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Immersion Methods for the Initial Teacher Training System

Reaching into Research Article for the Association for the Study of Primary Education (ASPE)

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Abstract

This article presents a redraft of Project Tokyo's comparative analysis for publication as an academic journal article. It synthesises eight days of classroom observation in Tokyo, participation in *jugyō kenkyū* cycles, interviews with practitioners and documentary analysis of Welsh training frameworks to propose how initial teacher education can prepare trainees to deliver deliberate bilingual pedagogy from day one. Findings are organised into three principal domains: (1) teachable micropractices and multimodal rehearsal sequences that produce rapid oral uptake; (2) collaborative professional learning, centred on lesson study, that professionalises classroom enquiry and accelerates diffusion of effective techniques; and (3) assessment and monitoring architectures, together with cultural integration, that make progression visible, defensible and motivating. The argument is grounded in contemporary research on second language acquisition, multimodality and professional learning and is illustrated with empirical examples drawn from Tokyo and Welsh settings (Fernandez and Yoshida, 2004; Lightbown and Spada, 2013).

Introduction

National ambitions for Welsh language revival demand simultaneous expansion of immersion provision and rapid improvement in the quality of classroom practice. Project Tokyo was designed to identify classroom routines and system arrangements in Tokyo primary settings that are explicit, repeatable and amenable to teaching within initial teacher education. The delegation combined systematic lesson observation, exploration of *jugyō kenkyū* cycles, interviews with teachers and leaders, and analysis of initial teacher education and inspection frameworks in Wales in order to determine what competencies initial teacher education must prioritise, how those competencies can be practised and assessed, and what placement and mentoring arrangements are necessary to sustain quality as trainee numbers grow. This paper therefore adopts a pragmatic analytical frame: it evaluates practices for teachability, transferability and scalability, and it foregrounds mechanisms by which declarative knowledge about language acquisition becomes dependable classroom enactment (Darling-Hammond and Bransford, 2005; Ellis, 2008).

The contribution is threefold. First, the paper articulates a compact set of classroom micropractices (modelling moves, rehearsal designs and multimodal scaffolds) that research and observation show to be highly effective in immersion contexts (Nation, 2001; Celce-Murcia et al., 1996). Second, it situates these practices within a professional learning architecture modelled on *jugyō kenkyū*, demonstrating how collaborative enquiry converts isolated techniques into shared pedagogical judgement (Fernandez and Yoshida, 2004; Lewis et al., 2006). Third, it describes assessment and moderation practices, including Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) informed formative probes and longitudinal profiling, that enable programmes to track and evidence progress without over-reliance on single-point testing (Council of Europe, 2001; Estyn, 2024). The following sections set out the relevant literature, present the findings in three integrated sections and conclude with implications for initial teacher education curriculum, placement design and mentor development.

Literature Review

Research on professional learning consistently highlights the value of cyclical, evidence-based enquiry in producing sustained change in classroom practice. Lesson study, often framed in the literature as *jugyō kenkyū*, is repeatedly associated with the development of shared professional judgement and with the creation of a repository of empirically tested lesson designs that travel across contexts (Fernandez and Yoshida, 2004; Lewis, Perry and Murata, 2006). Empirical comparisons of classroom practice across systems emphasise that making teaching visible enables the kind of dialectic between evidence and judgement required for reliable scale-up (Stigler and Hiebert, 1999).

Second language acquisition research identifies comprehensible input, opportunities for meaningful output, interactional feedback and repetition within meaningful contexts as the mechanisms that most strongly shape classroom progress (Lightbown and Spada, 2013; Ellis, 2008). The CEFR offers practical descriptors that permit teachers and programmes to stage progression and align formative assessment across diverse classrooms, thereby enabling moderation and comparability without imposing a single test regime (Council of Europe, 2001). Formative assessment literature further emphasises the power of short, low-stakes probes to inform moment-by-moment instruction and to accumulate into defensible longitudinal judgments (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Hattie and Timperley, 2007).

Multimodality scholarship and cognitive load theory explain why short, multimodal rehearsal segments are pedagogically efficient. Gesture, image, tactile props and brief audio exemplars distribute meaning across channels, lower working memory demands and create overlapping retrieval cues that support both

fluency and accuracy when learners must process content and language simultaneously (Kress, 2010). Teacher education scholarship argues that such techniques become dependable only when trainees encounter repeated, coached enactment opportunities in campus microteaching and structured placements and when mentor assessment is calibrated through sampling and moderation (Allen and Ryan, 1969; Darling-Hammond and Bransford, 2005). Collectively, these literatures justify the combination of concise theory, repeated micropractice and collaborative professional enquiry advocated in the findings that follow.

Teachable Micropractices and Multimodal Rehearsal

Project Tokyo observations reveal that micropractices (precise, repeatable teacher moves) form the backbone of effective immersion pedagogy. Teachers routinely articulated a dual objective for each lesson, pairing a content aim with a specific language aim, and designed sequences that moved from succinct modelling to controlled practice and immediately to a communicative payoff. This model is consistent with second language acquisition theory which locates learning at the interface of comprehensible input and meaningful output; it also aligns with the microteaching tradition that demonstrates rapid improvement when practice is deliberately constrained and feedback-rich (Lightbown and Spada, 2013; Allen and Ryan, 1969). The practical implication for initial teacher education is that trainees can be taught to script short sequences that combine teacher modelling, chorally scaffolded practice, substitution chains and a brief task that requires immediate use of the practised language. These sequences are teachable because they reduce complexity to a bounded routine, they are repeatable in campus and placement contexts, and they yield observable indicators of pupil uptake that can be captured on tape or in annotated pupil work for assessment and moderation.

Multimodal scaffolds were selected with cognitive load and transfer in mind. Gesture choreographies consistently mapped to grammatical frames, visual sentence frames paired icons with syntactic structure, tactile sentence cards provided kinaesthetic assembly points for emergent writers and short audio exemplars supported shadowing at home. Written rehearsal mirrored oral rehearsal in sequenced stages from gap fills through transformation tasks to freer composition, thereby consolidating form-meaning mapping across modalities. The observed practice resonates with multimodality research showing that distributed representations increase retention and reduce working memory bottlenecks for learners processing complex content in a second language (Kress, 2010). For initial teacher education this implies that trainees must learn not only a repertoire of multimodal techniques, but also an evidentiary rationale for choosing modalities in relation to a learning aim and an observable pupil response.

A further practical advantage of compact rehearsal segments is that they are amenable to repeated coached practice within initial teacher education's constrained timetable. Microteaching cycles that require plan–teach–feedback–reteach loops for these short segments permit rapid initial teacher education and provide high-quality artefacts that can be used for assessment and for mentor calibration. Accordingly, initial teacher education syllabuses should prioritise repeated enactment of micro-rehearsal routines.

Collaborative Professional Learning and Lesson Study

The second principal finding is that *jugyō kenkyū* style lesson study provides the organisational architecture needed to turn isolated micropractices into shared pedagogical judgement. In the Tokyo settings visited, teacher teams co-designed research lessons with a precise pupil-centred enquiry focus, observed the lesson with a pre-agreed evidence protocol and conducted post-lesson reviews that interrogated pupil thinking rather than teacher performance. Reviews drew on short video extracts, annotated pupil work and learner feedback to drive refinement of scaffolds, questioning sequences and pacing. This pattern is well documented in the lesson study literature as a mechanism for building professional knowledge that is both contextually grounded and transportable across classrooms (Fernandez and Yoshida, 2004; Lewis, Perry and Murata, 2006).

For initial teacher education the lesson study model serves multiple functions. First, it exposes trainees to the analytic lens needed to interpret pupil behaviour in language-content interactions, enabling them to prioritise interventions that directly influence comprehension and production. Second, it situates trainees within a collegial process that models how evidence informs judgement and how incremental refinements accumulate into robust practice. Third, lesson study provides a natural vehicle for mentor development because mentors and classroom teachers engage as co-researchers; the focus on pupil responses fosters a shared language for feedback that emphasises observable effects rather than subjective impressions.

Operationalising lesson study in initial teacher education requires pragmatic adaptations. Trainees can join existing teacher teams as junior participants in a scaled research cycle, contributing to planning, observing and participating in focused reviews. Evidence packets for trainee cohorts can be deliberately compact (e.g. with a two-minute clip, one page of annotated pupil work and a short learner voice extract) so that review meetings remain time efficient. Embedding lesson study across initial teacher education placements creates continuity between campus micropractice and classroom enquiry, thereby increasing the likelihood that trainees convert coached routines into durable classroom habits.

Assessment, Monitoring and Cultural Integration

The third principal finding integrates assessment and cultural integration as mutually reinforcing elements that make progression visible and sustain learner engagement. In Tokyo settings assessment relied on frequent, pragmatic formative probes (such as short, paired tasks, one-minute oral recalls and brief written frames) that teachers administered within lesson flows and mapped to CEFR-informed descriptors where appropriate. These small probes provided both immediate diagnostic data for instructional decisions and longitudinal markers for moderation. The emphasis on growth trajectories, rather than on single-point high-stakes measures, allowed schools to interpret early dips in mainstream attainment within an immersion transition narrative and to demonstrate added value as learners recovered and ultimately achieved at or above expected levels (Council of Europe, 2001; Estyn, 2024).

Cultural integration operated as a sequenced curricular resource rather than as an occasional spectacle. Seasonal festivals, rituals and community visits were planned as multi-session units comprising preparation, multimodal rehearsal, communicative enactment and consolidation. These units provided emotionally

salient reasons for repeated language use and enabled systematic recycling of lexical and discourse frames across year groups, creating natural spaced-retrieval schedules that supported retention. When cultural units were paired with explicit language aims and multimodal scaffolds they became powerful engines for both motivation and measurable progress.

For initial teacher education this composite finding implies three concrete responsibilities. Firstly, trainees must learn to design and use brief formative probes and to map their results to shared proficiency descriptors so that classroom judgements accumulate into defensible profiles. Secondly, trainees should practise constructing cultural units as sequenced language episodes with explicit preparatory and consolidation phases, ensuring cultural participation is pedagogically purposeful rather than tokenistic. Thirdly, mentor and moderation systems must be calibrated around compact evidence packets.

Collectively, micropractices with multimodal rehearsal, collaborative lesson study and integrated assessment with cultural sequencing form a coherent implementation logic. Micropractices provide the habitual moves trainees must master; lesson study supplies the professional architecture that makes those moves improvable and shareable; and pragmatic assessment plus cultural sequencing provide the evidentiary and motivational foundations for sustained bilingual progression.

Recommendations

1. Define a language acquisition strand within initial teacher education so that language pedagogy is explicit, assessed and routinely evidenced in trainee portfolios.
2. Embed coached microteaching cycles from the start requiring trainees to plan, teach, refine and re-teach short language drilling sessions.
3. Curate multimodal resource banks for initial teacher education and placement, including visual sentence frames, gesture video banks, short audio models, storyboard packs and low-cost tactile kits, and make these available with exemplar annotated lesson segments.
4. Teach trainees to analyse cultural occasions as language acquisition opportunities through four linked components: preparation, multimodal rehearsal, communicative enactment and consolidation.
5. Make lesson study (*jugyō kenkyū*) a routine component of initial teacher training and school continual professional development by ensuring research lessons that use evidence focuses to pilot and refine cultural or language rehearsal units.
6. Use pragmatic formative assessment probes mapped to CEFR informed descriptors.

Conclusion

The Project Tokyo evidence base demonstrates a practicable pathway for converting knowledge about language acquisition into reliable, scalable classroom enactment within initial teacher education. Short, precisely sequenced rehearsal segments supported by multimodal scaffolds yield rapid oral uptake when trainees can practise them repeatedly in coached microteaching and in placements. Lesson study furnishes the collaborative processes that professionalise judgement and accelerate the spread of effective practice. Pragmatic formative probes, mapped to shared descriptors, and sequenced cultural units together make progression visible, defensible and motivating.

Translating these findings into initial teacher education curricula requires modest but focused changes: a compact theoretical core connected to immediate micropractice; repeated plan–teach–feedback cycles for short rehearsal segments; inclusion of trainees in scaled lesson study; and mentor calibration that relies on compact evidence packets for sampling moderation. These changes are compatible with existing constraints on initial teacher education time and can be integrated into current methodology modules and placement designs. Future evaluation should adopt mixed methods to track trainee competence, pupil oral uptake and longitudinal attainment, and should examine cost-effectiveness as programmes scale. By foregrounding teachability, collegial enquiry and pragmatic assessment, Wales can increase the likelihood that expansion of immersion provision is matched by the sustained pedagogical quality required for equitable bilingual progression.

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