

Preface

Why would an Australian be interested in researching and writing about immersion education in the 1990s? Surely the coals of this topic have been well and truly raked over by now? And why late immersion? And why immersion in French *and* Chinese? I hope readers of this book will agree that the questions I have been asking in the research for this book provide, not answers, but more questions, and that especially in the area of classroom and learning processes, there is much that we do not yet know about learning a language in late immersion.

Until 1989, I had not heard of French immersion. I was then studying in Queensland for my Graduate Diploma in Applied Linguistics, and teaching adult ESL after a decade of teaching French and Music to high school students. One of my lecturers was starting an experiment as a piece of funded research. He would be teaching the course 'Fostering Emergent Literacy' to a group of second year Bachelor of Education students in a Language Other Than English (LOTE) and investigating the outcomes in terms of both content and language. The language chosen (based on the number of volunteers who had already studied a particular LOTE) was French and I was asked to provide the tutorials. The results of this project were impressive, and we wrote an article about the experience (Chappell & de Courcy, 1993).

During the semester we ran this course, we took our students on a visit to the one French late immersion school which was then operating in Queensland. There we observed Maths and History being taught to the students entirely in French, even though English was the students' native language. The students had not had any instruction in French before they started in the program. My students and I could talk of nothing else all the way back to university on the bus.

Thus began what was to consume my intellectual interest for the next seven years – an interest not in the outcomes of such a program, but in

the processes. Why were the students taking the program? What kept them in it? And, most interestingly – how did they learn what they learnt, both in terms of content and in terms of language? Finally, a topic which will be turned to later in the book – is the process different in languages not so close to English as French is?

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