



Integrating Language & Content Instruction in the Immersion Classroom

by *Elizabeth Graser, 1st Grade Teacher*
Normandale French Immersion, Edina, Minnesota

Lesson Plan Inside

One of the challenges in the French immersion classroom is the idea of integrating both language and content instruction. This has been a challenge for immersion teachers since the inception of immersion education in the United States in 1971. An immersion teacher has a particularly hard time with this because one is expected to be a content teacher and world language teacher at the same time. As a result, an immersion teacher is constantly incorporating the work of two teachers into an average day. Lesson after lesson, this teacher teaches the content through the vehicle of the immersion language. This presents a particular challenge because there need to be lessons that are well planned and designed to teach both language and vocabulary comprehension and the new content that is presented to the student during that lesson.

Swain (1996) suggests that it is necessary to engage in fundamental planning about how we will approach the integration of language and content in our classroom teaching. As an immersion teacher, my constant challenge is to make sure that the students in my first-grade classroom are leaving with a good general ability to produce French in reading, writing, and speaking. In planning quality curriculum, I need to ensure that students are not only exposed to input to develop language and content skills, but are also engaged in output that required both language and content skills.

Harley and Swain (1984) suggest that the immersion approach can be improved by increasing students' exposure to focused input, language that is specifically designed to focus their attention on problematic grammatical forms such as the use of *tu* and *vous*, and productive output, the repeated use of relevant forms in meaningful situations. Basically, teachers need to be focused in their approach to planning well thought-out lessons to create focused input for the students, and thus, the students will have many opportunities to use the language in situations that mean something to them. There is research that supports this approach to immersion teaching, yet we have much to learn about the successful integration of language and content (Lyster, 1994; Day and Shapson, 1991). The lesson I have developed for this article shows some ways to get output from the students with focused lessons.

Milan (1986) suggests that integration of language and content occurs through skill development as well. Skills in language arts (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are traditionally seen as separate entities by the teacher. If you look at skill integration, these are actually all measured as a "unified learning process" that is experienced by each individual student.

There are excellent ways to have students perform as Milan indicates: for example, read the text, use correct grammatical structures for expressing a topic, and provide culture, language, and content in the lesson. Curtain and Haas (1995) emphasize the need for concise planning in our lessons. They recommend using a thematic unit inventory map, where we as teachers might organize all of our themes prior to planning a particular lesson. The goal is to have teachers really think out what they are going to teach as a whole first, in order to exploit the links between language and content.

Language Functions	Subject Content	Culture	Vocabulary	Grammatical Structures	Assessment	Activities
<i>reflexive verbs</i>	<i>daily life</i>	<i>world differences in waking up</i>	<i>verb usage</i>	<i>When I wake up, I...</i>	<i>oral</i>	<i>daily oral language</i>
<i>expressing likes and dislikes of morning routines of certain animals</i>	<i>animal unit</i>	<i>various animals of different cultures</i>	<i>adjectives to describe</i>	<i>which, what kind</i>	<i>oral, written</i>	<i>morning attendance (Today is Monday, and I like tigers because...)</i>

Here, in the inventory map, I show that morning routines can be talked about in a variety of subject areas. In *music/fine arts*, the children can sing about routines that the panda have in the morning versus the brown bear here in America. For *physical education*, we can do dances and physical movements that show how people get up, get dressed, and get into their morning routine. For *culture and geography*, one can set up a game of Battleship and plot out where different countries wake up the earliest (all “ships” in the A column for AM, for example) and ask the students to tell their partners clues to indicate which country they are talking about. They might say something like, “I am thinking about a country where the people get up very early and then they take the metro to work. When it is 12 PM in Minnesota, it is 7 AM in this country. It begins with the letter ‘F’.” The partner can then guess France.

In *science*, showing how much sleep our bodies need compared to different animals in our animals unit would be a great compare/contrast activity using a Venn diagram. Students could bring in pictures of animals and decide if they needed more than eight hours or less than eight hours of sleep per night and classify accordingly. For *social studies*, talking about the reasons why we always get up in the morning versus the afternoon would be a great way to talk about community, an overall theme for the year in our first grade classrooms. One could look at different workers and when they get up for their “morning” routines, depending on what shift they work: for example, do all hospital employees get up and have a routine at the same time if someone works at night and someone works during the day? This could then be used as a *math* activity, graphing the different times of the day that different workers get up and have a routine.

This is an example of how I can approach the curriculum planning process to make sure I have taken account of a wide variety of language and content areas. The lesson following provides an even more detailed look.

References

- Curtain, H., and Haas, M. (1995) Integrating foreign language and content instruction in grades K-8. *ERIC Digest*, April 1995.
- Curtain, H., and Pesola, C. (1994) *Language and children: Making the match*, second edition. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Day, E., and Shapson, S. (1991) Integrating formal and functional approaches to language teaching in French immersion: An experimental study. *Language Learning*, 41(1), 25-58.
- Harley, B., and Swain, M. (1984) The interlanguage of immersion students and its implications for second language teaching. In A. Davies, C. Cripser, and A. Howatt (eds.) *Interlanguage*, pp. 291-311. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Lyster, R. (1994) The effect of functional-analytic teaching on aspects of French immersion students’ sociolinguistic competence. *Applied Linguistics*, 15, 263-87.
- Milan C. (1986) Integrating language and content through skill development. *Contact*, 5(3), 14-16, 28.
- Swain, M. (1996) Integrating language and content in immersion classrooms: Research perspectives. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 52(4), 529-48.

A “Morning Routines” Lesson

NOTES

Rationale

Here is a Gouin lesson (Curtain and Pesola, 1994) that works great with first graders. This type of lesson provides rich experiences for children in the immersion language in order to get fuller meaning across in the content area. In this lesson, the students are learning how to speak about the time when they get up in the morning. It makes good connections to students’ prior knowledge because they do this every day and are very familiar with these concepts. First graders love to act out anything, and this lesson gets them moving around using language forms with meaningful interaction.

Lesson Description

MY MORNING ROUTINE

*I get up in the morning at 7 a.m.
(Yawn) I am tired!
I get out of bed.
I get dressed.
I put on my pants and my shirt.
I brush my teeth.
I am ready for my day (smile).*

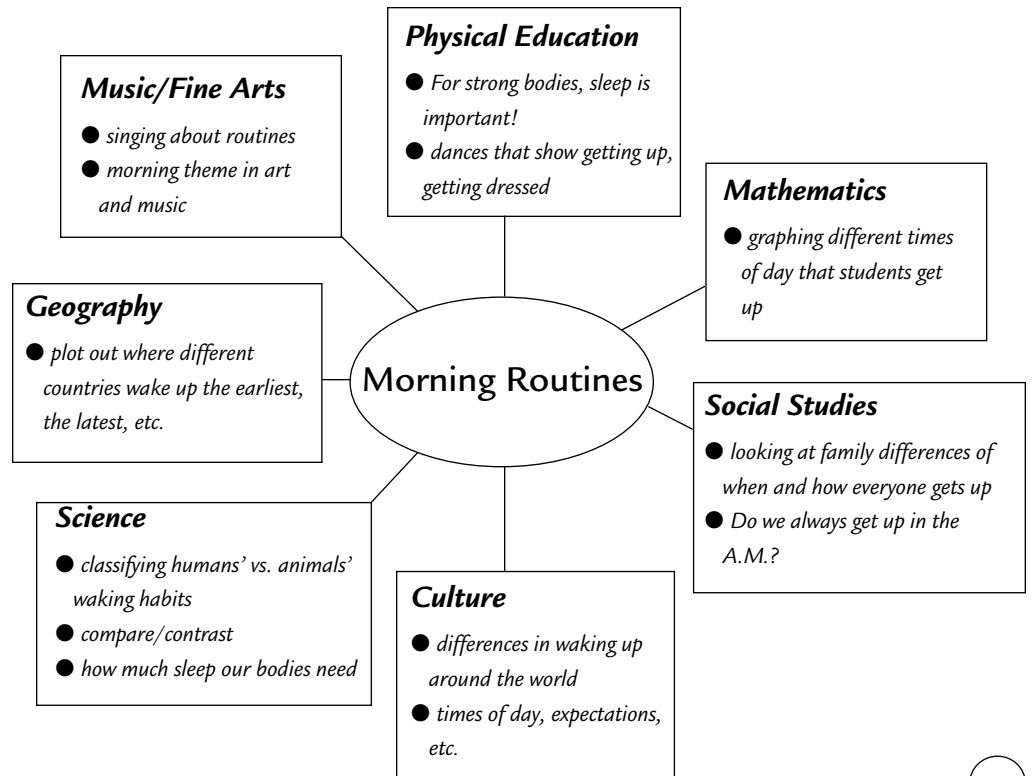
I introduce this with gestures and speaking only, then, after going through the actions a number of times while speaking, I write these phrases of the morning routine onto a transparency to show the students the written form of the language. The students repeat these series of events every day for one week.

This activity becomes a part of *our* morning routine every day as the children and I pretending to get up out of bed in the morning. A teacher could incorporate this into the daily task of taking attendance. For example, when each child is called on, he or she responds with a phrase from the morning routine and acts out the gestures. A teacher might also write one of the phrases onto the board and make it the phrase of the day. The students could call each other by the phrase of the day. Rather than simply “*Mademoiselle*,” the teacher could be named “*Mademoiselle I am ready for the day*.” If the student wants to speak with the teacher, or the teacher with a student, that becomes the phrase to be used all day long! Watch how fast they learn it!

At the end of the week, I show the children the written form of the words. The following week, I do lessons that incorporate two new sentences a day and invite students to draw pictures about them and copy the actual words into their journals. For the culminating activity, I have the children create their own book about getting up in the morning. They do this on their own by copying the sentences, making illustrations, and then reading the book to the teacher. Some children will end up retelling the story because they are unable to read it yet; others use invented spelling

to complete the book themselves. This will depend on each child's abilities.

I have included a web of ideas that is based on this Gouin activity of morning routine.



Conclusion

Reflective teaching might be an appropriate term for this kind of planning. Yes, we as immersion teachers have time constraints, and with eight classes a day, new grade levels added on, and district changes to the curriculum, it is hard at times to really be able to plan out one hour for each lesson. Becoming an immersion teacher is a lifetime process. Constant sharing between colleagues and revision to our plans must be done to make our classrooms an optimal place for immersion learning to take place.

In conclusion, the integration of language and content is thoughtfully considered in planning these activities for the first-grade classroom. Immersion teachers do have a challenge to consistently plan lessons by playing the double role of the whole language teacher and the content teacher. This is key to the learning of our students and will produce more effective language learners in the future. If we think through our curriculum in advance, paying particular attention to the integration of language and content skill development, we will be able to achieve this important goal. We hope to be able to establish networks of well-planned lessons that do incorporate these two essential ingredients so that, in the future, time constraints aren't such a large factor in our planning!

You can contact the author, Elizabeth Graser, at Normandale Community School, 5701 Norman-dale Road, Edina, MN 55424; Telephone (612) 928-2635; e-mail <egraser@edina.K12.