

**2012 DLI RESEARCHER CONVOCATION PANEL PRESENTATION**  
**Fred Genesee**  
**The Suitability of Immersion for All Learners**

**Current Knowledge Base:**

- Questions concerning suitability of immersion (in Canada and the U.S.) for at-risk learners raised important ethical, pedagogical, assessment, and policy issues.
- What research exists on at-risk students in immersion? In Canada, there are studies on English-speaking students: from low SES backgrounds (Bruck, Tucker, & Jakimik, 1975; Caldas & Boudreaux, 1999; Genesee, 2006; Holobow et al., 1991); with low intellectual ability (Genesee, 1976); with poor/impaired first language abilities (Bruck, 1978, 1982); and from minority ethnic groups (Genesee, 1992; Jacobs & Cross, 2001). In the U.S., there are studies on English language learners and English-L1 students from low SES backgrounds (e.g., Lindholm-Leary, 2011; Lindholm-Leary & Block, 2010); from minority ethnolinguistic groups (Haj-Broussard, 2005; Lindholm-Leary, 2011; Lindholm-Leary & Hernández, 2011; Wilson & Kamanā, 2011); and with special education needs (Lindholm-Leary, 2005).
- Students in Canadian immersion programs who are at risk for the above reasons can attain the same levels of L1 competence and academic achievement as comparable at-risk students in English-L1 programs and, at the same time, benefit from immersion by acquiring advanced levels of functional proficiency in an L2.
- Students in U.S. TWI programs (and of particular note ELLs) who are at-risk for the above reasons attain the same or higher levels of competence in English and academic domains as similar students in English-only programs and/or they score at par with or higher than norming groups on state-mandated tests; as well, they attain high levels of functional proficiency in the non-English language.
- Research on individual differences in reading achievement and on differentiating reading and language impairment in Canada: these are distinct risk profiles and we can use L1 indices to predict them, making it possible to provide early intervention (Erdos et al., 2011, in press; Genesee & Jared, 2008; Jared et al., 2011).

**Questions/Issues for Future Research:**

- How well do students with reading and/or language impairment perform in immersion in comparison to similar students in English-only programs? There are no extant data on this issue.
- There is a need for studies on the suitability of immersion for students with other serious risks: autism, Down syndrome, ADHD...
- Is one model of immersion (e.g., total vs. partial; 90:10 vs. 50:50) more suitable for at-risk learners and which at-risk profile?
- What measurement tools are necessary to identify students who are at-risk for reading and/or language impairment?
- What pedagogical strategies are effective for teaching language and academic content to students at-risk for reading and/or language impairment and other at-risk students?
- What professional skills and knowledge do immersion teachers need to work effectively with at-risk students?

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