

Foreword

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Themes of globalization and diversity permeate current discussions in commerce, diplomacy, security, individual advancement and many other domains. In our global society, individuals and groups from diverse backgrounds come into contact much more regularly than in the past. Whether they seek to collaborate or to compete, they need to understand one another. Although English is widely used as a common language internationally, there is a growing demand for products and services adapted to local languages and cultures around the world. New technologies provide broad and instantaneous access to ideas, information, and interaction for individuals who have the needed language skills. And, to serve our common welfare, communication in diverse languages is essential for sensitive discussions on critical world issues such as the environment, health and terrorism. Now more than ever, communication across languages and cultures is vital to success in today's world for nations, societies and individuals. This fact underscores the importance of competence in languages on a wide scale.

Demand and supply are not well matched, however, in many areas. In the United States, for example, the lack of language resources has become painfully apparent in recent years. Of the relatively small number of individuals in the United States who learn languages other than English, an even smaller number achieve a high level of proficiency in the language(s) they study. Developing a cadre of professionals with high levels of proficiency in both English and another language is essential for meeting the challenges of today's world. In other nations, individual multilingualism may be more common, but additional language skills could be beneficial, particularly in expanding opportunities to interact with the world outside their local communities.

Schools can and should play a major role in meeting the need for language skills by offering learners the opportunity to acquire them via 'pathways' through the system that lead to multilingualism. Paths that

foster growth in multiple languages would include the following basic elements, among others:

- early language learning opportunities for young learners so that they develop an appreciation for languages and have a foundation for getting to higher levels of proficiency in a second language and for adding more languages;
- sustained and intensive language development, from pre-school to elementary to secondary to university and beyond;
- integration of language and content instruction and use of other effective pedagogical strategies that cultivate high levels of proficiency in meaningful contexts;
- support for native languages, so that additional languages do not adversely affect their maintenance and development.

All of these elements can be found in immersion programs. Language immersion education is a powerful ingredient in an overall plan to promote the development of multilingualism in our schools. It fosters additive bilingualism, which, as Fred Genesee points out in his contribution to this volume, has beneficial social psychological, psycholinguistic and educational effects for students. While the approach may still be widely considered ‘innovative,’ it has claimed its place in educational programming as an effective way to give students a high quality education *and* the opportunity to become proficient in more than one language.

The value of language immersion programs has been recognized in growing numbers of communities in Canada, the United States and around the world since the St Lambert experiment began over 40 years ago. The Center for Applied Linguistics, in databases maintained on its website (www.cal.org), documents nearly 600 schools in the United States with immersion programs (one-way and two-way), representing well over 100,000 students. While these totals represent a small percentage of the larger US student population, the numbers are significant nonetheless and growing.

As immersion programs have spread, they have also evolved to suit different communities. One-way (foreign language) immersion programs have been joined by ‘two-way’ immersion programs where students from two different language backgrounds learn together through both languages, so that each group has an immersion experience in the other’s language. This development is significant in part because it provides a positive response to two important challenges facing many societies: the need for increased language resources and the need to educate learners from minority language backgrounds well. While there are important

differences between immersion programs in different contexts, many pedagogical and programmatic strategies can work well in both. It is a credit to this volume that various strands of immersion education are brought together so that experience and research can be shared. It is also extremely helpful that the editors have identified the core features of immersion programs and clarified terminology for these and related (or similar-sounding) educational approaches. As is often the case, dispersion of the model has led to variability in labeling, which makes it difficult to accumulate knowledge about it.

The diversity of student populations and unclear terminology are just some of the many challenges faced by immersion educators. As our understanding of immersion education in different contexts has deepened, so has our appreciation of the questions that have yet to be fully resolved, including a number of instructional and programmatic concerns:

- What are the effects of implementation differences (decisions on how program languages are allocated – for example by time, by teacher, by content area)?
- What is the impact of sociocultural context on immersion programs?
- How can language learning opportunities in the classroom be optimized?
- How can immersion instruction better support high levels of academic achievement?
- What pedagogical strategies are most effective for promoting second language learning in immersion classrooms?
- What design characteristics work best to create long sequences of language learning (preK–16) that include immersion?

Many of these issues are addressed in the contributions to this collection.

In today's and tomorrow's world, well-marked pathways to multilingualism are more important than ever. Language immersion programs play a central role in achieving the goal of multilingualism through schooling. Thus, the time is right for a volume such as this one, which takes stock of what we've learned about how to do immersion education, contributes fresh insights from well-established immersion settings, and introduces us to its practice in new and varied contexts. Tara Fortune and Diane Tedick have assembled reports of research and practice that deal with immersion education both broadly and deeply. From studies of Spanish immersion in the United States, to English immersion in Hong Kong, to aboriginal language immersion in Canada, the chapters offer research-based discussions that can inform practice. They remind us to pay attention to diversity in the immersion classroom, to plan carefully for

language development, to integrate content and language instruction in meaningful ways, and to honor the goals of the local community for the program – and they give us insight into ways of doing this. The volume makes an important contribution to the field of immersion education, as a type of bilingual education, by integrating research and practice and moving us forward in both domains. It will be a significant reference work for educators and researchers alike for years to come.

The editors and authors are to be congratulated for preparing a set of articles grounded in research that can help us see what can be done to make immersion an effective path to multilingualism and to academic success. We should act now to apply their findings and to extend them through further research.

