the language spontaneously and with ease;

3) *focus on the learning of the language, not on other subject matter.* The emphasis on the learning of content and the consequent difficulties associated with the developing accurate use of the second language in the immersion program, particularly for certain students, appears to suggest that isolating the language first may be helpful for many students;

4) *focus on communication, not on language study.* The emphasis placed on teaching how the language functions from a grammatical perspective, as demonstrated in the core French programs, does not appear to assist in developing communicative competence (Netten 2001, Germain and Netten, 2003):

5) *focus on the development of fluency and of accuracy.* An emphasis on the message and the use of the language in the classroom appears to be essential to the development of the ability to communicate. However, there must also be an emphasis on the use of correct forms of the language. Recent research has indicated that this aspect of language learning is most effective when integrated with strategies that develop fluency (Calvé, 1994; Lightbown and Spada, 1990, 1993; Harley, 1989; Day and Shapson. 1991; Germain and Séguin, 1995).

In addition, because the learning of a second language develops many cognitive, social and personal skills, this aspect of learning should be included in the education of all young people. In Canada, the learning of French by young anglophones is also an essential part of enabling them to participate fully in the intellectual, artistic, social and political life of the country on a national scale. Therefore, it was felt that an ideal program for learning to communicate in French should be one that was open to all students, whatever their personal characteristics. The development of an intensive French program appeared to be the only means of responding to all the factors which needed to be present in a program destined to succeed in developing the ability to communicate in all students.

Intensive French (IF) may be defined as an enrichment of the core French program consisting of offering from three to four times the number of hours regularly scheduled for FSL in a concentrated period of time (five months), at the end of the elementary school cycle (in grade 5 or grade 6). In the other five month period, students return to their regular curriculum,

including core French.⁵ A number of comments are pertinent. The program is offered at the end of the elementary school cycle, when students are still able to learn language implicitly and respond well to learning a second language, and can move on to more advanced activities in French in the intermediate grades. Normally, the period of intense study is offered in the first five months of the school year (September to January) and the return to the regular curriculum occurs in the last five months (February to June). This sequence is congruent with the theoretical foundations (see below). However, the reverse sequence is possible, but requires careful advance planning. There are usually two teachers implicated in this method of offering the program, and the regular curriculum in its modified form is taught first. The percentage of the school day devoted to IF varies somewhat with the conditions and priorities of the particular school or school district; from 50% to 80% of the school day is offered in French.

IF is not an immersion program. While activities are undertaken in French for the greater part of the school day, these activities relate to the learning of the second language. No subjects are taught in French, and content objectives for the other subjects are not achieved through the IF program. This aspect is important in that students concentrate for five months on learning to communicate in French; they do not have to learn subject matter in the second language at the same time. This characteristic makes the program open to students encompassing a wider variety of ability levels without remedial assistance than is generally the case for immersion.

Nor is IF simply core French covered more quickly, thus intensive. IF is a completely different way of learning French than the core program. This different approach is inserted into the core program for a five month period in order to accelerate the development of communication skills in French so that students can return to the core program and make more effective use of the limited time available. At the end of the IF program, students can use French

⁵ See article entitled *Intensive French and Intensive English : similarities and differences* in this issue.

spontaneously with considerable accuracy and ease, and can undertake much more interesting and challenging tasks in the regular core program.⁶

While the administrative model (five months intensive French/five months regular curriculum) is similar to one of the variations of intensive English, the implementation of IF requires two modifications of the curriculum which distinguish it from intensive English.⁷ These two changes are interrelated. In order to find the extra time for French in the intense period, the time devoted to the other subjects in the regular curriculum is reduced. The amount of reduction in each subject area varies from school to school, depending upon the percentage of time given to IF, the availability of staff and other related considerations. In general, time allotments for music, physical education, and similar specialist areas are not reduced. The time devoted to mathematics, and in some cases religion, is also not reduced, or is only minimally affected. English language arts is the subject which is reduced substantially, as much as 50% in some schools. Time allotments for other subjects, such as social studies, health, and science are considerably reduced. However, all learning outcomes for the grade are maintained for all subjects. This goal is achieved through a process of mapping the regular curriculum. In the five-month intense period certain skills or cognitive processes which are developed in other subjects are encouraged; in the other five months, all subjects return to their regular time allotments and some learning outcomes are achieved more quickly because of the previous experiences in intensive French.⁸ There are two theoretical foundations for the adjustment of the time allotments, one for English language arts, and another for the other subjects in the curriculum, both of which are explained below. The compacting of the English language arts curriculum is

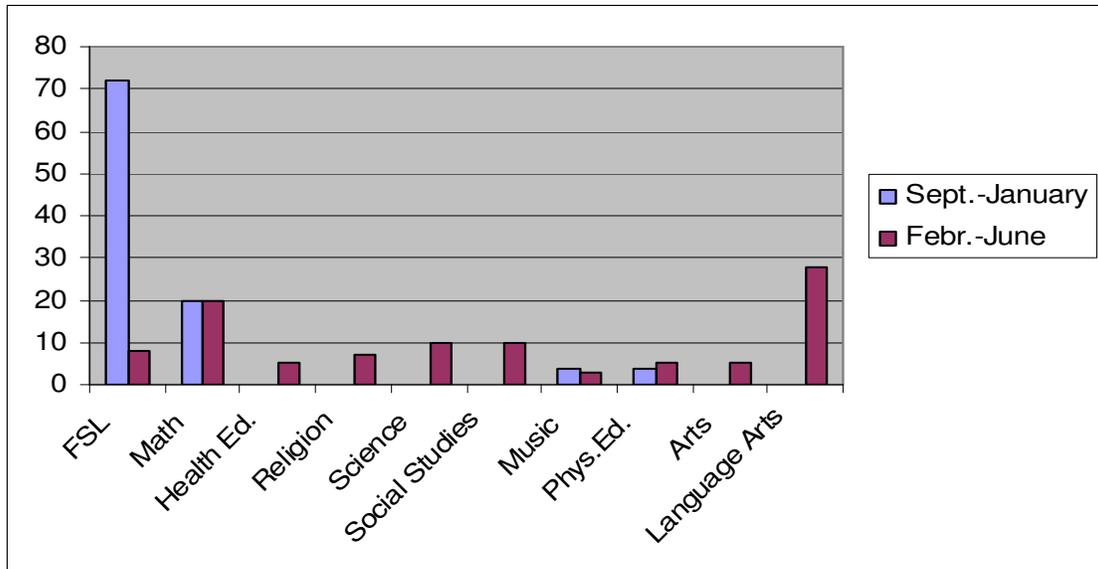
⁶ See articles entitled *L'évaluation de la production orale : critères et résultats* and *L'évaluation de la production écrite : critères et résultats* in this issue.

⁷ See article entitled *Intensive French and Intensive English: similarities and differences* in this issue.

⁸ See article entitled *Development the Curriculum for Intensive French* in this issue.

based on the interdependence of languages; the compacting of the other subject areas is based on the Vygotskian conception of intellectual development. An example of the time allotments for each subject in the intensive and the non-intensive period is given in Table 2.

Table 2
Example of time allotments for all subjects with 72% of the day in French



The related change which must also take place is the reorientation of the FSL curriculum. This is what makes IF different from the regular core French program and allows the mapping of the regular curriculum. The IF program of study for the five intense months is a literacy based approach to second language learning, which places emphasis on the development of literacy skills in French. The program also reflects the development of cognitive skills related to the other subjects. The theoretical foundations for these changes are developed in the following section.

Five Basic principles of Intensive French

There are five basic principles underlying the conception of intensive French. The first principle is a synthesis of the empirical research findings; the last four are based on current theories about language and language learning.

1. The learning of languages for the purposes of communication is a development of literacy skills. To develop communication skills, language must be used as a means of communication, and not presented as an object of study. The focus of the instruction is on authentic language use. Listening, speaking, reading, viewing, writing and representing are developed in an integrated fashion in order to communicate; the emphasis is on transmission of a message. Considerable time, and intensity, is required to develop a skill, particularly at the beginning stages. This is the reason for an intensive period of study in the elementary grades. In IF the intention is for students to achieve a level of spontaneous communication by the end of the intensive period. Once this level is achieved, students are more autonomous learners and can make effective use of the time devoted to core French afterwards. (Netten and Germain, 2000).

2. Languages are interdependent. Languages may seem different when they are spoken or examined from the point of view of their surface features. This conception has led to the belief that each language is distinct entity, and is stored in a separate part of the brain. However, the purpose of language is the same, no matter what the language; language is used to communicate our thoughts, to analyze and structure our universe. Two languages can be very different on the surface, but they actually are based on the development of similar cognitive processes. This theory, sometimes called the iceberg theory, has been developed in the hypothesis on the interdependence of languages (Cummins, 1979, 2001). Cummins proposed that even though languages may appear to be very different when we consider their surface features, such as

vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling, they are actually similar in that they entail and develop the same cognitive processes. That is, when we use a language, we use it to express thoughts and feelings, generalize, synthesize, inference, solve problems, create hypotheses, and so forth. No matter what language we are using the cognitive functions performed with the language are the same. Furthermore, language learning also proceeds in a similar fashion across languages, and skills learned in one language may be used in another. Learning and using a language develops certain common underlying proficiencies which are available for use with all languages. This relationship enables a transfer of learning to occur. This theory has been interpreted to show that skills developed through L1 are available for learning and using L2. It also means that the skills that are learned through L2 may be transferred to and used in L1. In learning French, students learn processes that may be transferred to and used in English. For example, in immersion classrooms, reading skills are developed first in French; in IF, the writing process is taught in French, and then used later in English in the second part of the year. In addition, when students are doing tasks in French, they are developing the cognitive skills associated with language, hypothesizing, analyzing, and so forth. These skills, once developed, are available for use in either English or French. This relationship is depicted in Figure 1.

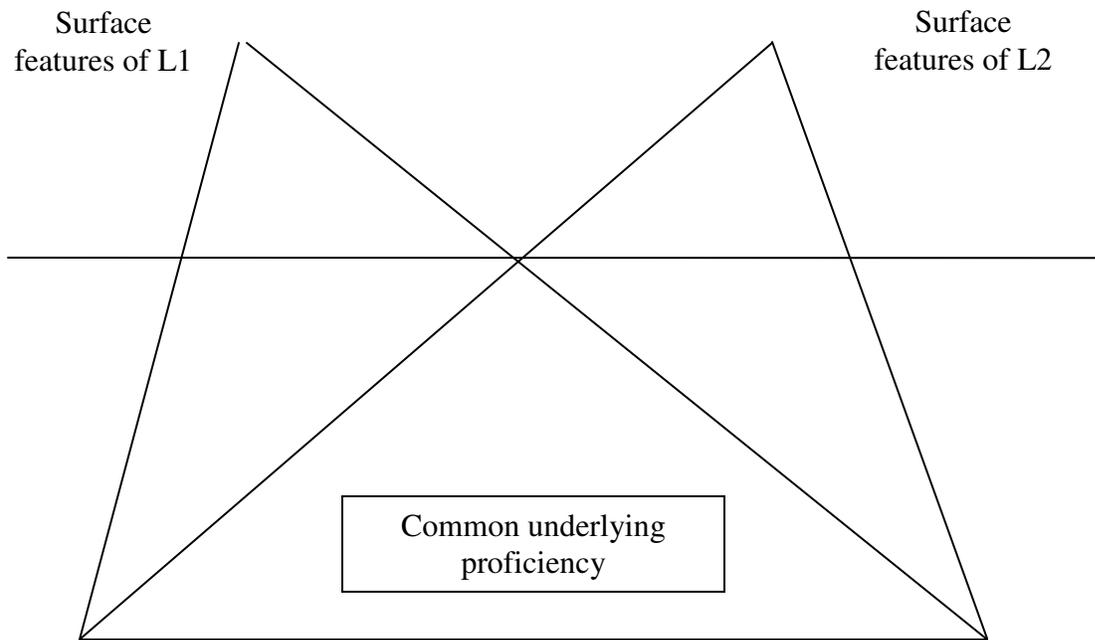


Figure1 – Model of common underlying proficiency theory

This theory is the basis for three aspects of the IF program. First of all, the IF curriculum is a literacy, or language arts, approach to teaching the second language. As a consequence, it is possible to reduce the English language arts curriculum by 50% in the intensive five months of IF, and still attain all the outcomes of the English language arts curriculum for the grade. In fact, it is interesting to note that students who participate in an IF program actually receive up to 20% more time in literacy development than do their peers who are in the regular program. Table 3 shows the increase in time devoted to literacy development for IF students in Newfoundland-Labrador. Lastly, in regular core French the learning of the second language is approached as if the student had no previous linguistic ability, whereas, in fact, the student at this age brings much discourse competence from the first language. In IF, this fact is recognized and students are encouraged to begin immediately to convey messages.

Table 3
Increased time devoted to literacy skill development in IF

	Recommended by the Department of Education (%)	From Sept. to January (%)	From February to June (%)	Average for the school year (%)	Change in time devoted to literacy(%)
French (L2)	10	70	10	40	+ 30
English (L1)	24	-	28	14	- 10
TOTAL	34	70	38	54	+ 20

3. *Cognitive development is not subject specific.* It is commonly accepted in the school system that the development of particular cognitive processes is associated with the learning of specific subjects. Thus, it is generally thought that mathematics develops skills such as problem-solving, science emphasizes for example hypothesis forming and testing, social studies, analyzing, synthesizing and generalizing. This compartmentalization of the intellectual development of the child, represented in Figure 2, has been behind the development of curricula for the schools since the nineteenth century.

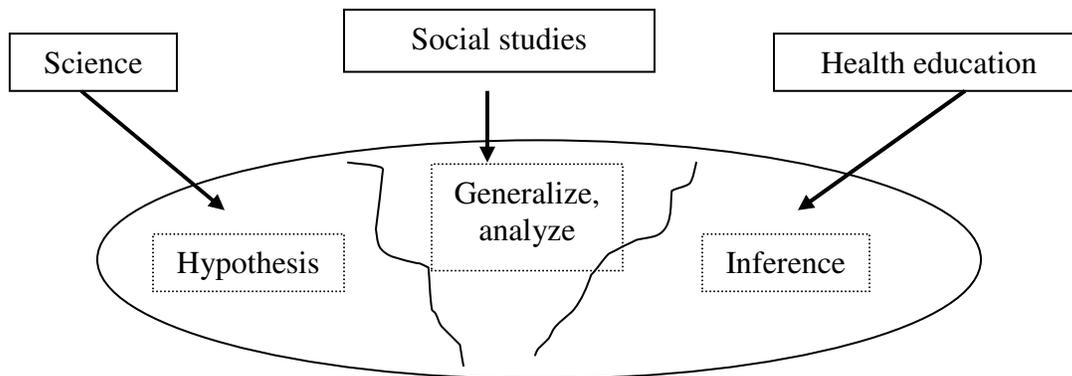


Figure 2– Common conception of intellectual development in school

However, it may be argued that this conception is similar to the naive conception that all languages are separate and unrelated. In order to move beyond this narrow conception, it is the conception of intellectual development proposed by Vygotsky (1985, 1962) that underlies the IF program.

Instruction has its own sequences and organization, it follows a curriculum and a timetable, and its rules cannot be expected to coincide with the inner laws of the developmental processes it calls to life. [...] We found that intellectual development [...] is not compartmentalized according to topics of instruction. Its course is much more unitary, and the different school subjects interact in contributing to it (Vygotsky, 1962 : 101-102).

According to this point of view, the intellectual development of the child is not compartmentalized according to subjects. Intellectual development tends to be more general, and interrelated. While there are certain skills and processes which are specific to a particular subject, such as learning to use the scientific method in science, there are still many cognitive processes which are not subject specific. This conception is illustrated in Figure 3.

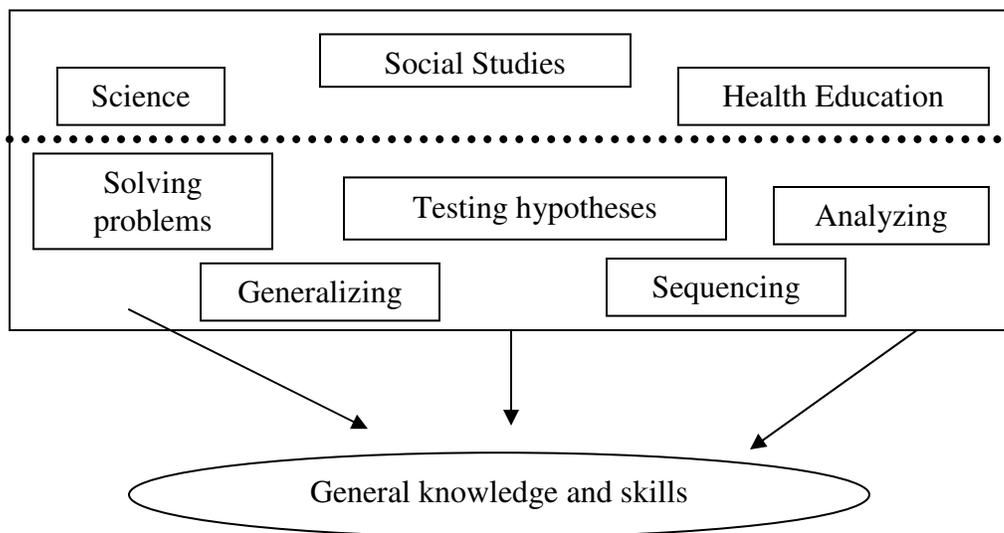


Figure 3 – Schema of the Vygotskian conception of intellectual development.

Therefore, in IF it is possible to compact subjects other than English language arts and still attain the cognitive skill development that is foreseen by studying these subjects. It is the type of task that students undertake, not the subject studied, that determines the cognitive development that takes place.

4. *Interaction increases intellectual development.* Cognitive development is not only enhanced by the type of activities the students engage in, but also by interaction (Vygotsky). Until the middle of the 1970's educational practices were much influenced by the theories of Piaget. According to this point of view, the social and the cognitive development of the child occurred simultaneously, but separately. The two appeared to follow parallel routes, as depicted in Figure 4.

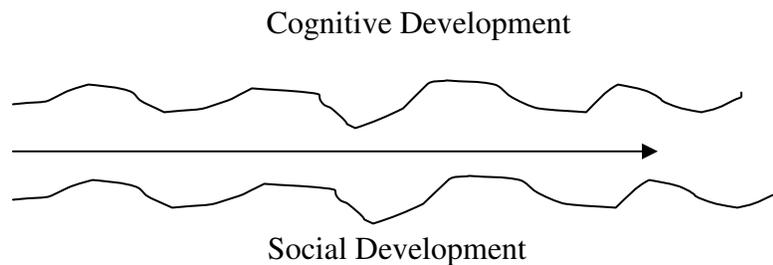


Figure 4 –Piagetian conception of social and cognitive development

However, during the 1970's, the neo-piagetian school of psychology contradicted the idea of simultaneous but separate development of social and cognitive aspects of the child. According to this later theory, the development of social and intellectual skills is interrelated (Doise and Mugny, 1981; Mugny, 1985; Mugny and Carrugati, 1989; Perret-Clermont, 1979). In fact, the relation is characterized as a causal one; social interaction contributes to intellectual development. This relationship is depicted in Figure 5.

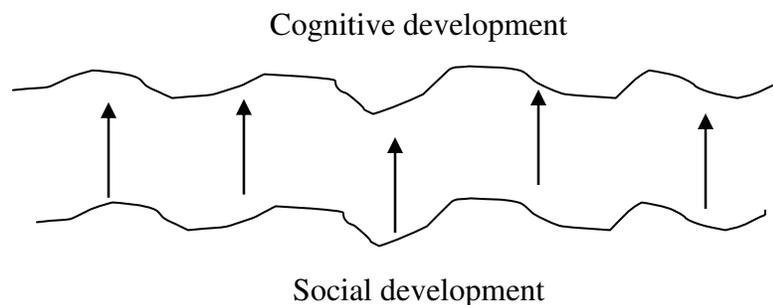


Figure 5 –Neo-piagetian conception of social and cognitive development

Socialization is not perceived as an external factor which develops once cognition has developed, but rather as an agent which contributes actively to the intellectual and cognitive development of the child from a very early age (Mugny and Carrugati, 1989). By interacting in the second language, students are not only learning to communicate, but they are also assisting their second language development. Through the use of French in interaction, language input is more likely to become intake (Swain, 1981; Van Lier, 1998). At the same time, students are also enhancing their general cognitive development. It is for these reasons that the use of interactive teaching strategies is one of the major characteristics of the IF program. Strategies that permit students to interact, such as group work, enable them to profit from the cognitive benefits of social interaction.

5. The learning of a language for the purposes of communication requires the development of procedural knowledge. Developing a skill means developing procedural knowledge. Factual knowledge of forms and structures is useful for reference purposes and, therefore, for conscious self-correction (such as in process writing). However, factual knowledge of forms and structures (i.e., declarative knowledge) is not useful when engaging in authentic conversation. In this matter it is interesting to reflect upon the ways in which young children learn to use their mother tongue and uneducated adult immigrants a second language without the medium of learning declarative knowledge about the language. Factual knowledge of French is not accessible quickly enough to be integrated into conversation. Furthermore, factual knowledge cannot be turned into a skill. Only implicit knowledge can be proceduralised (Paradis, 1994). This means that students need to use and re-use language forms and structures in real situations in order to internalize them and be able to use them intuitively.

Related to this principle is the question of developing accuracy and fluency. Fluency is certainly a skill, and relates to the ability of the student to be able to make the links between the many language forms necessary to express a thought with ease. Accuracy, however, is also in part a skill, and can best be developed by the repeated use of correct forms in authentic conversation (Germain and Netten, 2003). Both accuracy and fluency in communication require the proceduralization of implicit knowledge.

In conceptualizing intensive French, many theoretical aspects of language learning, and learning in general, were brought together to develop a new approach to second language learning: the need for increased time, the importance of intensity at the beginning stages of skill development, the need for authentic language use in learning communication skills, the interdependence between languages and the consequent development of literacy skills, the transdisciplinary nature of cognitive development, the contribution of social interaction to cognitive development, the finding that only implicit knowledge can be proceduralized, and the realization that accuracy is a skill as well as being declarative knowledge. Integrating all these theories led to the conceptualization of IF, and in practice has led to a cumulative improvement in the learning of French.

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