Professional Project

Bilingual Education: a comparative study

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Section One: From Core to Immersion

Section Two: An Overview of Bilingual Education in Canada, Wales, and Scotland

Section Three: A Scottish Case Study

Section Four: Submersion versus Immersion

Section Five: Beyond the Present in Bilingual Education

References

Bibliography
Introduction

In conducting this study, it has been my aim to promote the case for a bilingual education system. The notion behind this developed from my thorough awareness of recent thought on language acquisition and from my experience on teaching practice of the benefits to be reaped from activity-based (meaningful) learning as opposed to the grammar-based or form-focused approach which I faced as a learner.

In section one, a variety of different approaches to language learning is examined and, where possible, evidence is included to highlight the pros and cons of each approach.

The second section looks at approaches to bilingual education in Canada, Wales and Scotland. The Canadian element is included as it coincides with my own personal experience of teaching English in Québec. Scottish bilingual education, it has been suggested, follows the Welsh system, although my reading and observation tend to contradict this notion, showing both similarities and differences in each of the three systems.

Section three is in the form of a case study, looking principally at Tollcross Primary School. Indeed, there are many features of Scottish bilingual education to which I failed to attribute any importance prior to visiting the unit and which are highlighted in this section.

I feel that a study of bilingual education would be incomplete if one were to overlook the effects of submersion versus immersion in our multicultural society. It is to this then that I devote section four.

In the fifth and final section, I look at possible developments in bilingual education in this country and, in particular, in Lothian Region and include essentially my own views on the matter.
Section One: From Core to Immersion

Approaches to language learning can be put into two broad categories. These are

1. Learning about the language and
2. Learning through the language.

The former is primarily the way in which a foreign language (FL) is learned in Scotland. It is known as a "core" programme and has taken traditionally the form of 4 to 6 forty minute periods per week in the first and second years of secondary education, with an option on whether or not to pursue the language to a higher level. Recent developments, mostly of a political nature, have lead to the decision to make the learning of a foreign language, be it French, German or other, compulsory until the end of fourth year and various regions have initiated pilot projects whereby pupils start to learn the FL as early as P6. With the advent of Standard Grade and the new emphasis being placed on communication, there have been significant changes in teaching methodology. Nonetheless, tests carried out in Canada have shown that those children whose sole method of learning an FL (English or French in this case) fare worse on all standardised achievement tests currently being used than pupils who learn by any other method.¹

Following on from regular programmes i.e core, there are extended programmes where another subject (commonly social studies, history or geography) is taught through the FL. This is known as language extension. The choice of subject(s) being taught is dependent on

(a) the ability of teaching staff and
(b) the ability of the subject matter to lend itself to the FL.

The second approach to FL learning is termed "immersion". Of this there are three main variations.

1. Early Total Immersion
2. Early Partial Immersion
3. Late Immersion
Immersion of any sort leads to learning by acquisition due to the amount of exposure to the FL. With Early Total Immersion (ETI), the initial focus is on comprehension. It is common for pupils to talk to the teacher in their mother tongue for a period of up to one year or indeed say nothing as noted in Language Two as well as many other works by Krashen. 

An interesting feature of ETI and EPI (Early Partial Immersion) is that it is the parents who decide that they would like their child to be bilingual contrary to Late Immersion (LI) where it is normally the pupil himself who decides whether or not to follow an Immersion Programme.

It has been very difficult to assess the effects of ETI on pupils as standardised assessment tests do not take into account any innovative practices and aesthetic aspects and communicative creativity fail to be measured. However, the Bilingual Education Project in Canada carried out a variety of tests on Immersion pupils, using a control group to monitor results. Finding a control group is, in itself, a difficult task due to various factors, amongst which, Immersion students appear to develop characteristics not common in regular programme students. An example of this would be the extremely high level of self-confidence apparent in Immersion pupils at Tollcross Primary and, I have been assured, throughout the Scottish Bilingual Project Units. This, I suggest, is attributable to two main factors. The first is that the Unit receives a great amount of publicity and the pupils are constantly being scrutinised from outside. Secondly, the children are very aware that they have a facility in two languages and, as such, are able to do something which their unilingual counterparts cannot.

The tests carried out by the Bilingual Education Project showed that ETI pupils were poorer at word knowledge, word discrimination, spelling, reading and punctuation from Kindergarten to p3. This is hardly surprising as no actual formal learning of the mother tongue takes place during these years. By p5, they were at least as good as the control group and went on to out-perform them in subsequent stages. Tests run by other project groups in different places appear to have had similar results.

- page 2 -
Partial Immersion normally involves conducting part of the school day in the mother tongue and part in the FL. There are various ways to implement this. One such way involves doing certain subjects in the FL and others in the mother tongue. Another involves using one language in the morning and another in the afternoon. The former is a feature of education in the Western Isles of Scotland. There, the teachers perceive the advantages as being better creativity:

"I can truthfully say that writing and reading in Gaelic have definitely improved. There English has suffered no loss through learning in both languages. They used to write only one or two sentences in English when given a topic, now they write more."  

and better communicative ability:

"I would say from observation of the children..... the Gaelic-speaking children were able to express themselves better than their monoglot peers."  

I have failed, however, to find any objective evidence to support these views.

Late Immersion commonly begins around the age of 12. It involves delivering up to 100% of the curriculum in the foreign language for one or two years and then reducing the FL input to about 40%, generally for Geography, History and Social Studies as already mentioned for extension. With LI, pupils have frequently already done several years of "core" and as such, are generally able to respond in the FL immediately hence eliminating Krashen's "Silent Period".

Studies have shown that LI pupils learn more rapidly than ETI pupils but, frequently, never quite reach the same standard due to the lesser amount of time in which they are exposed to the FL. In my opinion, this is partially due to the fact that LI pupils have the advantage of maturity which allows greater subject content to be covered in the FL allowing thus allowing for vocabulary to be widened at a more rapid pace.

Again, tests by the Bilingual Education Project have shown that
LI has no adverse effect on mother tongue development and commonly results in a better command of the mother tongue. I haven't uncovered any real reason for this and think that it would be a good area for future study.
Section Two: An Overview of Bilingual Education in Canada, Wales and Scotland

Canada

In 1971, Canada was declared a bilingual country, with English and French being given equal status. This, of course, did not mean that all or even very many Canadians had "native-like" control of both languages. Instead it meant that French Canadians, or Québécois, were granted the right to use French in all official transactions. As one can imagine, this could have made life difficult for anglophones living in Québec and it was through pressure from them that the first Canadian Immersion Programme was established in Montréal. The main impetus was to give an education entirely in French to native English speakers, with English being incorporated in the later stages, thus fostering bilingualism. This bilingual education, it was stressed was not to be at the expense of English. The Programme therefore involved teaching solely through French until Grade 4 when English was introduced, taking up around 50% of class time. A feature of ETI pupils is that they can transfer skills from one language to the other and thus skills which they possessed in French in this particular case were readily applied to English.

It is important to remember that these children were in an immersion class through choice, albeit parental, and perceived no threat to their mother tongue. They were developing bilingualism through additive processes i.e. they were in the L1 (mother tongue) majority and gained all of the perceived cognitive advantages attached to bilingual education. Furthermore, they were in the ideal situation to acquire French, given that they were constantly exposed to the language outwith the confines of the classroom.

Due to the success of the original programme, this approach has now been widely adopted in the province.

On the other side of the coin, ETI programmes in English have been developed for the benefit of the French Canadians. Here the success has been limited due to an inherent reluctance to learn English. There are many reasons for this, amongst which the notion of preserving their own culture through their own (French) language. In addition, the learning processes can be seen as
subtractive as the French Canadians are by far the minority group and are tackling the majority language.

I would like at this point to refer to the "Threshold Theory" which suggests that unless a bilingual person reaches a high level of fluency in both languages - less frequent in the case of the Quebecois than in that of the English Canadians - then there are no positive cognitive effects and indeed, a poor level in both languages can be detrimental. This last statement goes a long way towards suggesting why, for many years, bilingualism or bilingual education was perceived as a negative experience for the individual.

Nonetheless, immersion programmes in Québec continue and the Protestant School Board in Montréal has produced significant evidence in support of bilingual education.

Other provinces, Ontario in particular, have embarked on ETI, EPI and LI programmes. As the aims of the Ministry of Education are not to make all pupils fully bilingual, we have perhaps the reason for the diversity of approach.

Research has shown that there are essentially three levels of bilingualism, if we take the minimalist definition of bilingualism as given by Haugen:

"Bilingualism is understood ..... to begin at the point where the speaker of one language can produce complete meaningful utterances in the other language." 8

It is said that the bottom level of bilingualism is achievable in 1200 hours and is what may be classed as tourist-like control. The highest level is achievable in 5000 hours (Grade 8 of ETI) and allows native-like control of the FL except perhaps in speech where many would argue that native-like control can never be achieved.

A final feature of the Canadian approach to bilingual education takes the form of exchanges whereby French speaking Canadians spend up to 6 months with an English Canadian family in another province, going to school and participating in daily life. This is
reciprocated a year later when the anglophone visits his francophone counterpart. This, in my opinion, has significant advantages as far as increasing cultural awareness is concerned and this in turn is one of the reasons why I ‗ favour bilingual education. The FL albeit important serves as a means to developing cultural awareness, analytical strengths and cognitive advantage.

Wales

Welsh bilingual education came into existence for reasons quite different to those in Canada. It had proven ineffective to teach Welsh to anglophones for half an hour per day in Welsh schools, so, initially, monoglot Welsh pupils followed by bilingual pupils, then pupils with a bilingual parent and so on were admitted to bilingual education programmes until 1974 when the doors were opened to Welsh and English speakers alike.

In general the programmes run along similar lines to those in Canada although experiments in EPI have met with greater success in Wales.

In contrast to Canada, bilingual education programmes were initiated through pressure from the Welsh speaking community, in other words, a minority language group within the UK. There was a fear on behalf of Welsh natives that they were losing their "Welshness" and they therefore wanted their children to attend schools where Welsh was more than just another subject on the time-table alongside Maths and French. Anglophones were concerned that the result would be propaganda centres, but these fears were soon dismissed as Bilingual schools opened their doors to Welsh and English speakers alike. It is interesting to note that the schools previously attended by the bilingual programme pupils objected to losing their Welsh component also!

There was however a problem with bilingual Welsh programmes which does not feature in the Canadian literature which I have consulted - that of teachers having no linguistic training and lacking the many skills possessed by the language specialist.
This is proving to be a problem in Scottish bilingual education also where many extended courses have been written and no-one as yet is able to teach them.

There exists another type of programme in Wales not common to Scotland or Canada, that of Welsh Stream schools. The atmosphere in these schools is said to be predominantly English and they have encountered staffing problems not familiar to bilingual schools. In addition, Welsh speaking parents often divert their children away from the Welsh Stream and towards bilingual schools where the atmosphere is essentially Welsh. Trends have also shown that children of mixed speaking parents favour bilingual schools as do children of anglophone parents who had perhaps a grand parent who was Welsh.

Scotland

As far as I am aware, there are two quite different bilingual education programmes in operation in Scotland. The first of these is in the Western Isles and came into being some 16 years ago shortly after the setting up of Comhairle nan Eilean (Western Isles Island Council) which together with the SED financed the original project. Gaelic had suffered a great decline and this was attributed for the most part to the compulsory education system in English and to economic difficulties in Gaelic-speaking areas.

"...... only through education that the language survive ...." 9

The project had two stages, 1975-1978 and 1978-1981. During both periods, there was one central theme - to forge links between the school and the community. This was to be done through a programme of Environmental Studies in Gaelic. Interestingly, both Gaelic and English were to be used side-by-side, thus developing all primary skills in both languages. In the first stage of the project, 20 schools were involved, increasing to 34 in the second stage with a view eventually to incorporating all schools in areas where Gaelic is spoken to any significant level. The change to be initiated by the Project was intended to be long-term.

There were many problems in undertaking such a venture, such as
some classes consisting of Gaelic, non-Gaelic and partial-Gaelic speakers. In addition, very little printed material was/is available in Gaelic and part of the work undertaken by the Project Team included the setting up of a publishing company named Acair Press. Nonetheless, the success of the project has resulted in Bilingual Education being firmly established in the Isles where there now exists a Bilingual Policy.

The second programme of Bilingual Education in Scotland very much resembles the immersion programmes of Ontario. Children with little or no Gaelic are immersed in the language from the nursery stages with only one or two words of English being used if the child is in distress. This programme more closely parallels the Canadian set up than the Welsh, in my opinion, because the pressure which created the programme came from anglophone, majority language parents and not from Gaelic-speaking parents. The programme is as much intended to increase cultural awareness as fluency in Gaelic, although the latter is inevitable. Many regions of Scotland are now offering such immersion programmes and the next chapter is devoted to taking a close look at an Edinburgh school involved in one such programme.
Section Three: A Scottish Case Study

The purpose of carrying out the study detailed below was twofold. Firstly, I was already familiar with the Initiative which had resulted in the Western Isles Project, but equally unaware of the origins of the Gaelic Units which are becoming more and more common throughout Scotland. Strathclyde, for example, now has Units on four different sights, catering for 130 pupils.
Secondly, I had familiarised myself with much of the theory behind bilingual education and was anxious to see the reality. This I decided to do by observing and questioning teachers and pupils in an Immersion Unit thus addressing many of the issues which had come to my attention.

I contacted the Head Teacher at Tollcross and arranged a series of visits to the school which enabled me to shed a light on the aforementioned.

Origins of the Unit and Entrance Qualifications:

Tollcross views itself as a kind of jigsaw made up of pieces from different origins. At the present, 18 ethnic minorities are represented in the school. It seems natural therefore that such a school be the sight of a Gaelic playgroup (a Highland Initiative). Parents of children attending the playgroup knew of the existence of other Gaelic Units in Scotland and wrote to the Director of Education asking for such provision to be made in Lothian. The Region agreed and were given 75% SED backing in financing the Unit.

Meetings were organised with interested parents and eventually the unit was opened with 6 pupils from P1 to P3. Much of the initial interest had died away due to travel and transport problems, with pupils coming from all over the Region.

I feel that there must have been great commitment on behalf of the parents whose children district schools and were required to transfer.

The doors were (and are) opened to anyone who showed an interest. No link with the language through relatives was
required as was the case in Wales in the initial stages. The only commitment was to show an interest in the language and the culture and not in small class numbers as was frequently the case!

The Unit now comprises 35 pupils and three classes - a nursery class (the playgroup has been relocated), a P1 - P2 and a P3 - P5.

**The Nursery**

The class comprises 14 children aged 3 and 4. What follows is a commentary of what I observed together with remarks made by the teachers and pupils.

The teacher spoke uniquely in Gaelic. The children did not communicate with each other in Gaelic, but responded to questions from the teacher with as much Gaelic as they could manage. This varied from the odd Gaelic word in an English construction to complete conversations in Gaelic. The had spent only 7 months in the nursery, most with no prior knowledge of the FL. There appeared also to be varying degrees of comprehension. A few of the pupils completely ignored the teacher and I could not determine if this was due to the fact that they didn't understand or didn't yet feel ready to speak Gaelic and were thus maintaining the right to be silent as suggested be Krashen.

No actual Gaelic was taught and as far as I could ascertain, there were major differences between activities in this nursery and in regular English speaking nurseries. The environment, needless to say, was substantially Gaelic, with Gaelic posters and books.

One point which was very noticeable was the very limited concentration span of the children. According to the teacher, this reduces the possibility of whole class activities such as stories. Lack of comprehension means that the children must see the pictures to understand. Singing and rhymes are also a problem as some of the children have had difficulty in picking up all of the word and therefore get easily bored.

The main benefits of the nursery are that the children going on to P1 will have a good start and, I suppose parents will already be
aware of whether or nor the children are showing any signs of stress in the Gaelic environment. One child, a potential trilingual, with Spanish parents, is carefully monitored for this very reason.

An interesting point which emerged is that the children are already aware of the fact that Gaelic is an additional language not spoken by everyone. As my four-year-old translator said

"I'm nearly full Gaelic now."

Primary 1 and 2

Even at P1 level, the children spoke to each other in Gaelic. They seemed to be perfectly fluent (although not being a Gaelic speaker myself, I am perhaps a poor judge) which I considered to be quite astonishing given that they had not had the advantage of the Gaelic nursery as it only began in August last year. Much of the work the children do is project based, in order to extend their vocabulary. Play of course features largely on the agenda. This however is a potential problem. When the children are playing, they continue to communicate through Gaelic. As they have not internalised many Gaelic grammatical structures, they apply English structures using Gaelic words. This habit is apparently hard to break. In addition, it contradicts the authorities on on acquisition who insist that anyone going through an immersion programme does not apply his mother tongue grammar and argue that whether a person is a native speaker of Hindi or French, the learning processes are the same.

When I inquired as to why the children speak in Gaelic apart from communications with the teacher, one boy said to me "Miss Mcleod says we have to". "But why do you have to?" I asked. To this I received the response of "If we don't, we'll be sent to Mrs Miller's class". Mrs Miller is of course the teacher of the English speaking P1. This raises the issue of whether immersion does in the early stages stimulate automatic response in the FL. From what I saw, one of the main motivations behind speaking in Gaelic in this instance was due to a feeling of superiority which was apparent even in the nursery ie we can speak Gaelic and lots of other people can't.
Primary 3 to 5

It was from this group that I was best able to see the results of an immersion programme. Here, contrary to the immersion programmes common in Canada, Gaelic had not been reduced to any great extent in order to make way for English. This may be due to the class set up. The P3 pupils had received an education only in Gaelic, the P4s had one year of English before the Gaelic unit existed and the P5s had two years of English. The walls were decorated almost completely in Gaelic, with the exception of the computer instruction. Reading materials existed in both languages. The P3 children had recently been introduced to reading in English and had proven the notion that skills are transferable. Within two weeks of being presented with English reading materials, they were as capable as reading in English as their Anglophone counterparts. According to the teacher, the P5 pupils, who had had the same exposure to Gaelic as the P3s, than had developed greater reading skills in both Gaelic and English, a better Gaelic vocabulary and better writing skills in both languages than the regular P5s for the English components and than the P3s for the Gaelic components. This served in some ways to reinforce what I had learned about Late Immersion being a more efficient way to acquire a language than Early Total Immersion (per time period) although admittedly it was not very late in this instance.

I also wish to mention the fact that the children (in all of the classes) were indeed very self-confident, not in the least inhibited by my presence. This, I was told - and noticed during the preplacement period - would not have been the case in regular classes.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight Three potentially problematic areas which came to my attention as a result of my visits to Tollcross.

Firstly, there is an extreme lack of materials. Many of the books in the Unit are English books which have sticky labels with Gaelic translations covering the English text. Furthermore, I rather naively assumed that a beginner level book in English translated into Gaelic would remain a beginner level book. This is not the case and is it therefore a more complicated task trying to find
suitable translations than I would have imagined.

Secondly, Gaelic has a counting system which functions in units of 20. This is what is originally taught to the pupils, although the decimal system is introduced in P4. At first the children find the decimal system very complicated but, in the long run, have a good mastery of numbers. The point which I wish to raise is with regards to National Testing. Will a child who has learned to read, listen and count in Gaelic show himself to the best of his ability in the test scheduled for P4? As yet a Gaelic translation has not been produced.

Finally, I would like to touch on the subject of integration. I asked the class teachers if the Gaelic speakers played with the non-Gaelic speakers in the playground. I was assured that they do. However, this seriously contradicts the opinion of the pupils I consulted who told me that they normally play with the other Gaelic children. When I suggested to them that they perhaps play with children from other classes, they said, "Yes, the other Gaelic class". To see if this was the case uniquely in Tollcross, I asked the same of the teacher of the Secondary Unit in Glasgow. She told me that the Immersion children had in fact formed a clique. This suggests to me that some sort of attempt ought to be made to better integrate these pupils.

Whether this is a common problem, I do not know, as the subject has not featured in any of the literature which I have consulted.
Section Four : Submersion versus Immersion

Thus far, I have talked mainly about immersion programmes - which involve whole classes of children following the same programme in the FL - without touching on the important category of submersion which is ever grow ; due to the large number of immigrants to developed countries. Britain in particular now has large Chinese, Indian and other ethnic minority communities. Children from these groupings who are not native speakers of English undergo some programme of submersion, often resulting in bilingualism, particularly when the child attends classes in his or her native tongue either after school of at weekends. The term submersion is employed where a child speaks a different language from the other class members and is frequently the only person in the class to speak that language. There are a variety of programmes available to immigrants, each involving a different approach. It is however the current trend in Britain to avoid withdrawal from the main stream class as this, it would appear, can make the child fell isolated and make other class members feel that the ESL pupil is less bright, hence the reason for his withdrawal. In addition, modern thought on language being that language is best learned in a meaningful context, there is no better environment than in the main stream class.

"The optimum language learning environment is one where there is a real purpose for communication" ¹⁰

Within the variety of available programmes, which are outlined below, there are two main approaches to submersion. The first is transition, where the child begins his education in the mother tongue, eventually doing more and more in the FL(English) until eventually the mother tongue is completely phased out. This is the approach favoured in Canada for all immigrants other than French speakers transferring to English speaking areas. They are more likely to follow the second approach which is termed enrichment and involves maintaining both languages. This is now becoming common in Britain, especially in areas where the concentration of any one ethnic group is high such as in Birmingham which has a relatively large Indian community.

Programmes for minority language children :
1. Regular (Submersion): FL only with no cultural adaptations.
2. Culturally Sensitive Regular; FL only + cultural adaptations.

3. Culturally Sensitive Regular + L1 instruction ie L1 taught as a subject as was the case in Wales prior to their bilingual education system.

4. Culturally Sensitive FL Immersion + L1 Maintenance; L1 is used for about 30% of the time after the FL has been established.

5. Transitional Bilingual (See above).

6. Language Shelter; L1 is used for all education.

It is my opinion that each of the programmes has major attributes and deficiencies. The one which fares worse according to what I know about language acquisition is needs Language Shelter. Programme four would, I believe, in most circumstances produce the best results, but with only one or two immigrants in a class sharing the same mother tongue, this programme is often financially unviable.

With any language programme involving minority pupils, I feel that it is important to make the child feel that his first language is valued and in the first option, I feel that this is often overlooked.

As already mentioned, the minority pupil experiences difficulties in learning a new language which are not experienced by those in the majority group. Studies have shown that minority groups can generally be put in to 3 different categories\(^{11}\) and depending on which you belong to, you have a greater or lesser ability to be successful at acquiring a language or becoming bilingual. The 3 categories are as follows:

**Autonomous** - examples of which would be Jews who are not subordinate in any way or any group which possesses a distinct racial, religious, ethnic identity.

**Caste** - Perceived as being inferior for two main reasons, that they have inferior adult roles and
their education is inferior. Examples would be Blacks, Hispanic in the USA and Finnish in Sweden. This last group are particularly interesting because I believe that Australia is home to a lot of Finnish people and that there, they are seen under a totally different light.

**Immigrant** - Normally voluntary and thus given a high status.

Finally I would like to reinforce the fact that L1 and L2(FL) are bound up with overall intellectual development and that conceptual skills are transferable, as highlighted in previous sections.
Section Five: Beyond the Present in Bilingual Education

I have so far mentioned the various bilingual programmes which are available, I have compared and contrasted those programmes followed by Wales, Canada and Scotland and I have examined, mostly through observation and discussion with pupils and teacher alike following a bilingual programme, the reality of life in the bilingual classroom.

Whether or not, many more Gaelic Units shall open in Scotland, I don't know. I believe, however, that Lothian Region is behind many others in Bilingual Education. I justify this opinion by mentioning that each year in Inverness, there are meetings of immersion teachers from all over the country. It is here that each region shows what materials they have produced in order to enrich the resources of the Gaelic classroom. As far as I know, Lothian has not so far produced any materials, relying solely on the Tollcross teachers (whose jobs are full time) for Gaelic input. There is no advisor for Gaelic in the primary school and the person responsible for the Programme is not a Gaelic speaker and being already responsible for 5-14 developments, he does not have a lot of time to contribute greatly to the Unit. I suggest, therefore that Gaelic in Lothian is a token gesture and has no real impetus.

Other regions, such as Highland and Strathclyde take Bilingual Education far more seriously and in the case of the latter, steps are being taken to greatly increase Bilingual Education in schools not just in the domain of Gaelic, but in a variety of Modern Languages.
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5. Ibid.


8. Taken from a hand-out from a SALT Conference in Glasgow.


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