

## 25 Years of the Neurolinguistic Approach: Origin, Outcomes, Expansion and Current Experiments

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**Abstract :** The traditional lack of success of most Canadian students in the regular French program in attaining the ability to communicate spontaneously led to the conceptualization of a modified program. This program, called Intensive French, introduced and evaluated as an experiment in several school districts, formed the basis for the creation of a more effective approach for the development of skills in a second/foreign language and literacy: the Neurolinguistic Approach (NLA). The NLA expresses the major change in the understanding of how communication skills are developed: learning to communicate spontaneously in a second language depends on the reuse of structures in a variety of cognitive situations to express authentic messages rather than on knowledge of the way a language functions. Put differently, it prioritises the acquisition of implicit competence over the learning of grammatical knowledge. This is achieved by the adoption of a literacy-based approach and an increase in intensity of instruction. Besides having strong support empirically from numerous experiments, the NLA has sound theoretical foundation, as it conforms to research in neurolinguistics. The five pedagogical principles that define the approach will be explained, as well as the differences between the NLA and the paradigm on which most current resources and teaching strategies are based. It is now 25 years since the original research occurred. The use of the NLA, as it will be shown, has expanded widely. With some adaptations, it is used for other languages and in other milieus. In Canada, classes are offered in mandarin, Ukrainian, Spanish and Arabic, amongst others. It has also been used in several indigenous communities, such as to restore the use of Mohawk, Cri and Dene. Its use has expanded throughout the world, as in China, Japan, France, Germany, Belgium, Poland, Russia, as well as Mexico. The Intensive French program originally focussed on students in grades 5 or 6 (ages 10 -12); nowadays, the programs based on the approach include adults, particularly immigrants entering new countries. With the increasing interest in inclusion and cultural diversity, there is a demand for language learning amongst pre-school and primary children that can be successfully addressed by the NLA. Other current experiments target trilingual schools and work with Inuit communities of Nunavik in the province of Quebec.

**Keywords :** neuroeducation, neurolinguistic approach, literacy, second language acquisition, plurilingualism, foreign language teaching and learning

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