

# Shared Identities: Our Interweaving Threads



## English intensive immersion programmes: Design and management considerations

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Immersion education has emerged over the last 30 years and is gaining acceptance amongst academics and second language instructors. Immersion education offers learning about a particular subject matter while at the same time improving target language proficiency. This paper provides insights into the management of an intensive English immersion program, and discusses a number of considerations for the design and implementation of an annual five-day English immersion program for Japanese high school students.

イマージョン教育は過去30年間に登場し、第二言語学者や講師の間で注目を集めています。特定の主題についての学習を提供し、言語能力の向上をターゲットにしている。今回は日本の高校生のための英語集中訓練プログラムの考慮事項について説明する。

Immersion programmes were first developed in Canada, for English speaking students to acquire French. According to Cummins (2000) the term “immersion education” was the term used to describe programmes in which the French language is used as a medium of instruction for elementary school students whose home language was English. Immersion programmes and immersion classes are based on the idea that second language (L2) acquisition should be learnt the “natural way”, that is, in the same way a child learns its mother tongue (Swain & Johnson, 1997). This means that instead of studying discrete language skills such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening, the target language is learnt in a holistic manner.

According to Genesee, Paradis, and Crago (2004), there are three points of difference between immersion programmes: the age of the learner; the amount of exposure and usage of the target language; and the particular linguistic and cultural goals of the immersion. Therefore, each immersion program is unique and different.

This paper discusses an immersion program offered to Japanese high school students. The paper will provide a description of the essential management and educational considerations when designing immersion programs. Part one, Background Information, will discuss the types of language learners that attend the immersion, the general concept, the aims and objectives and provide a description of the programme (see Table 1 and 2). The second part of this paper, Group Dynamics, will provide language educators insights into building cohesiveness and interpersonal skills. Not only is building interpersonal skills one of the aims of this programme but it is an essential skill in life. Finally, this paper will discuss a dynamic music and language task based exercise in “We Da’World” - A Music and Language Workshop.

### Background information

A Japanese university administers the Tsumagoi English Olympics, an annual EFL immersion language programme, designed for Japanese high school students. It is held every year at Tsumagoi, Gifu Prefecture, during the first week of August for 6 days. Although, there have been 17 Tsumagoi English Olympic programmes since they first started in 1992, this paper will describe only the 2008 Tsumagoi English Olympics. The authors of this paper wish to limit the

scope to this one programme because they were not involved previously. The authors were central to the planning and design of the 2008 Tsumagoi English Olympics programme and for two of the authors this has been the first time to manage a language immersion programme.

In 2008, there were four native speaker teachers and eight Japanese English teachers. Almost all the participant learners were Japanese high school students ranging from 13 to 18 years old. There are approximately 21 to 25 students per immersion programme. These students are invited to attend this programme based upon the result of a listening and writing test. The immersion programme is free and all costs such as food, accommodation, transportation, and tuition are paid by the university.

### Concept

The main idea is to expose participants to an English language domain thereby giving students a chance to experience everyday life in an English speaking country. Students are expected to use English as the only medium of communication during the immersion programme.

### Aims/Objectives

The aims and objectives of the intensive immersion programme are to:

- increase participant exposure to English;
- raise student confidence;
- encourage student English use; and

- encourage teamwork and build inter-personal skills.

### Problems

There are a number of problems that can be expected when running a language immersion programme. The authors of this paper anticipated the following problems:

1. The overuse of Japanese language during the immersion programme;
2. Interpersonal relationship problems such as cliques; loners; bullies etc;
3. Mixed expectations of participants during the programme;
4. Problems with the venue and facilities such as rooms; food quality and quantity; excessive rules; sleeping area; bathing times etc;
5. Differing teaching styles and teaching philosophies; and
6. Financial restrictions.

The greatest problem regarding intensive immersion programmes is the tendency for participants to use languages other than the target language. One way to deal with this problem is to get participants to sign a pre-programme agreement to use only the target language (other languages only in emergency situations). Sound preparation and forward planning can help alleviate many problems. A clear explanation regarding student expectations before the immersion programme can help reduce misunderstandings.

It is advisable to have a separate management team which co-ordinates between teachers and the camp administration (i.e., the host site). This paper will address interpersonal relationship problems in group dynamics, in a separate section of this paper.

### Theoretical framework

It is important to have an understanding of the theoretical framework for language immersion programmes to allow a solid foundation of underlying principles that encourages successful L2 acquisition. The theoretical framework of this intensive immersion programme has come from some key concepts from immersion education, bilingual education, and language revitalization initiatives.

The aim of immersion education is to use the target language as the only medium of communication. The Tsumagoi Olympics incorporates this aim by making English the only language of communication. Furthermore, many of the activities during the five-day immersion are shared learning task-based activities. These activities focus on content rather than language (refer to “We Da World” for an example in a latter part of this paper).

A cornerstone of this intensive immersion programme is found in the innovative approaches to language revitalisation. Language revitalisation refers to “the development of programs that result in re-establishing a language which has ceased being the language of communication in the speech community” (Hinton & Hale, 2001, p. 5). A major emphasis of revitalising endangered languages, languages that are threatened to become extinct,

is the concept of “living the language”. These programmes encourage, mainly adult learners to use the target language beyond the classroom into daily life. The target language is therefore used in a variety of contexts and settings. The language is used in very real authentic communicative situations.

Another concept readily applicable to the context of English immersion programmes in Japan is the idea of “language domains” (Fishman, 1972; 1991). A language domain is a designated time and/or location reserved for a specific language. For example, parents who desire to raise bilingual children may speak a certain language to their children from Saturday to Monday and choose a different language of communication from Tuesday to Friday. This is an example of a time language domain. An example of a location language domain would be at one of the Maori language immersion schools for children in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Keegan, 1996). These schools known as *kura kaupapa* Maori, encourage their students to speak Maori as their primary language of communication within the physical boundaries of the school. Students (and teachers) know that once they enter the school gates then Maori is to be used.

This section of the paper has described some of the concepts and principles that act as the theoretical basis for successful second language acquisition. The immersion programme needs to be carefully designed to allow these concepts and principles to be successfully implemented. The next part of this paper will discuss what type of activities should be planned and when these activities should take place.

## Programme outline

A 5-day programme for the Tsumagoi English Olympics is provided on the following page. Before activities can be planned, there are day-to-day tasks that take precedence and therefore require immediate inclusion into the programme. These daily tasks include: morning assembly call, morning exercise, breakfast, lunch, dinner, and bath times. Traveling to the venue and returning home on the last day needs to be carefully considered. There are necessary venue requirements such as camp briefing, orientation, cleaning, and final inspection that take considerable time. Once the venue requirements are satisfied, other activities can be planned into the programme.

Two of the most important elements of programme design are balance and timing. Balance refers to having an appropriate mix of activities that works both the mind and the body. There should be a range of activities that encourage group/pair work as well as individual work. Also, the activities should be multi-dimensional, requiring the work of different intelligences (Gardner, 1993). For example, the Tsumagoi English Olympics has a mix of different activities such as: “The Tsumagoi Code” (a workshop that builds team work through a T-shirt design activity) “Theatre Sports” (a workshop that has acting and drama tasks), and “We Da’ World” (a session that incorporates music and singing).

The other essential consideration is timing. Each day is divided into three parts. The morning session begins from 9am and ends at 12 noon. The afternoon begins at 2pm and finishes at 5pm. Finally, there is a two hour evening session from 7pm to 9pm. During this time, students would work in groups and prepare a photo journal and a personal montage of pictures taken from magazines. These evening sessions

were repeated and lasted the duration of the immersion programme. Activities were allocated a specific session depending upon any special requirements. For example, “Treasure Hunt” and “Outdoor Activities” that involve outdoor exercise were allocated in the afternoon so that students were able to shower and clean themselves for dinner.

Table 1 lists the activities for the Tsumagoi English Olympics along with a brief explanation of each activity.

### Group dynamics

An essential element of language teaching is group dynamics. If students enjoy being in each other’s company, they are more motivated to interact and communicate. On the other hand, the opposite is just as true if students do not like being together. Based on this premise, it is important to intervene and develop positive group dynamics. The managers of the intensive programme were acutely aware of this with the summer intensive program at Tsumagoi. From the start of the first session, through concurrent sessions, and right up to and including the final session, help was provided to students to develop positive interpersonal relationships.

To understand how the immersion programme facilitated good group dynamics, there are three distinct stages:

1. The icebreaking stage
2. The warming stage
3. The end

**Table 1. A list of activities during the Tsumagoi English Olympics**

Activity Name	Description
Icebreaking Session	Students mix and interact by sharing personal information. Developing group cohesion through various ice-breaking activities.
Theatre Sports	Students learn gestures and body language. Students also perform drama and skits using cards.
The Tsumagoi Code	Students learn about symbolism. In groups students design a T-shirt using original designs.
Picture this – Manga’lympics	Students create and design a manga storyboard.
Treasure Hunt	Using a map, students circumnavigate around the Tsumagoi venue and collect clues from a variety of task-based stations. These clues provide the answer to a riddle that must be solved.
Music and Language - We Da’ World	In groups, students compose lyrics to a rap beat. Students then perform and record the original composition.
Outdoor Activities	Students participate in a variety of outdoor sports.
Montage Project Presentations	Students talk about their individual montage project.

### The icebreaking stage

It is essential to get the group off to a good start as soon as it is formed because this is when students are looking for a place to fit in. At first, they are generally very polite and on their best behavior. However, under the surface there is always a lot of structuring and organization going on (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003). Therefore, the teacher needs to

Time:	Day 1: July 31st Thursday	Day 2: August 1st Friday	Day 3: August 2nd Saturday	Day 4: August 3rd Sunday	Day 5: August 4th Monday	Day 6: August 5th Tuesday
7:00	Travel to Tsumagoi Camp Venue	Morning call	Morning call	Morning call	Morning call	Morning call
7:30		Morning exercise	Morning exercise	Morning exercise	Morning exercise	Morning exercise
8:00		Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast
Morning Sessions 9:00 – 12:00		Theatre Sports	Picture this- Manga'lympics	Music and Language - We Da' World	Montage Project Presentations	Closing Ceremony
12:00 – 2:00	Lunch	Lunch + Free time	Lunch + Free time	Lunch + Free time	Lunch + Free time	Return home
Afternoon Sessions 2:00-5:00	Icebreaking Session 2:00-4:00  Opening Ceremony All Olympic students 4:00-5:00	Language and Symbols-  The Tsumagoi Code	Information Athletes-  Treasure Hunt	Montage Project Presentations  Outdoor Activities Outdoor activities (Student helpers prepare)	Grading and Assessment	
5:00 – 7:00	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	
Evening Sessions 7:00 – 9:00	English Olympics Introductions	Photo journal Montage preparation	Photo journal Montage preparation	Photo journal Montage preparation	Final Presentations Closing Party	

Table 2. Tsumagoi English Olympics: five-day intensive programme

make sure that the participants all mix and grow together as one group.

The key to getting the participants to form one group is in developing cohesion. This is the glue that will bond them together (Dörnyei, 2001). That glue is made up of all the interpersonal relationships the students develop and share. To develop good interpersonal relationships, the students need to change partners often and get familiar with each other. First of all, students should get to know everyone's name. Then students should be sharing personal information with each other. People are generally drawn towards others with whom they share a common interest, so designing activities that require students to share information about interests that they have in common work well in developing a cohesive group.

Cohesion is important because the students need to trust each other. Safety and security are important in a second language class. If the students don't feel comfortable to risk talking to each other, then learning is going to be compromised; especially in a communicative approach to language learning. When the students do feel comfortable with the group, their energy is focused on more social goals rather than just trying to stay out of trouble.

The opposite state of a cohesive class is a fragmented class. If trust is not given the time and encouragement to develop, a group of students who start out lacking in self-confidence can easily become negative and uncooperative (Hadfield, 1992). At that point other student behaviours can be observed. They become territorial, cliques develop, loners find their comfort zone, and the group eventually, and all too easily, becomes fractured.

To avoid any negative developments, the first session at Tsumagoi aimed at getting the students all mixing, getting to know each other, and developing the interpersonal relationships in the group. This was facilitated with a selection of icebreaking activities. Icebreakers generally have the following kind of characteristics: (a) students learn each other's names; (b) activities are fun and easily achievable; (c) activities require the students to mix (a lot!); and (d) facilitate the discovery of shared interests and things in common.

### *Warming stage*

Ice tends to re-form if left alone, and so it is important to keep it warm and moving around. Likewise, it is important to keep the interpersonal relationships fluid. Warm-ups are useful little exercises that help maintain that fluidity. Warm-ups were used at the beginning of concurrent sessions when the students had become familiar with each other. Like icebreakers, warm-ups are short, easily achievable exercises that are fun and that required the students to mix. On top of this, random grouping activities were made. The beauty of random grouping means that the students never know who their next partner is going to be, and so students need to invest in the whole group, not just in one or two people. A typical random pairing exercise is a bunch of cards, one for each student with each card being one of a pair. The students draw a card and have to find their partner who has drawn the pairing card, thus the grouping is purely by chance and the students are free from feeling manipulated into pairs by the teachers.

### *The end*

The last phase of a group's existence is the end. It is important to bring a group experience to a positive closure. The end is a time for the students to reflect on their shared experiences, their achievements, and for the teachers to prepare them for future study. The final exercise was to sit all the students in a circle. Everyone in the circle tossed a ball of string to someone sitting opposite them and shared something positive about that student with the group. Each person held the end of the string as the ball was passed around until the end of the exercise. This activity encouraged the group to focus on positive aspects of the shared experiences, and also demonstrated how everyone had all become joined together through friendship. Everyone, in some way, was connected as demonstrated by the interweaving strands of string that were being held. Finally, the string was cut and everyone was given a piece to tie around their wrist as a memento of the whole Tsumagoi experience, and also to remind participants of the friendships that had been made.

To summarize this section, a good group dynamic helps make the Tsumagoi English Olympics a success. To ensure a good group dynamic, it is important to start positively influencing the group dynamics as soon as the participants come together. It is also important to keep the interpersonal relationships fluid throughout the group's existence, and it is a good idea to bring a positive closure to the group experience. The Tsumagoi English Olympics had very good dynamics. This was not left to chance alone. The teachers of this immersion programme purposefully manipulated the students' interpersonal relationships from the start in order to help students get along together.

### *"We da' world": A music and language workshop*

#### *Introduction*

In this section, the process of teaching students how to write lyrics to rap music will be discussed. This lesson was created to reinforce group cohesion, to provide students the chance to create something memorable, and to introduce them to creative writing.

#### *Initial instruction—syllables and rhyming*

At first students must be taught the term syllable. In writing lyrics, the number of syllables students create must be in sync with the melody. This is a key point in helping students adapt their writing to fit the melody. Rhyming is also important but not completely necessary. Some rap music was created for this workshop and entitled, "We Da' World". It was made with a specific melodic rhythm that matched a verse with 4 lines. Ideally, students should make the final syllable of the last word of lines 1, 2, and 4 rhyme. Various examples were given to the students to show them exactly how rhyming worked.

#### *Learning the rhythm*

In this stage, students were placed into verse/chorus groups. Each group would write one verse and one chorus based on one of the three themes: environment, peace, and aid. The verse mentioned above was 4 lines long with 5 syllables each, and a one-line chorus with 12 syllables. Using the rhyming lyric examples created, students learned that one musical note of the melody stood for one syllable of a

word. However, 2 syllables could be placed on one note as long as the time was increased by half. In other words, one syllable for one note would equal a quarter note, but placing two syllables on a single note would require the word to be spoken with two eighth notes (i.e., double-time). Teaching this to students would help adapt their writing to the rhythm of the rap song.

### Brainstorming

After teaching students about rhymes and syllables, they were put into theme groups and given a handout to write their ideas. There were 6 groups, 2 groups for each theme. The three themes were environment, peace, and aid. Students spent the first thirty minutes brainstorming their lyrics on these themes, as shown in Figure 1. From this point, students began to put their ideas into sentences (see Figure 2). Students needed help from teachers during this time.

Fortunately, there were 3 native English speakers and 7 Japanese English teachers who could help students put their ideas into sentences. Once this step was completed, a handout with the exact syllable lines was provided. Students then began to put their sentences into the syllable lines, as shown in Figure 3. In some cases, students had to edit their sentences without changing the meaning in order to fit them in to the allotted syllable lines. After this was completed, students added their lyrics to sheet music. The sheet music was prepared before this lesson by adding the same number of syllable lines as the previous hand out under each note that represented the rhythm of the rap melody (see Figure 4).

**Lets write some lyrics!!!!!!!!!**

First, students should brainstorm and write their ideas based on their theme.

**Title: We Da World**

**Step 1: Your Group Theme** Aid and Helping People

**Step 2: Brainstorming and writing your ideas**

poverty  
starvation  
disease  
aid  
help  
happiness  
smile

There are many people who are in need of aid.  
~~Millions~~ of people are suffering from starvation.  
Helping them from ~~the~~ hardship,  
Even little by little,  
Will some day lead them to happiness  
No food, bad health

Let's help them and let us be their salvation.

we can better sel va to

Figure 1. Brainstorming

Step 3: Simplify your ideas in fewer words.

CHORUS: Where is the equality?  
 We are all friends.

VERSE: People are suffering from starvation.  
 Let us be their salvation.  
 We aren't alone, we get along.  
 Help each other, enjoy together.

Figure 2. Making sentences

Step 4: Adapt your lyrics to the rhythm

Your group number is 1 2 3 4 5 6

Your group will write verse 1 2 3 4 5 6

Some suffer from starvation

Let us be their salvation

We aren't alone we get along

Help each other enjoy together

Your group will write chorus 1 2 4 5 6 7 8

Where is the equality

Think about the humanity

Figure 3. Fitting lyrics to rhythm

**We Da World**  
Grand Piano 2 Nelson Forrest

♩ = 90

Verse 1

Verse 2

Chorus 1

Chorus 2

In the green grass for eat there was a big fat bear  
Brendell put them away when now you see last 2 years!  
They been away big fat bear but do they still stay together  
into the going on where

Figure 4. Copying to sheet music

Figure 5. Garageband

### Performance

Now that the sheet music had been completed, students began practicing in their groups followed by a whole group rehearsal. During rehearsal, each group had the chance to record their verse and chorus using the Apple multi-track recording software, Garageband (see Figure 5).

In the end, students performed their rap in front of all the teachers. At the end of this session, students all received a CD of the rap song with their voices and a karaoke version. Although this lesson can be challenging, students worked together to make a song and a final performance, and created

coherent lyrics based on 3 themes. The CD served to provide them with a very memorable experience that adds to group cohesion thus supporting a better learning environment. Materials for this workshop can be downloaded at <[www.forrestworld.org/tsumagoi/wedaworld.zip](http://www.forrestworld.org/tsumagoi/wedaworld.zip)>.

## Conclusion

This paper described the Tsumagoi English Olympics immersion program. This immersion program draws upon L2 theory from the socio-linguistic fields of immersion education, bilingual education and language revitalization.

Of all of the many skills that are learnt by students on this immersion program, personal development skills, are one of the most important. Students seek to improve themselves in many ways, their English ability being only one part of the total development. Being away from home in a camp environment students learn to look after themselves and each other by sharing their experiences together. Education takes a new, deeper meaning. It is more holistic when compared to the confines of classroom learning.

Students learn more effectively if they learn by doing. In this immersion program, students experience living the language. Students practice their English in varied contexts simulating a real home stay experience in an English speaking country.

This paper also discussed the importance of building positive group dynamics. Building interpersonal skills and learning to work with many different types of people is an important skill that is learnt and practiced. Finally part three, described an interactive workshop that involved students composing rap lyrics to music.

Interest in immersion programs is now on the rise in Japan. Although, language immersion programmes such as the Tsumagoi English Olympics may still be in their infancy, it is hoped that this paper may serve as a guide for the creation of many similar programmes in the future.

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