Permeating the Boundaries of Traditional Second Language Professional Development

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Abstract

This essay reviews how a French-as-a-second-language/second language consultant supports teachers with curricula renewal and the required shift from pedagogic approaches that are Grammar-Translation and content-based to those that are communicative and competency-based. Through a traditional professional development model, the consultant prepares the teachers for new curricula. Through a job-embedded professional development model, the consultant and teacher apply new methodologies to the classroom environment, assessment and instruction. The data indicate the number of traditional and job-embedded professional development sessions for the 2012 to 2013 school year within four of the second language programs in the Greater Saskatoon Catholic School division: French Immersion, Intensive French/Post-Intensive French, Core French, and Ukrainian Bilingual. The results show that traditional sessions lead to a greater number of job-embedded sessions. To conclude, curricula renewal requires ongoing support not only for teachers at the division level, but also for pre-service teachers at the university level.

Curricula Renewal and Its Approaches

From 2007 to 2013, the Core French curricula experienced a transformation as well as a renewal which required a shift in pedagogic paradigms. To bridge the gap between the Grammar-Translation Method, used to teach Core French, and a communicative approach to L2 teaching, the Grade 6 IF and the Grades 7 to 12 Post-IF programs were fully conceived and implemented in June 2011 which preceded the Grades 1 to 9 Core French curricula renewal in 2012. Both FSL programs enable students to communicate by developing their ability "to spontaneously express their ideas while acquiring explicit knowledge about vocabulary and language" (Netten & Germain, 2012, p. 90). However, due to the lack of instructional minutes and sustained periods of instruction within the Core French program, the students' language abilities pale in comparison to those of their IF and Post-IF counterparts (Netten & Germain, 2004). The factors of limited instructional time and a new communicative approach to teaching an L2 within these two programs emphasized the need for targeted and frequent PD support throughout the school year.

The Grades 1 to 9 FI curricula had experienced a renewal in 2008 and 2009. The specificity of the new curricula outcomes maintained the basic principles of FI which "consist of the appropriation of the L2 through the use of French to learn subject matter of the school curriculum" (Netten & Germain, 2012, p. 86). This renewal did not subsequently respond to Rebuffot's (1993) findings within his review of FI in Canada, which identified the program's major difficulties as its students' inabilities not only to communicate with accuracy, but also to readily adapt their language to social interaction. To commence the improvement process of the 2007 curricula, the province implemented the 2013 kindergarten, Grades 1 and 2 interdisciplinary FI curricula. The primary UB curricula, which frame four subject areas in immersion, are currently in the process of being developed into integrated curricula. Both the interdisciplinary FI and the integrated UB curricula require a shift from content-based to competency-based teaching that develops the students' abilities to use and apply vocabulary and concepts to the performance of communicative tasks transferable to the real world. These paradigm shifts in L2 pedagogies require learning opportunities that support the professional growth of the teachers which, in turn, further benefits the students' learning (Johnson, 2006).

Redrawing Boundaries of Teacher PD

A combination of PD models provides "opportunities for L2 teachers to make sense of theories in the professional lives and the settings where they work" (Johnson, 2006, p. 240). The traditional PD model of the FSL consultant prepares large groups of grade and program-specific teachers for provincial and division initiatives that inform them of new curricula content, frameworks and their recommended methodologies. The one to three hour sessions occur in school libraries or in the division's learning center where 10 to 30 teachers acquire knowledge about the curriculum, program or resource initiative. After the seminars, they receive copies of the ministry documents, new program guides and sets of resources with possible sample units of study and other supporting documents prepared by pilot teachers and consultants. The PD objectives include learning about the new content and how to use it. This PD model allows for input-based professional growth, but only to the extent that teachers understand the concepts presented. Its large size, limited opportunity for one-on-one inquiry-based learning and time restraints impede any in-depth incorporation of new material and strategies into current classroom practices (Johnson, 2006).

The job-embedded PD model builds upon the prior traditional session by enabling the teacher and consultant to work collaboratively within the classroom environment and to put the new approaches into practice through a before, during and after process. This allows the teacher and consultant to connect program curricula and recommended resources to various L2 instructional strategies while co-planning lessons and units before or after school, or during preparation time. Occasionally, the school principal provides curriculum actualization time during a half day of release time, during which the teacher works with the consultant while a substitute teacher instructs the students. Next, co-taught lessons "allow for self-directed, collaborative and inquiry-based learning" (Johnson, 2006, p. 243) that unearth answers to spontaneous questions and provide emergent feedback to enhance teaching strategies while maximizing student learning. Afterwards, the teacher and consultant discuss the diagnostic, formative and summative assessments of the targeted L2 learning during the students' oral, reading and writing tasks to further differentiate their teaching to meet the students' needs. The gaps in the students' learning provide direction for further co-planning of tasks and their accompanying assessments.

In my position as FSL consultant, I am responsible for planning and delivering the traditional and job-embedded/alternate PD sessions. The following table is a compilation of PD information from September 2012 to June 2013 after curriculum renewal began for the FI, IF/Post-IF, Core French and UB programs.

Table 1
Traditional and Job-embedded PDs 2012-2013

Forms of PD	Traditional		Job-embedded/Alternate	
FSL/L2 Programs	Number of sessions	Percentage of total traditional sessions	Number of sessions	Percentage of total alternate sessions
FI	29	85	85	36
IF/Post-IF	1	3	132	55
CF	2	6	11	5
UB	2	6	10	4
Total	34		238	

Table 1 indicates the 2012 to 2013 traditional PD sessions and their consequential number of teacher initiated job-embedded PDs. The 29 traditional PD sessions of the FI program equated to 85% of the PD consultations. The momentum created by these PD sessions, which

focused on communicative teaching approaches to improve students' fluency and accuracy in speaking, reading and writing, resulted in 85 job-embedded teacher initiated PDs, equating to 36 % of the total alternate forms of PD. The IF/Post-IF program's teachers were previously trained through a 30 hour summer Provincial Ministry training symposium. The follow-up of 132 sessions or 55 % of the job-embedded PD consults indicates the prescriptive nature of the IF/Post –IF teaching strategies and the teachers' motivation to master these strategies to maximize their students' oral and written proficiency. The Core French and UB programs' low number of traditional PDs, which is related to the low number of teachers, resulted in less demand to implement new curricula and their communicative approaches to L2 teaching. Even though the UB curricula were due for implementation September 2013, the provincial ministry halted its development which, as a result, contributed to the low number of teacher initiated PDs as indicated in Table 1.

The data indicate a direct correlation between programs experiencing pedagogic shifts required by renewed curricula, and the high number of traditional and job-embedded PDs. After the implementation of traditional PD forms, teachers who further initiate job-embedded PD sessions seek alternatives, recognize consequences and self-examine so they can learn more about themselves, their students, the curriculum they teach, and the impact of their teaching (Johnson, 2006).

Quality Core Instruction and Job-embedded PD Sessions

The school division's Quality Core Instruction Model provides a lens through which professional communication and collaboration occur during job-embedded PD sessions. Working within this model, the consultant and teacher explore "the environment through which learning takes place, the curriculum used to plan the teaching of knowledge and skills, the assessment practices to inform instructional decisions, and the instruction to teach and engage students" (Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools [GSCS], 2013, p. 1).

Environment

The consultant, teacher and students create a collaborative, trusting and communicative environment where the responsibility of learning is gradually transferred from the teacher to the student during all learning experiences (GSCS, 2013). To establish the classroom expectation to communicate in the L2, the consultant and teacher, together, create meaningful contexts for the students to use the target language (TL). Krashen (1989) introduced his theory concerning how

L2 acquisition occurs when the students receive comprehensible input that is slightly above their language competence and when they authentically require using the TL to interact. Using comprehensible input remains a frequent PD goal that develops the teachers' abilities to modify their instructional speech, during all interactions to progress the students' current level of comprehension and L2 development. Purposefully planning specific input in the learning environment, in the form of targeted vocabulary, concepts and structures, enables the students to further comprehend, reproduce and transfer their use of the targeted language independently to other learning contexts. By developing a trusting relationship between the three parties, everyone willingly takes risks while teaching, learning and communicating based on the model of "I do, we do, you do as the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills shift from the teacher to the student" (GSCS, 2013, p. 8).

For the majority of French and Ukrainian language learners, the classroom remains the main environment in which L2 learning takes place therefore their mistakes become valuable learning opportunities for corrective feedback (CF). Due to the communicative nature of the FSL/L2 programs, a common PD goal for teachers consists of learning to effectively provide CF during all stages of learning and their communicative tasks. By collaboratively implementing Lightbrown and Spada's (2008) concept of integrated form-focused instruction within the FSL/L2 teachers' practices where "the learner's attention is always drawn to form within communicative practice and activities" (as cited in Spada, 2010, p. 229), the students experience frequent opportunities to apply CF to incorrect grammatical structures in their speaking, reading and writing, thus improving the accuracy and fluency of their L2 skills. After "establishing a culture of learning" (GSCS, 2013, p. 8) through CF in a secondary FI classroom, a teacher reported that this practice "led to CF being further used productively within student-student and student-teacher contexts" (C. Chateigner, personal communication, October 10, 2013).

In the FSL context, where French is taught as a subject in schools, the limited exposure to the language and culture in natural contexts remains an obstacle (Shin, 2007). This is despite the fact that there are many cultural learning options which would permit students and their teachers to experience the TL and its culture within their school setting. An L2 classroom environment that integrates cultural components within its learning environment fosters a connection between the spoken language, its culture and its people. Consultant-planned opportunities inside the school/classroom allow the students to experience French food, music, customs, pastimes, art

and crafts with members of the community (Ministère de l'Éducation de la Saskatchewan, 2008). Unfortunately the large number of students per school, in addition to limited cultural funds, means that equitable opportunities for students at all levels of language proficiency to participate in such experiences are not always available. The participating students and teachers do not only learn through classroom resources but also through authentic experience of the culture and the communication with its native speakers.

Curriculum and Assessment

In the Quality Core Instruction Model curricula, it is recommended that teachers "engage learners with important knowledge, understandings and skills" (GSCS, 2013, p. 3). The consultant aims to prepare L2 teachers to use the programs' curricula to plan and to ensure that the curriculum outcomes are understood by the teachers, the students and their parents.

The co-planning uses a four-stage backward design approach (Wiggins, Wilbur, & McTighe, 2005). The first stage determines "the purpose for learning prior to instruction" (GSCS, 2013, p. 3) by identifying desired results in the form of learning outcomes or critical learnings, the essential question that serves as an umbrella for the unit, the students' inquiry questions, and "the conceptual content (Know), skills (Do) and attitudes/beliefs (Be)" (Drake & Reid, 2010, p. 2).

The second stage consists of planning the assessment by determining the summative task, the communication tasks, the learning indicators and their corresponding performances, as well as strategies and assessment tools to evaluate these performances. During the co-creation of the assessment tools, the students learn the purpose of their tasks by transforming the learning indicators into meaningful *I can* statements or student-friendly language which demonstrate an understanding of the expected knowledge and skills they will monitor and assess as their learning progresses. Later, during the assessment process, the teachers use *assessment as learning* that actively involves the students' reflection on their learning and progress relating to the co-created assessment tools.

The third stage involves planning the teaching and the learning environment through learning centers or displays, resources and task-based language teaching (TBLT) that "involves three phases (the pre-task, the main task, and the post-task phase)" that are "input-providing, involving listening and reading as well as output-prompting, engaging the students in speaking and writing" (Ellis, 2009, p. 224). The TBLT provides differentiated learning opportunities for

students to demonstrate any four of the FI learning domains: oral and written comprehension and oral and written production (Ministère de l'Éducation de la Saskatchewan, 2008).

The planning for the fourth stage emerges from the teachers' assessment of the students' learning which, in turn, informs future instruction. Teachers make instructional decisions based on learning evidence (GSCS, 2013). After identifying what knowledge and skills the students have learned, as well as what difficulties they experienced during the TBLT, decisions are made for future instruction. The backward design model provides a destination for teachers and students to reach and, by collaboratively planning with this approach, the consultant and teacher set goals to improve the learning of the students (Sutton, 2013).

After school-based traditional PD sessions on approaches to communicating student achievement, discussions continue with teachers about the relevance of creating "a collection of evidence of student achievement at strategic times of the school year" (GSCS, 2013, p. 4) with the students and for the purpose of communication with parents. Roessingh and Kover emphasized how "a portfolio approach helped students to take more responsibility for their learning" while providing "concrete evidence of students' progress and an ideal tracking mechanism" (2002, p. 12). This evidence highlights the L2 students' reflection on their efforts, strategies, progress, strengths, successes, and difficulties in connection with the evaluation criteria established at the onset. With consultation support teachers and students co-create their learning portfolios by selecting pertinent traces of learning to communicate with parents.

Parents also require a bridge in their understanding of the framework and assessment tools of the new FI interdisciplinary curriculum framework. In order to ease the *assessment culture shock* that results with this shift from subject specific instruction and assessment to that of an interdisciplinary nature, Sutton (2013) explains how professional discussion must occur between division FSL specialists using parent friendly language and examples that connect parents' prior knowledge of curriculum content, instruction and assessment practices. Parent information evenings occur within the first trimester, and before the communication of student progress through portfolios, parent-teacher-student conferences and progress reports. These sessions enable parents to learn how the organization of these curricula differs from past versions and how they maximize language development. Examples, explanation and discussion allow the parents to both express their concerns and to interpret this new framework.

Instruction

Transitioning to a communicative approach to teaching promotes a limited-use of translation, in addition to the use of TBLT and integrated form-focused instruction strategies. Cummins emphasized that "in bilingual/immersion programs, the use of translation as an instructional strategy" results in "students 'tuning out' their weaker language and consequently learning very little" (Cummins, 2007, p. 222). To bridge the gap between what students' know and what they want to learn to say requires instruction that allows for a limited-use of translation. This benefits their learning by teaching them to linguistically inquire in their L2 by asking, "How do I say …?" in French or Ukrainian and, as a result, by filling their linguistic gap. Consequently, the learning of this word or structure in the TL permits the students to not only repeat it, but, with encouragement, to also apply it while communicating their authentic message.

Instructional support connects the learning outcomes to TBLT that create a communicative environment in which grammar can be acquired through use (Ellis, 2009). During the pre-task phase, the consultant helps establish an instructional routine during which students build on their prior knowledge. In doing so, they learn to use vocabulary and structures in purposeful interaction while acquiring a correct internal grammar (Netten & Germain, 2012). Through repetitive use of a limited number of structures, the consultant and teacher prepare the students to connect their understanding and oral abilities to reading and writing activities of the main task.

During the main task, the consultant models how to incorporate an oral preparation or contextualization phase into the current reading instructional practices of the teacher (Netten & Germain, 2007). The pre-reading task further develops the students' speaking and comprehension skills while they use new words and structures in conversation, therefore, learning their meaning and facilitating comprehension as they eventually read the text. After verifying student comprehension, integrated form-focused instruction targets and reinforces grammatical concepts found within the text that posed problems while reading.

During the post-task, the implementation of a pre-writing phase enables the teacher to model his or her ideas in conversational phrases with comprehensible input derived from the previous oral and reading activities (Netten & Germain, 2007). Next, a writing-input phase allows the teacher and consultant to collaboratively demonstrate a written model based on suggestions by the students. This oral preparation to writing activates the students' prior learning thus allowing them to apply it to their writing-output task. As the students use both the

targeted language and their personally adapted responses, the teacher circulates the class to provide CF in the students' writing while referring to specific grammatical concepts used in their input-model.

Conclusion

Shifts in L2 pedagogic paradigms require alternate forms of PD that not only inform and prepare teachers as they implement new curricula, but also provide ongoing support as they adopt new instructional and assessment practices. As more traditional PD sessions ignite schools' and teachers' inquiry about communicative and competency-based approaches to L2 teaching, it is hoped that the number of school and teacher-initiated consultations increase. The traditional PD model continues to coincide within the schools' professional learning time but, an increase in teacher-initiated job-embedded PD requests indicates the need for provision of additional resources. To respond to this growing need to support teachers as they forge ahead shifting their practices "to create educationally sound and contextually appropriate learning opportunities for their students" (Johnson, 2006, p. 250), school divisions and university education programs must provide more learning opportunities for teachers to further develop their skills required by new curricula. At the division level, an increase in human resources in the form of L2 consultants and teachers-on-assignment allows for an increase in job-embedded PDs. At the university level, the L2 curricula of pre-service teacher education programs require renewal to align new teachers' pedagogic knowledge and practices with the curricular demands of implementing communicative and competency-based approaches to L2 teaching (Shin, 2007). The combined benefits at the university and division levels prevent the 'wash back' of the Grammar-Translation and content-based approaches to teaching curricula in traditional non-communicative ways, thus equipping their L2 learners with the linguistic capital to apply their L2 learning to the demands of their future multilingual global community.

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