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## Teaching grammar is not enough

Letter

*Wednesday, April 30, 2008*

Re: "In denial about language" (Gazette Online, April 25).

As an educator with more than 16 years' experience teaching second languages in Australia, France, Hong Kong, England and Canada, I do not share Robyn Matthew's opinion that the best way to go about increasing bilingualism is through a "back to the basics" approach that has students focus on the study of grammar and syntax.

This is a direct contradiction to influential researcher/professor H.H. Stern's realization in the 1980s that traditional grammar-based approaches do not help students' language acquisition.

Although I agree with Matthew's comment that many students lack the basics, I believe the real failure of communicative approaches to improve fluency levels is because traditional programs do not offer the following: careful selection of high-frequency vocabulary; sufficient repetition; a strong emotional context; scaffolding of language skills; extensive opportunities for creative, spontaneous use of the language; and an inductive, rather than deductive approach to the teaching of grammar (to which I believe Matthews would like to return).

The program I use, based on an approach called the accelerative integrated method, introduces these elements in every class. It also uses gestures to teach words, syntax and grammar in a way that stimulates different areas of the brain simultaneously, and responds to different learning styles and multiple intelligences. More than 4,000 Canadian schools have purchased this program since 2004, and it is gaining popularity in Australia, the U.S. and Europe.

With this approach, grammar skills are refined in context through an inductive approach similar to the way we acquire our mother tongue. We don't teach children grammar rules before they have developed a solid level of oral competency, so why would a second language program attempt to do so? It doesn't make any sense.

I will never use another method in my classroom again. When I watch 11-year-old students (all boys, I might add) arguing a grammar point, joking, teasing each other, doing creative writing in French, I feel I am safe in the knowledge that I am sending young people out into Canadian society with strong (grammatically correct) oral communication skills.

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