Conversations in immersion: Concerns about pedagogy and gatekeepers

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Abstract

Research on stakeholder perspectives in language immersion contexts is relatively new (Padron & Waxman, 2016; Whitacre, 2015). This current qualitative research examined perspectives of stakeholders at a mini-conference for immersion educators and administrators called Conversations in Immersion. The mini-conference encouraged immersion stakeholders to discuss their concerns about immersion and provided an expert immersion educator and collaborative networking experience to address those concerns. Themes within the data

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emerged from three sources: (1) pre-conference questions, (2) a collaborative discussion session with administrators, and (3) a question-and-answer session with a keynote speaker. Data collected from this conference were analyzed using conventional content analysis. Themes that emerged from the data included pedagogically-based concerns and concerns about how to manage relationships with gatekeepers. Findings indicate that participants' conversations focused on instructional and administrative aspects of language immersion and on the roles of gatekeepers in language immersion contexts.

Introduction

Context of the mini-conference

Practicing immersion educators and administrators have unique pedagogical and support needs beyond traditional classroom and school settings. These needs are not self-evident and may appear nebulous to district and state-level administration. One way to create a productive dialogue for the purpose of determining and disseminating the needs, perceptions, and concerns of immersion stakeholders is to establish a space and a format for educators and school administrators to voice their needs and concerns. With this goal in mind, the Louisiana Consortium of Immersion Schools conceived and organized a day and a half mini-conference called Conversations in Immersion. Conversations in Immersion took place in Southern Louisiana in April 2016. The purpose of Conversations in Immersion was to offer attending stakeholders, including administrators and teachers, a chance to shape the direction of dialogue at the conference. Research on stakeholder perspectives in language immersion contexts is relatively new (Padron & Waxman, 2016; Whitacre, 2015). This current study examined the perspectives of these stakeholders. Specifically, it explored the research question: *What do immersion stakeholders consider to be the most salient issues in language immersion education today?*

Practicing immersion educators and administrators have unique pedagogical and support needs beyond traditional classroom and school settings. These needs are not self-evident and may appear nebulous to district and state-level administration.

The study uncovered the questions, critiques, and issues that language immersion stakeholders have, and how they communicate those concerns in the context of a language immersion mini-conference that explicitly allowed participants to voice their perspectives and concerns. Data from three sources were collected: (1) Data in the form of pre-conference questions were collected from registrants via a Google form before the attendees arrived and were given to the keynote speakers to address in their presentation, (2) Data from the field notes from an hour-long post-keynote conversation with one of the keynote speakers, and (3) a session specifically created for administrators. In that session, administrators held a collaborative discussion of issues that affect their immersion programs. Over 120 stakeholders, most of whom were from Louisiana, in addition to attendees from Texas and Michigan, attended the conference. The conference program included a full day with two keynote presentations and teacher-led

breakout sessions and a half-day community panel. Approximately 80% of the attendees were teachers, 25% were administrators, and 5% were academics, including graduate students and professors.

Literature review

Immersion education is defined as an educational setting in which students are taught a minimum of 50% of the academic day in the target language (Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, 2004). This literature review will describe related research on perspectives and concerns of language immersion administrators, teachers, and parents. The perspectives and concerns represented in the literature reflect language immersion stakeholders' expectations about responsibility, support, and implementation in the immersion context, and examine their role as gatekeepers in language immersion settings. Gatekeepers in the immersion literature have been defined as people who have the ability to limit student access to language immersion education (Mady, 2016; Arnett, 2013; Genesee & Jared, 2008). This current research expands that definition and considers gatekeepers to be people who have the capacity to control or limit student support and access to language immersion pathways. We expanded this definition to include people who have the capacity to control or limit *student support*, in addition to access, because support, once students have entered an immersion program, can determine whether or not students flouris Immersion education is defined as an educational setting in which students are taught a minimum of 50% of the academic day in the target language h within the program or leave. Immersion programs have a high rate of early withdrawals; in Louisiana, 29% of students enrolled in immersion programs between 2001-2009 withdrew before completing the elementary portion of the K-8 program (Boudreaux, 2011).

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Administrators' perspectives

More research has been published on administrators' perspectives than on teachers' or parents' perspectives in language immersion contexts. Emery (2016) and Roque, Ferrin, Hite, and Randall (2016) discussed administration as an essential gatekeeper in immersion because it can control and limit support for immersion pathways. Emery (2016) conducted a phenomenological study that examined what immersion administrators need to know in order to implement and sustain successful immersion programs. She found that administrators need immersion-specific knowledge, a passion for bilingualism, and the ability to balance the uniqueness of immersion with their non-negotiables. Non-negotiables are minimal pedagogical requirements that ensure the amount of time and importance of the target language in order to qualify as an immersion context (CODOFIL, n.d.). While Emery (2016) discussed the qualities that immersion administrators need to possess, she did not focus on administrators' self-perceived needs and lingering questions they had about immersion programs.

Roque et al. (2016) examined language immersion administrators' self-perceptions. They utilized surveys and interviews to conduct an inquiry into the roles, skills, and traits of language immersion principals. They found that principals embody five key roles: immersion guru, immersion proponent, immersion overseer, cultural unifier, and agent of change. While Roque et al. (2016) were able to discern traits that immersion principals believed to be keys to success, the study did not address principals' and other stakeholders' perceived needs or any lingering questions they may have about immersion.

An organization that examines administrators' support and implementation of immersion is the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), in its *Guiding Principles for Dual Language Education* (Howard, Sugarman, Christian, Lindholm-Leary, & Rogers, 2007). CAL identified seven strands that immersion administrators need to consider when implementing in an immersion context: (1) assessment, (2) curriculum, (3) instruction, (4) staff quality, (5) program structure, (6) family and community, and (7) support and resources (Howard et al., 2007). CAL gleaned these strands from research on the best practices of successful K-12 immersion programs nationwide. CAL maintains that all strands are important in successful immersion programs. Interestingly, these strands are maintained or controlled by administrative gatekeepers in language immersion settings.

Teachers' perspectives

There is a modest corpus of conflicting literature that discusses immersion teacher perspectives and roles as essential gatekeepers in immersion programs. Forman's (2016) qualitative study of immersion school staff found that teachers perceived that the implementation of language immersion programs was the role of the principal and that support of the program was the responsibility of the school district. Thus, the teachers in this study did not consider themselves to be gatekeepers. Likewise, Cammarata and Tedick (2012) discussed how teachers are limited by administrations' and parents' beliefs about immersion. As such, they do not consider themselves to serve as primary gatekeepers. These findings contradict research by Padron and Waxman (2016) who found that principals attributed the responsibility of the implementation of foreign language programs to their teachers. While research indicates that language immersion teachers do not perceive themselves as program implementers and gatekeepers, administrators may view teachers in this capacity.

Mady (2011) found that teachers can serve as gatekeepers if they limit student support by restricting parental access to immersion programs, particularly for immigrant students. For example, Mady (2016) found that teachers believed that English language education would be more beneficial to immigrant students despite the fact that (1) students would learn both languages in French immersion, and (2) the parents wanted their children to learn both of Canada's official languages. In this study, the teachers' role as gatekeepers influenced parents' and administrators' decision-making in terms of which students had access to the language immersion program.

Parents as gatekeepers

Parents, in their role as benevolent gatekeepers, are crucial for implementation and sustainability of language immersion programs. As Mady (2016) addressed above, parents are gatekeepers who, for example, decide which languages children should learn. However, parents can be swayed by teacher input and perspectives. Parents also provide necessary support to schools. Hatheway, Shea, and Winslow (2015) conducted a qualitative study of a principal's implementation of an immersion program in the northeastern United States. In this study, the principal's first step toward program implementation was the creation of a parent and faculty support coalition. This supports research that indicates that the inclusion of parents in the development of a strategic plan is necessary for the creation and sustainability of effective immersion programs (Battin, 2013; Hatheway et al., 2015; Lucido & Montague, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Parental input is necessary because student enrollment depends on parental support. Parents support the effectiveness of immersion programs by willingly enrolling their children in the program and through their commitment to support the program at home and in the community. Thus administrators, teachers, and parents are essential gatekeepers in terms of language immersion program support and implementation. They decide who enters, who exits, and who gets supported in immersion. Extant literature does not explore the above stakeholders' concerns or the uncertainties that they encounter when they participate in a language immersion context. This study seeks to uncover the questions, critiques, and issues that language immersion stakeholders have in the context of a language immersion mini-conference that explicitly allowed participants to voice their perspectives and concerns.

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Method

Participants

Participants were stakeholders who attended the conference, including immersion educators, local and district-level administrators, as well as academic researchers and graduate students. All participants provided informed consent before data were collected. Of the 120 participants, all but five were from Southern Louisiana with the distribution of teachers matching the number of parishes that had immersion schools. Southwestern Louisiana has a single parish with immersion (18%), Central Acadiana has four parishes with immersion (43%), and Southeastern Louisiana (27%) parishes. Only five of the participants were not from Louisiana; one was from Michigan, and four participants were from a nearby metropolitan Texas area.

Data Collection

Participants provided data from three sources: (1) pre-conference questions that they contributed before they arrived, (2) the collaborative conversation of immersion administrators, and (3) the conference attendees' post-keynote

conversation with a well-known immersion speaker. The questions were collected via a Google Form that was e-mailed to attendees when they registered for the conference (see Appendix A; questions written in French have been translated). Field notes from the two conversations sessions at the conference were gathered by qualified researchers with university faculty positions, who attended those sessions and recorded detailed and essential information from the conversations with the administrators and the participating keynote speaker. Both sessions were one hour in length. Once typewritten, the field notes for the two conversation sessions totaled 10 pages.

Data Analysis

The compiled data set included questions and field notes from three contexts: the pre-conference questions, the conversation session with administrators, and the conversation session with the keynote speaker. First, the data for each context were analyzed separately to develop descriptive codes (Saldaña, 2013) and then aggregated. Once aggregated, data were analyzed using conventional content analysis as described by Hsieh and Shannon (2005). Initially, researchers used inductive category development (Mayring, 2000). They read the field notes several times to get a sense of the whole (Tesch, 1990). From there, codes were derived from the highlighted words that captured key concepts and thoughts (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Initial analysis entailed making notes on first impressions and thoughts, then creating the descriptive coding scheme. After descriptive coding, emergent categories were created by sorting codes based on how they were related or linked together. Then, emergent categories were organized into meaningful clusters using second cycle axial coding (Saldaña, 2013). Finally, researchers defined the established categories and subcategories based on these axial codes. Gatekeepers, the most unanticipated theme, emerged from the axial codes.

Results

Pre-conference questions

Conference attendees were sent a link to an anonymous Google Form survey when they registered asking them to provide up to three questions that they would like to ask the conference keynote speakers. From the Google form survey, 15 attendees submitted a total of 37 questions to prompt discussion during the conference sessions (see Appendix A). Figure 1 identifies the percentage of questions submitted by topic. By far, the topics of gatekeeper, particularly administrators as gatekeepers (39%) and instruction (37%) were prominent among the questions. The keynote speaker and administrators were given the list of questions in advance and chose to address most of the questions in their presentations. Questions that were not explicitly addressed in the keynote speaker's presentation were used to prompt discussion during the post-keynote conversation time. Most questions pertaining to instruction, assessment, and research were addressed in the keynote presentation and the discussion panel. The questions pertaining to gatekeepers, a significant theme of this study, were not

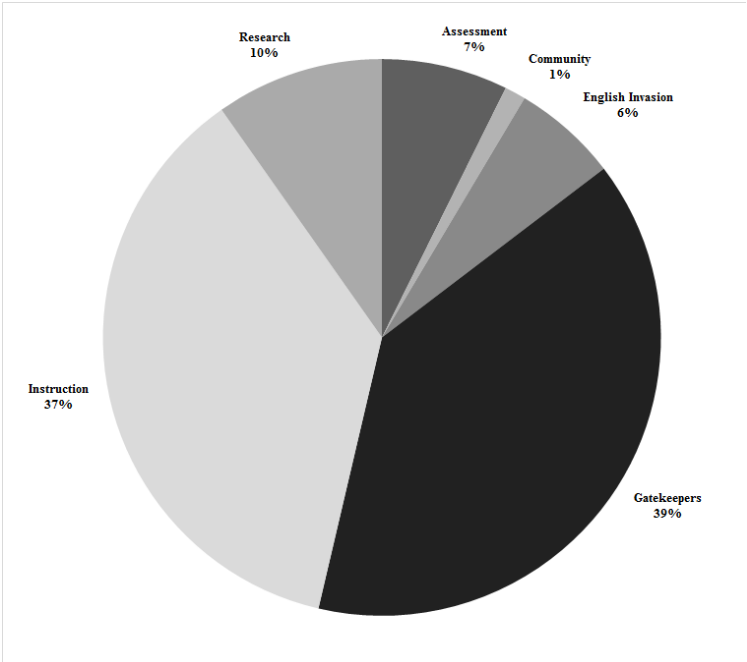

Figure 1. Pre-conference question themes

explicitly addressed in the keynote presentation. This may be because gatekeeping is context-based. For example, issues with administration and decision-making at the district level vary by state and school district. Therefore, the gatekeeper theme emerged more organically from the conversations as participants voiced their concerns with teaching immersion in their school districts and at their particular school sites.

Administrators' conversation

This conversation consisted of a session focused on administrators' interests and was facilitated by a local language immersion supervisor. The audio recordings for this session were virtually inaudible; thus, the data are based on researcher field notes. The supervisor began the session by having the administrators brainstorm and then select two topics that they wanted to discuss in the session. The administrators selected assessment and culture as the main discussion topics for this session. Community involvement was briefly discussed within the culture discussion, which quickly segued to a discussion of the topic of instruction. As with the distribution of topics from pre-conference questions, Figure 2 on the next page shows that instruction and gatekeepers, particularly the state or district as gatekeepers, were the top-ranking themes from this conversation with 49% and 19%, respectively. These themes were followed closely by the theme of assessment (18%). Overall, instruction, gatekeepers, and assessment were the three themes that dominated the conversation at the administrators' session.

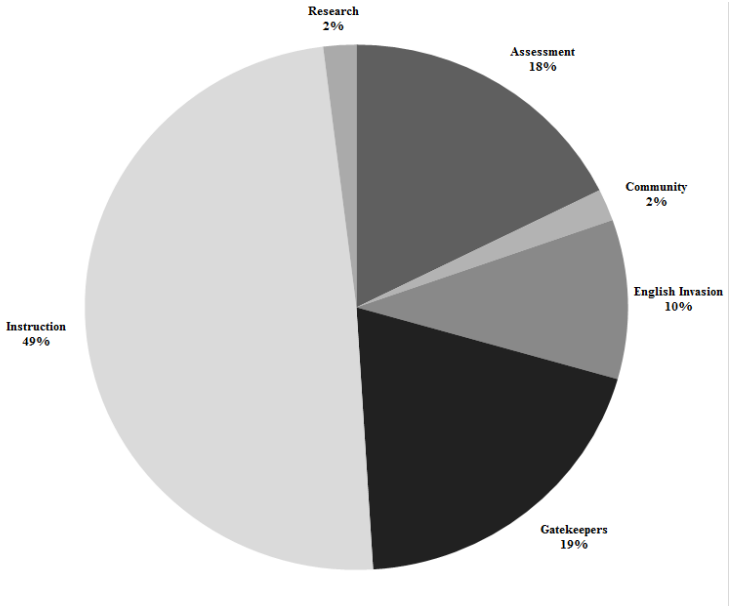

Figure 2. Conversation with administrators' themes

Post-keynote conversation

After the keynote speaker's address entitled, "Literacy, Language, and Academic Achievement," an hour was given to the attendees to ask questions. Initially, pre-conference questions were asked to spark the conversations during this session. Then, participants asked follow-up questions. Researchers took field notes in outline form during the session. The field notes were e-mailed to the keynote speaker for verification of accuracy and validity. After validation from the keynote speaker, the field notes were analyzed for themes. Figure 3 on the next page shows the major themes that emerged in the keynote conversation once it was coded: instruction (65%), research (19%), and gatekeepers (12%). Within instruction, a secondary theme of English invasion emerged. In the post-keynote conversation and the administrator conversation the themes of instruction and gatekeepers emerged.

Aggregated results and discussion

The compiled data set, including questions and field notes from the pre-conference questions, the conversation with administrators, and the conversation with the keynote speaker gleaned five major themes. The five themes, represented in Figure 4 (on the next page), were instruction (45%), gatekeepers (28%), assessment (10%), research (10%), and English invasion (7%). The five major themes that emerged consistently across the data will be discussed below to clarify the connections that existed among all sources of data.

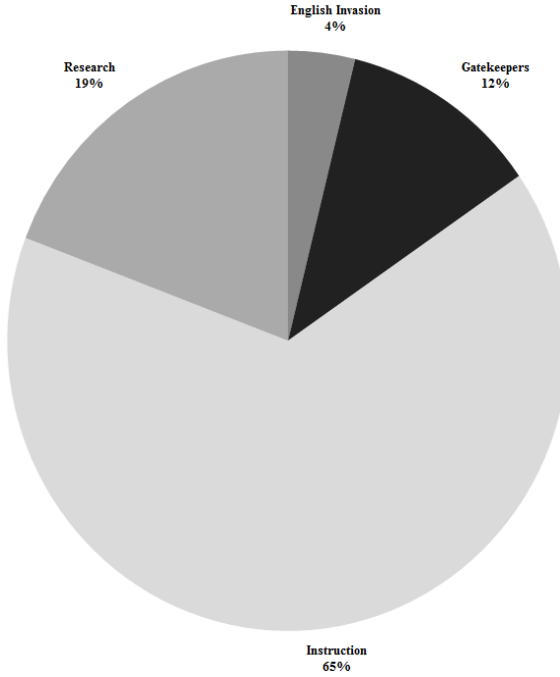

Figure 3. Conversation with keynote speaker

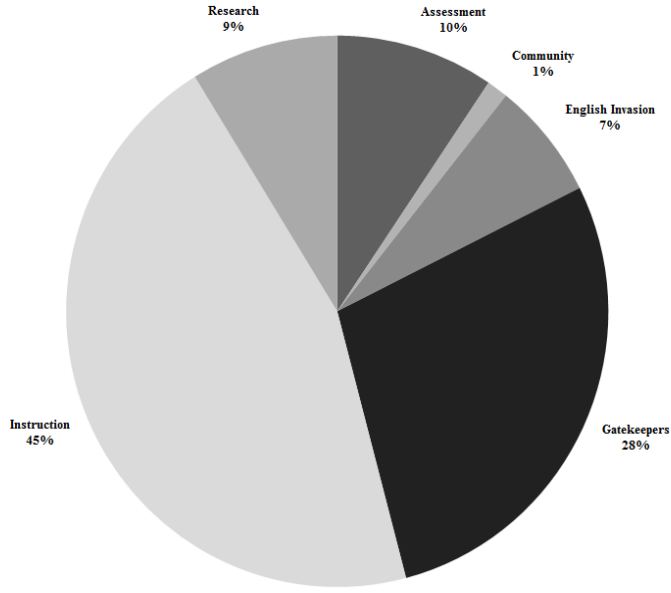

Figure 4. Major themes from compiled data.

Instruction

Instruction in pre-conference questions

The theme of instruction included classroom practices that facilitate effective teaching in language immersion settings. Participants sought information on exemplary materials for teaching specific student populations, how to fine-tune their language skills, and strategies for sharing instructional resources that they found useful. Several subthemes that are described below comprise this broader theme. Participants' pre-conference questions about instruction centered around language precision, immersion materials that meet context requirements, and differentiation for students who need adaptations.

First, participants asked about ways to encourage students to be more precise in their L2 language: "*Our immersion students have a wonderful 'voice' with rich vocabulary, but they struggle with using correct structure and spelling. How can we best meet their needs?*" These concerns reflected research on productive skills of immersion students (Harley, 1992) and how to address them (Lyster, 2016).

Participants also asked where they could find exemplary immersion resources and materials that work with their specific contents: "*Where can we find quality French and Spanish materials for language arts, math, science, and social studies that are aligned with state standards?*" Matching target language (TL) materials was a vocalized struggle for participants because of the varied immersion contexts and the specific materials required for these contexts (Tedick & Cammarata, 2012).

Finally, participants submitted questions about strategies for teaching exceptional students (giftedness, dyslexia, special needs), language and content instruction, and English language acquisition teams: "*Comment mieux adapter le contenu et/ou la lecture et l'écriture aux enfants dyslexiques*?" [How can we better adapt content and/or reading and writing to our dyslexic children?]. The need for differentiation is consistent with previous literature that reflects immersion teachers' concerns with access to exemplary resources (Walker & Tedick, 2000) and immersion-specific pedagogy for differentiation and special populations (Arnett, 2007).

Instruction in administrators' conversation

Most of the administrators' comments pertained to instruction: (1) what they needed to consider in order to transition to higher grades, (2) which content should they teach in the target language (TL), and (3) which classroom practices should they encourage to increase TL production and interaction in the TL. One of the issues mentioned in their discussion about transitioning to higher grades was that as students matriculate through immersion, less content was taught in the target language: "*Lack of content in language. Expectations by level, university, high school, middle school, dictates what is taught at the level below*" (field notes, April 21, 2016). This means that higher-level high school and university courses that teach language but not content are driving instruction in middle school immersion content courses such as social studies and science.

Issues with content courses offered at higher levels appear to be systemic, dealing with how those courses are administratively coded or the academic tracks that students are on:

> Suggestion of advanced-level French courses that are not AP courses. Seeking French high school course codes not linked to language level. There are two separate tracks so that language options are not restricted to honors/AP track. Students may take advanced language courses without being in honors/AP curriculum. (field notes, April 21, 2016)

This conversation demonstrates the myriad ways that administrators must work to negotiate the fit between the immersion program and the options within a system that is already in place.

Administrators' conversation about classroom instruction focused on procedures that would engage students:

> The problem is not so much that we cannot get students to do something; it's that we don't ask them to do something. For example, you cannot learn how to ride a bike by watching someone; you must ride the bike yourself. Classrooms must be structured to "force" students to engage. (field notes, April 21, 2016)

These elements differ from the pre-conference questions. The pre-conference questions related to pedagogy in the classroom. However, administrators focused more on structural aspects of instruction such as vertical program alignment, selection of content area(s) to be taught in the TL, and best practices for evaluation of instruction.

Instruction in the post-keynote conversation

The most robust theme for this conversation was instruction. Creating opportunities to produce language, learning through routines, and discussing what content needs to be taught when transitioning to an upper level were the most mentioned instructional topics. As with the administrators, the bike riding analogy came up again with regard to getting students to actively produce language in the classroom.

> Although it's not a cognitively complex task, riding a bike can in some ways be analogous to becoming a speaker of a language. The only way to become a bike rider is to ride the bike. You can't learn simply by watching others. Similarly, to become a speaker of a language, you have to speak. Our task as immersion educators is to find many opportunities and ways for our students to speak in our classrooms. (field notes, April 21, 2016)

The keynote speaker also suggested that one way to increase linguistic productivity was to embed linguistic activities into the procedures of the class. This focus on quotidian procedures reflects the administrators' focus on framework.

> To move to the next level, we can expose students to needed language, not through explicit teaching, but by embedding it in everyday routines. Through a routine, you can scaffold new language when you direct students to get in line. For example, we can direct students to get in line, we can say: If you have a snack, have an older brother, have long hair, get in line. To learn the alphabet, If your name has a ____ in it at the

> beginning, in the middle, at the end, get in line. (field notes, April 21, 2016)

Structuring the transition to the next grade level was another element that was brought up in the conversation with the keynote speaker. Specifically, what courses should be taught in language immersion programs. The keynote speaker discussed not only which subject(s) would produce the most language, but also, as mentioned in the pre-conference questions, implored teachers to consider if they have what is needed to teach that subject, or, can administration find a qualified teacher to teach the subject (i.e., a certified secondary math teacher with advanced-mid French proficiency). For example:

> Math doesn't always offer rich opportunities to speak, read, or write the immersion language after third grade (it offers some but not as many as other subjects). Science does allow for rich oral and written language use, but some science content is very heavy on technical vocabulary that has little use outside the classroom (e.g., ovipositor, fulcrum). In some states, middle school teachers must have a teaching certificate for the subject they teach and finding someone certified in the discipline who is also highly proficient in the immersion language shapes decisions about which content is taught. (field notes, April 21, 2016)

The keynote speaker's conversation melded together elements from the pre-conference questions and the administrators' discussion. Instructional elements from the pre-conference questions about the practitioner quotidian and pedagogical concerns were prevalent as well as and the administrators' discussion about language structure, systems, and classroom procedures. It is clear from the data that the participants were aware of the importance of what happens in the classroom in terms of instruction and the structure that underlines that work.

Assessment

Assessment in pre-conference questions

In this theme, there were two main types of assessment that participants brought to the fore: assessing L2 language proficiency and assessing student achievement in regular grade-level content areas. These two forms of assessment in immersion are not the same. Language proficiency measures "one's ability to use language for real-world purposes to accomplish real-world linguistic tasks, across a wide range of topics and settings" (Language Testing International, 2016, para. 1), while student achievement measures mastery of content beyond growth in L2 proficiency, such as mastery of mathematics, social studies, science, and L1 literacy.

Regarding measuring L2 proficiency, one participant asked the question: "*What type of summative assessments are recommended for target language proficiency in grades K-8th in Spanish and French for listening, speaking, reading, and writing*?" Another participant inquired about effective benchmark assessments for assessing student academic achievement: "*Benchmark assessment: could you recommend any benchmark assessment, especially at the lower grades, that can paint*

a good picture of a student's progress in literacy and numeracy." Participants wanted resource recommendations that would meet the needs of their programs in two distinct areas of assessment, L2 proficiency and student content achievement. In other words, the questions related to the two forms of assessment were bifurcated. Participants isolated L2 proficiency and academic achievement; they did not perceive them holistically. Cammarata and Tedick (2012) acknowledged the struggle to balance content outcomes with language scope and sequence; they further stated the need for curricula and assessment materials that integrate both of these elements.

Assessment during the administrators' conversation

Assessment was the second most common theme in the conversation with administrators. Specifically, participants were concerned with vertical articulation. Vertical articulation refers to how students' language proficiency was viewed by gatekeepers, or where they were placed when they matriculate from a K-12 language immersion program to post-secondary education. The following quote is an example of the concerns administrators mentioned when students matriculate from one level to the next: "*What is the focus of one immersion level if it does not fold into expectations for the next level?*" (field notes, April 21, 2016). For example, in high school, many of the Louisiana immersion students take courses up to French VI which surpasses AP Levels and most test at the Advanced Low ACTFL level (or B2 CEFR [the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages level]). However, once French immersion students enter college, they are given French placement tests. Because the placement tests focus on grammar, immersion students are frequently placed in beginning or sophomore-level French courses. Despite the fact that a study done through a Language Flagship Proficiency Grant with three major universities, Michigan State University, University of Utah, and University of Minnesota, found that after the sophomore year of college, language courses students are only at the intermediate-low level (Landes-Lee & Rubio, 2017). In other words, participants were concerned that it is common for immersion students to be placed in college courses that are nearly four levels beneath their actual proficiency level.

The language that was used in academic assessments in immersion contexts was another prominent theme in this study. Participants realized that there was a discrepancy between the language of instruction and the language of assessment:

> Immersing students in language would be optimal. Assessments are not aligned to that experience. Students must take tests in English. Preparation and assessment formats contrast. Take reading assessment in English. Take social studies and science in French because those subjects are taught in French. (field notes, April 21, 2016)

This concern about a disconnect between the language of instruction and the language of assessment is apparent and unresolved in bilingual and immersion research. Paradoxically, Nillas (2002) found that Filipino students did better when the mathematics testing was in their target language (TL), while DeCourcy and Burston (2010) found no difference in one year and a slight advantage the following year when

majority language students take mathematics test in their L1. Cammarata and Tedick (2012) also documented this inquietude over balancing content and language in their instruction.

Participants asked questions about assessment in immersion contexts that ranged from assessing language proficiency and content mastery to the appropriate use of L1 or L2 in assessment. Participants were also concerned with how assessments were valued for the purpose of accurate student matriculation. Concerning resources, participants were eager to share effective assessment materials.

English invasion

English invasion in pre-conference questions

The intrusion of English in immersion contexts was a robust theme, often in reference to instruction. Namely, participants wanted to know what strategies were successful in reducing the use of L1 in the classroom: "*How do you get students speaking more? Many of our immersion students understand but respond in English.*" Other participants' questions communicated a desire to move students past their comfort zones and to limit the amount of L1 they use during immersion class:

> If a French-speaking teacher sees that a child is getting very frustrated to the point of tears or yelling because he/she does not understand what is being said, what does research tell us about addressing this situation? Is it acceptable for the French teacher to also use some English OR should the teacher continue to speak only in French? (field notes, April 21, 2016)

Some participants expressed concerns that administrators did not understand the detriment that the invasion of English language use brings into the immersion classroom: *"How do you convince an administrator to respect a request that they not interact in English with your students mid-lesson during observations?"* (Pre-conference question).

These examples clarify three points. First, educators' have a need and desire to keep languages separate in order to preserve immersion space as a TL space. Second, there is also a need to negotiate student motivation and challenge them to increase their oral language production. This also relates to the students' affective needs and if the TL could meet those needs at all times. Finally, there is an underlying conflict revealed when the administration does not adhere to this context of language separation that teachers are working to create. Ballinger, Lyster, Strerzuk, and Genesee (2017) offer a strong case for the separation of languages in immersion, citing a critical mass of research that the majority language, English, has not been definitively shown to improve TL ability. In fact, evidence exists that the use of the majority language hinders mastery of the TL (Ballinger et al., 2017).

English invasion in administrators' conversation

Administrators mentioned the invasion of English when they focused on why it occurs in the classroom and how they try to avoid it. A direct quote recorded in the field notes captures this sentiment: *"In whole group, they speak French. In centers, they tend to speak English. Why?"* The discussion facilitator responded:

"Did you give students the tools to complete center tasks in French?" (field notes, April 21, 2016).

The discussion of English invasion by administrators focused on when and during what tasks English would be spoken in the classroom. In most of the cases, the administrators discussed the task level not meeting the students' language level. Haj-Broussard, Olson-Beal, and Boudreaux (2017) underline this need to ensure that the tasks assigned in immersion correspond to the students' language level. In their research, when this was not the case, English invariably was spoken.

English invasion in the post-keynote conversation

The keynote speaker addressed one question regarding English invasion in the classroom. Her response reiterated a contention, also mentioned in the pre-conference questions, that students need to push past their comfort zones:

> [Participant:] How do you get students to speak more? Many students show that they understand but respond in English.
>
> [Keynote speaker:] It is tough to get kids away from English because often we do what is the most successful for us and what we are comfortable with. Our students, like most of us, are likely to choose to do what's the easiest for them. (field notes, April 21, 2016)

English invasion occurred when students did not push past their comfort zone or when the instructional/situational task was above their language level. While Swain and Lapkin (2013) discussed how English might help students with a complex task that is above their language levels, Fortune and Tedick (2015) found that increased used of English in the immersion setting corresponded with a plateauing of the minority language proficiency. The other English invasion element dealt with gatekeepers not protecting the linguistic space of the immersion classroom. Haj-Broussard (2003) found that not protecting the immersion space from English invasion resulted in decreased academic achievement. The next section will focus on the participants' perspectives of gatekeepers and their effect on the immersion context.

Gatekeepers

Gatekeepers in pre-conference questions

Administrators, district personnel, and parents were identified by participants as gatekeepers. As previously defined, gatekeepers are individuals who have the capacity to control or limit the support needed for language immersion pathways. In their questions, participants were concerned that principals and district personnel have the power to undermine the use of L2 in the classroom (See Appendix A, question 19). Participants believed that administrators' desire to standardize instruction led to a lack of differentiation for immersion. For example, one participant noted: "*If administrators are requiring their immersion teachers to teach*

Administrators, district personnel, and parents were identified by participants as gatekeepers. As previously defined, gatekeepers are individuals who have the capacity to control or limit the support needed for language immersion pathways.

in the exact same way as their regular ed counterparts [English Language Arts team teacher], *can we expect the exact same results or will their* [sic] *still be an advantage in immersion?*" Both English invasion and forcing immersion teachers to teach precisely as their regular education counterparts point to a sense of hierarchy, in which language immersion programs are the programmatic "other," often not understood and possibly even undermined.

Within the theme of gatekeepers, a sub-theme included questions and concerns related to issues of immersion support from administrators and districts. One participant echoed a common concern that immersion programs need qualified administrators who are knowledgeable about immersion: *"How do you convince a district that the most knowledgeable and qualified people need to lead immersion schools?"* This relates to the previously mentioned notion that there is an "otherness" about language immersion programs, leading to expressed sentiments among participants that traditional pedagogical methods in non-immersion instruction are not sufficiently effective in language immersion contexts. "*If administrators are requiring their immersion teachers to teach in the exact same way as they regular ed* [sic] *counterparts, can we expect the exact same results or will their still be an advantage in immersion?"*

Parents emerged from the data as a group of essential gatekeepers who are necessary for the healthy functioning of immersion programs. Participants sought strategies on how to cultivate the support of parents: *"How can we get parents to be more supportive of the immersion system?*" In this study, participants felt that parental support is essential to the success of immersion programs. They were interested in eliciting ideas for encouraging parental involvement and support.

Underlying these comments is the issue of openness to and support from gatekeepers. This issue reiterates the findings of Howard et al. (2007) that the district supervisors, school administrators, and parents are all essential to ensuring a sustainable immersion program However, additional research indicates that gatekeepers are not always clear about what their roles are in the implementation of immersion programs (Forman, 2016; Padron & Waxman, 2016; Whiteacre, 2015), and research was not available on the roles of parents as immersion gatekeepers.

Gatekeepers in administrators' conversation.

In the administrators' conversation, the prevalence of the gatekeeper theme underlined how structural support for language immersion was a multifaceted issue. This issue was raised mostly concerning state, district, and parental support. However, fairness in assessment of student proficiency and school performance was another theme. It is interesting that these two themes dominated despite the stated topics of discussion of the session: assessment and culture.

The idea of one school measuring language proficiency and then that proficiency level being disregarded once students matriculate to the next school was discussed as an unfair administrative practice. This qualifies as gatekeeping because inconsistent articulation practices may limit students' ability to be properly placed in appropriate courses within an immersion program. Participants suggested that perhaps legislation was needed to ensure consistent and fair articulation, instead of articulation being left

up to individual administrators. In the conversation, they discussed the "*legislative possibility of SPS score for [international tests] (Ex: If a student passes B1 [intermediate-mid] and no one looks at that in high school, what's the point?*)" (field notes, April 21, 2016). This refers to a Louisiana law that was recently passed that allows site-certified immersion schools to get more points on their school performance score (SPS). The discussion relates to the fact that even though the middle school students take exams that show they are at the Intermediate-mid to -high level, the high schools they matriculate into do not consider that when they are placing them in courses. This means that the students do not have access to the courses that correspond with their actual language proficiency level.

Another issue discussed was that immersion courses were not allowed to count for the same credits as the regular education courses. This differential treatment was controlled by administration and made immersion courses less palatable for students: *"Concern over fair treatment compared to core courses. For example, regular education students may take advanced math courses. Why not advanced language courses?"* (field notes, April 21, 2016).

Stakeholders expressed concern that immersion courses were not equally valued by administration, and thus students did not respect immersion teachers as they might respect teachers of other subject areas: *"How do FL teachers maintain respect from students if the language course is not really valued? How can such respect be established?"* (field notes, April 21, 2016). It is interesting to note that many of the comments on gatekeeping dealt with the language courses taught at the middle and high school level, as opposed to content courses such as social studies and science. Administrators often decide which content courses are taught in the immersion language, in addition to the TL course. Stakeholders perceived that the TL course is not as supported as other content courses taught in the TL.

Gatekeepers in the post-keynote conversation

Finally, gatekeepers were mentioned in the keynote conversation with regard to administrators' selection of subject matter, and teachers' and administrators' needs to ensure that they understood parents' legitimate concerns.

When asked about which subject(s) to choose to teach in the TL when students matriculate into the higher grades, the keynote speaker urged administrators to keep language and resources in mind, but she also mentioned another gatekeeper at those higher grade levels—the students:

> The tricky part was finding useful materials and keeping the students' interest. When students are moving to middle school, they often find the content taught through the immersion is tough—and they don't want it to be hard. At this point in their academic career, students are taking a major role in the decision of whether to stay in the immersion program. (field notes, April 21, 2016)

This idea of students as gatekeepers in middle and high schools, where elective courses compete with each other, is important to consider. Students have a role as gatekeepers because they can choose to participate in a language immersion program, or they may influence peer participation in language immersion, particularly at the

middle and high school levels when they start to make more autonomous choices about coursework.

While students are gatekeepers in the later grades, the initial gatekeepers are the parents. They enroll their children in language immersion programs in elementary school.

> Teachers and administrators need to reassure parents that the seemingly risky choice that they to enroll their child in a program where we teach "hard stuff" in a language that their child doesn't know and that their child will learn that material as well or better than if they were learning in a language they do know was a good choice. (field notes, April 21, 2016)

This emphasis on parents and students underlines the varied gatekeepers that need to be engaged to ensure that the immersion programs are successful.

Consistent with the above findings, in Whiteacre's (2015) study, data showed that all administrators believed that program buy-in was one of the factors of foreign language immersion program success. Involving all stakeholders (faculty, staff, parents, school board members, students, and other members of the community) in the planning of the foreign language immersion programs nurtures a collaborative team effort (Rhodes, 2014). All stakeholders need to support the language immersion program and understand their role in ensuring successful implementation of the program (Forman, 2016; Padron & Waxman, 2016; Whiteacre, 2015).

Research

Research in pre-conference questions

Finally, the questions about immersion research focused on how research could inform innovative instruction in immersion settings. Participants were interested in knowing how research informed immersion education for special education populations. For example: "*Are there any successful interventions for autistic students* [sic] *in immersion that have been studied*?"

Participants were equally interested in how research could inform their interactions with gatekeepers: "*What kind of research has been done about characteristics or training of successful immersion administrators?*" Finally, research on effective immersion models and assessment were an area of interest: "*What model of immersion has given the highest level of target language proficiency according to research?*"

Participants were interested in immersion research for a variety of reasons. Participants' questions about immersion research ranged from classroom interventions, to the immersion model that result in the highest target language proficiency, to the qualities of successful administration in immersion. These findings indicate that immersion teachers are interested in how research can inform and innovate their practice. However, immersion teachers may lack the time and ability to access current research on immersion pedagogies.

Research in the post-keynote conversation

Regarding research, the most mentioned areas included the disconnect between research and practice and the need to collect more data in the field.

Conversations in immersion

> Krashen's work... proposed that speech emerges when the speaker is ready...I was an advocate of the "speech emerges when students are ready" point of view, I attended a conference session in which some teachers said that their students were not allowed to use English. I thought, "How terrible!" Years later, by great coincidence, I became the World Language Coordinator in that school district.... The students' French was quite good, and importantly, and they spoke only French. (field notes, April 21, 2016)

The research on immersion the participants would like to see focused on pragmatic issues. They wanted to know the research on how to negotiate in their jobs, find and utilize interventions, increase-language proficiency, and what is needed for and from administrators at the school and district level. These issues all deal with the two most significant themes in this study: pedagogy and gatekeepers.

Conclusion

Conversations in Immersion was a practitioner-guided conference geared toward providing participants with a voice and an opportunity to discuss what they believed were important issues in language immersion education. Participants discussed many pragmatic and quotidian issues. At the conference, participants discussed their worries about language precision, the best materials or tests to use in their programs, and what research is needed to help inform their practices. These issues in language immersion reached across the themes that emerged from the data: instruction, gatekeeping, assessment, research, and English invasion.

The discussion topics at Conversations in Immersion varied from how to differentiate immersion instruction for exceptionalities (giftedness, dyslexia, special needs) to how to enlist the support from gatekeepers. Another fundamental issue was how difficult it was to move students, teachers, administrators, and parents out of their comfort zones. This was particularly relevant for administrators who must move out of their comfort zones but who need clarification on administrative practices to move and adjust from a regular education mindset to a language immersion mindset.

The theme of gatekeepers was an unexpected finding of this study. Even in the administrator conversation in which they selected assessment and culture as the session topics, "gatekeepers" was the second most-discussed topic. Likewise, in the keynote speaker's conversation that focused on instruction and research, the theme of gatekeepers reemerged. While there has been some research on the roles of principals and the need to prepare administrators to better implement immersion (Forman, 2016; Padron & Waxman, 2006; Whiteacre, 2015), a more systemic view of the varied roles and power structures needed to support a successful program have yet to be studied.

The theme of gatekeepers was an unexpected finding of this study.

There are programs, training, and research for each concern that the participants discussed. For immersion instruction and assessment, CARLA offers summer institutes that address how to better implement these in immersion contexts. For parental support, Canadian Parents for French offers support guidelines for

parents of immersion students that can be adapted for other languages. There are even guidelines for administrators (Boudreaux, 2007). However, these disparate elements are not cohesively articulated to create a support structure for immersion programs. In addition, in terms of matriculation into the higher levels, the articulation of assessments needed to be considered. Findings also indicate the importance of student gatekeeping in language immersion contexts.

Recommendations for Practice

Implications from this study indicate that more focus needs to be directed toward how gatekeepers such as administrators, district supervisors, teachers, parents, and students, can relate to and support language immersion learning contexts. Despite the growth of professional development opportunities for teachers with required teacher certification in Utah, and the language immersion teacher certifications programs implemented or in development in Minnesota, Georgia, and Louisiana, little has been done to formally train immersion administrators or district supervisors. Based on these issues, the authors recommend an immersion-specific add-on training that would be required for principals of immersion language pathway schools. The training should address issues such as how immersion education differs from regular education, the need to protect the target language, and how to advocate for and strengthen language immersion programs.

Implications from this study indicate that more focus needs to be directed toward how gatekeepers such as administrators, district supervisors, teachers, parents, and students, can relate to and support language immersion learning contexts.

Although the majority of stakeholders at the conference taught in French or Spanish immersion programs, concerns about gatekeeping and the mechanics of instruction may be generalizable to immersion programs with other target languages. Gatekeeping may be a non-language bound phenomenon; access to and support for immersion programs hinges upon district, administrator, teacher, parent, and student motivation and awareness regardless of the TL. District level administrators, school level administrators, and parents do not need to speak the TL to support or provide access to immersion programs. However, these gatekeepers need to be aware of the benefits of immersion programs, be knowledgeable of immersion non-negotiables, and be motivated to advocate for language immersion programs. These qualities are not mutually exclusive to any particular language.

Parents and students in the United States rarely have access to a support system to help guide them through the language immersion process. In order to support parents and students, a nation-wide K-16 language immersion specific advocacy organization could provide information and research on language immersion pathways. A language immersion parent and student organization would also be able to support parents' and students' decision-making about language immersion programs and provide an opportunity to reinforce student learning in language immersion contexts.

Limitations

Conversations in Immersion was a small conference in a specific regional area, southern Louisiana. The region has 40 years of experience with language immersion programs; thus, the sentiments expressed here may be different in a region that is just starting their immersion program. Additionally, immersion programs in Louisiana are more varied than programs in other locales. Generalizability to other states or countries is therefore limited due to programmatic variability. Other limitations include a small sample size (n=120) and the fact that data were collected from two separate sources: from the Google form from which pre-conference questions were collected, and from field notes recorded during one day of conference sessions. However, during the data analysis stage, intercoder agreement and peer debriefing sessions were used to strengthen the reliability and transferability of findings (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Future Research

Conversations in Immersion facilitated the sharing of stakeholders' perspectives and allowed stakeholders to receive feedback from peers and experts in the field of language immersion. Drawing from the themes of the mini-conference, it is apparent that instruction and assessment are perennial concerns, as well as concerns about how to encourage TL precision while simultaneously limiting the use of English in immersion classrooms. Further research on best practices for instruction and assessment in immersion contexts will strengthen the overall knowledge base in these areas. The other themes indicated that advocacy and research need to more closely explore how to solidify meaningful gatekeeping for the purpose of supporting immersion programs.

Research in language immersion contexts is not a nascent endeavor. However, as stated previously, research on stakeholder perspectives in language immersion contexts is relatively new (Padron & Waxman, 2016; Whitacre, 2015). This study indicates that future research warrants a closer examination of various gatekeepers' roles, tasks, and responsibilities vis-à-vis immersion. Research should also examine context-based support and educational legislation and policies that have helped or hindered language immersion program growth and achievement. In addition, parents and students should be included in the conversation to ensure that all stakeholders' voices are heard.

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Appendix A

Pre-Conference Questions

1	How do you secure District support and, if unavailable, outside funding for texts, etc.?
2	Bilingual projects: *alternance des langues* [alternating languages], reading literature il L1 and L2. Are there any specific methods that have been proven to be successful? We heard from Roy Lyster about students summarizing chapter in L1 before approaching the reading of the next chapter in L2. Are there any different approaches that can be suggested?
3	How do we advocate effectively enough to overcome poor administrative support?
4	If administrators are requiring their immersion teachers to teach in the exact same way as they regular ed counterparts, can we expect the exact same results or will their still be an advantage in immersion?
5	What type of summative assessments are recommended for target language proficiency in grades K-8th in Spanish and French for listening, speaking, reading and writing?
6	What should I study for my thesis here in Louisiana?
7	What is the most effective way to address writing proficiency in upper grades?
8	We have high school courses with students who participated in traditional French FLE programs and others who participated in French Immersion programs. Our immersion students have a onderful "voice" with rich vocabulary, but they struggle with using correct structure and spelling. How can we best meet their needs?
9	Are there any successful interventions for autistic students in immersion that have been studied?
10	What is needed to ensure that the ELA teacher and immersion teacher can work well together? What has worked on the past?
11	How can we have a better articulation between elementary, middle, and high school program?
12	*Comment mieux adapter le contenu et/ ou la lecture et l'écriture aux enfants dyslexiques ?* [How can on better adapt the content and/or the reading and writing to dyslexic children?]
13	How can we get parents to be more supportive of the immersion system?
14	Obviously a French Immersion classroom setting has a lot of positives for a child entering school in Kindergarten. What do you feel are the three best attributes of a French Immersion setting?
15	What should I study for my thesis here in Louisiana?
16	Please write in your second question for our immersion experts.

17	How do you get students speaking more? Many of our immersion students understand but respond in English.
18	Benchmark assessment: could you recommend any benchmark assessment, especially at the lower grades, that can paint a good picture of a student's progress in literacy and numeracy. We use DIBELS and IDAPEL (French) for literacy, however the information we gather from these assessments is not accurate of their progress and we need to do a lot of analysis to make results meaningful.
19	How do you convince an administrator to respect a request that they not interact in English with your students mid-lesson during observations?
20	I've heard these terms alternance, translanguaging, and code-switching. Are these the same things? If we are supposed to stay in the target language during immersion, do these processes not happen then in immersion. Is that OK?
21	Where can we find quality French and Spanish materials for Language Arts, Math, Science and Social Studies that are aligned with state standards?
22	We constantly look for ways to promote our language programs and celebrate the successes of our students. We would like to develop student ambassadors, both current students and alumni, who represent and promote their program / study outside of high school. How have other states and school districts best promoted their programs? Do you know of any successful student ambassador programs?
23	Are there any studies about how the brain works differently within the immersion classroom as compared to regular education?
24	If you were a graduate student looking for a topic for your dissertation in immersion, where would you say there needs to be more work?
25	*On remarque chez les enfants de l'immersion un grand écart de niveau entre leur compréhension (orale et écrite, assez bonne) et leur production (oral, écrite, très lacunaires : syntaxe très approximative, copiée sur l'anglais par exemple) ; faut-il davantage les considérer comme des élèves de FLE ? (si vous êtes d'accord, comment en faire prendre davantage conscience aux profs?)* [One notices that immersion students have a big difference between their comprehension (oral and written are fairly good) and their production (oral and written have huge gaps; a syntax that is very approximative, copying from English); would it be better to consider them as elementary foreign language students (if you are in agreement how can we better convey that understanding to the immersion teachers?)
26	How can we get help with French language textbooks if our district is not supportive of immersion?
27	When a child enters Kindergarten in a French Immersion setting, most of the time they speak only English. If a French speaking teacher sees that a child is getting very frustrated to the point of tears or yelling, because he/she does not understand what is being said, what does research tell us about addressing this situation? Is it acceptable for the French teacher to also use some English OR should the teacher continue to speak only in French?

28	Please write in your third question for our immersion experts.
29	How do you deal with parents who are not supportive or consider immersion "too difficult"?
30	Routines and scaffolding: are there any resources available to support teachers in scaffolding language through routines.
31	How do you convince a district that the most knowledgeable and qualified people need to lead immersion schools?
32	Immersion students are finishing with very good language skills, but few grammatical competencies. They feel less confident when TL learners who can't put together a sentence or understand a word the teacher says, can out conjugate the best of them. How do we get them to have precision in their language?
33	What model of immersion has given the highest level of target language proficiency according to research?
34	I teach on the high school level. For many of our Immersion students, ninth grade is the first time they will take Science and Social Studies in English. Students have reported negative feelings during their transition period, (embarrassed, out of place, uninformed, wierd [sic]) and we certainly do not want their special immersion experience to contribute to any negative feelings on their first days in high school. How can we better prepare our students (and English-speaking teachers) for this transition out of immersion whenever it occurs?
35	How can you convince administrators that are worried about scores and money and and a host of other things, that immersion is a good idea?
36	What kind of research has been done about characteristics or training of successful immersion administrators ?
37	*Certains enfants ont de grandes difficultés de lecture en anglais (langue maternelle), est-ce que rester dans l'immersion les aide ou au contraire accentue cette difficulté? (les tests sont en anglais!)* *En quoi l'enseignement en Français peut-il les aider dans leur langue maternelle?* [Some students have a lot of difficulty in reading English (their first language), does staying in immersion help them or does it increase that difficulty (tests are in English)? How can learning in French help them in their first language?
38	What ways can we motivate more students to participate in immersion programs without believing them to be too "difficult "?
39	Have any studies been done on the success of students in a French Immersion setting on the ACT test as opposed to students in an English classroom setting and if so, can you share the results with us?