

EARLY FRENCH IMMERSION:
A PORTRAIT OF A PRIMARY PROGRAM

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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Early French Immersion: a portrait of a primary program

by

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Abstract

This study focuses on how children make sense of language and learning experiences in an early French immersion setting. The purpose of the study was to explore the question of whether or not instruction of all subjects in French is conducive to promoting in-depth understanding of concepts, considering that children's knowledge of French is very limited, particularly at the earliest stages of early French immersion. The work of developmental psychologists has contributed a great deal to our understanding of how exploratory talk and guided discussion can enhance a child's knowledge and grasp of concepts. In an early French immersion environment, it is understood that second-language proficiency levels usually do not match background knowledge, nor are they compatible with all subject areas which make up the prescribed curriculum content at each level. The thesis questions are examined with this in mind; is it possible to engage in dialogue and discussion with early French immersion students, as a means of promoting concept development, when the language of discussion and instruction is one in which the students have not yet become proficient?

In order to examine this question, I offer a portrait of a primary program, drawn from classroom observations, and interviews with students and teachers at one primary school. Background for this portrait is completed by my own personal knowledge and experience gained from thirteen years as a French immersion teacher. Qualitative research methods have been used to design the study; presentation and analysis of the data follow the guidelines for such research.

Results of the study confirm that some students and teachers feel that a lack of proficiency in the second language limits comprehension of spoken messages and written texts. This in turn, affects the selection and manner in which teaching resources may be exploited in the early French immersion classroom. This is particularly evident in those areas where discussion and dialogue are necessary for further development of concept comprehension or extended learning, because of the abstract nature of the concepts, or because of children's lack of background knowledge and/or comprehension of vocabulary and grammatical structures in French. A number of specific examples are provided by students and teachers, and are supported by my own experience of thirteen years teaching in early French immersion classrooms.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction:

Early French immersion is an educational program which begins instruction in French as a second language at the kindergarten level in Newfoundland. In some provinces, instruction for early immersion students might begin at the Grade 1 level. Classroom instruction is typically carried out in French only for the first three years of the program (kindergarten, Grade 1, Grade 2). English Language Arts is introduced at the Grade 3 level. In later grades, children who are enrolled in the early French immersion program will reach approximately 50% English language instruction at the Grade 6 level. Physical education and music programs are often taught in English to French immersion students. In the School Board where this study took place, immersion programs follow the pattern described above. In a way, it could be said that students in early immersion move from total immersion to partial immersion, *after* they have spent three years being introduced to French as the language of instruction in all subject areas.

Early French immersion programs began in Canada in the mid-1960's, and have been implemented in provinces all across the country since that time. Their initial implementation was largely due to the influence of parent groups in Quebec,

whose primary goal was to help their children become bilingual in a bilingual community. These parents were dissatisfied with the results of traditional core French programs in helping their children learn and speak French.

It all began with 26 little English speaking kindergarten children whose parents were determined that there had to be a better way for their children to learn French in school (CPF National News, Winter, 1996).

My own experience in teaching French Immersion began more than thirteen years ago. Since then, I have taught at kindergarten and all primary levels as a full time or substitute teacher, the most extended periods of time in Grades 1 and 2 consecutively. The questions which will be explored in this thesis have arisen as a direct result of my experience in teaching. This study is not therefore, one from which my own beliefs and practical knowledge of the field can easily be separated. In fact, the experiences and observations I have made through the years provided the point of departure for the present study.

In qualitative inquiry, initial questions for research often come from real-world observations, dilemmas and questions and have emerged from the interplay of the researcher's direct experience, tacit theories and growing scholarly interests" (Marshall and Rossman, 1995, p.16).

As with most exploratory questions, the guiding questions of this thesis are multi-faceted, with one question leading to another. They are:

Do children fully comprehend the language of instruction in French immersion? How do children demonstrate their understanding of the language in a classroom setting, and what are their own perceptions of the French language and learning in French?

Is it possible to extend children's knowledge and concept development through discussion and dialogue in French, when children are just beginning to learn the language? If not, or if this can only be done in a limited way, what should be done?

The nature of such exploratory questions does not allow a narrow focus for research, but does provide a definite point from which to begin drawing a portrait of a primary French immersion program. Based on classroom observations, student and teacher interviews, and my own experience as a classroom teacher, a greater insight into these questions is developed. The questions help develop a perspective from which to view early French immersion classrooms and how students learn there. This perspective results in a different view from that which has been typically presented of French immersion classrooms.

Personal experience and reflection:

At the beginning of my teaching career, I had acquired very little theoretical background related to teaching young children, as I had followed the course of study for teaching at the secondary level. But, perhaps like many young, inexperienced teachers, I believed that teaching was going to be easy, and felt confident that I could teach at the primary level. I had already completed a French degree, during which I had been 'immersed' in the French language and culture. For me, this had been an extremely positive experience and I had come to know the French language very well. As a result, I believed strongly in the notion that children would learn their second language in much the same way as they had learned their first, through a natural exposure to the language during the daily activities of the classroom. My own exposure to the language had resulted in my being able to speak and understand French fluently, and I believed that the same experience could be offered to the children in my class.

As far as my teaching responsibilities were concerned, it was obvious that I was to teach children to speak French and ensure that they understood what I said. At the Grade 1 level, I should encourage them to speak French to me and their peers

whenever possible, to the best of their ability. I should deliver the program outlined in the various curriculum guides for each subject area.

Curricular materials should offer equivalent conceptual complexity and informational content as do those materials of corresponding grade levels in the regular English program. At the same time, they [the curriculum materials] should be made accessible to students who are in the process of learning their second language by improving upon available material and by assisting teachers to develop strategies for mediating between written materials and students (Day, 1994, pp.17-18).

This seemed straightforward. One of the defining features of early French immersion instruction is that children are exposed to that language in much the same manner as they have been exposed to their first language. This meant that I should speak French at all times to children, and as authentically as possible. Just as parents speak to their children in full sentences long before children speak themselves, immersion teachers speak French to their students without expecting students to respond verbally. In the classroom, however, it is essential that students respond by following classroom routines, and by indicating in some way that they understand the curriculum content which is presented in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and other subject areas. In the home, children have time to

respond, and increased opportunity for repetition before being expected to reproduce language.

Nonetheless, I followed curriculum guidelines as they were presented to me by my colleagues, and through reading theories of French immersion instruction. In reading, for example, I attempted to mediate for students when using written materials by trying to make texts meaningful and interesting to students, within the limits of their second language ability. Using dramatizations, emphasizing picture clues, and involving children in the story, I attempted to get the 'message' of the story across. The emphasis was on the "message, and not the form" (Krashen, 1989, p. 59) for students attempting to speak in their second language.

Krashen (1989) is convinced that "immersion programs succeed because, like other good methods (of second-language teaching), they provide students with a great deal of comprehensible input" (p. 60). 'Comprehensible' input is language that students are able to understand, even though they might not yet be proficient in the second language. Language can be made comprehensible, for example, by using pictures or actions to help students understand what is being said. Krashen suggests that teachers can adapt their language levels according to students' needs when working with students who are at a similar linguistic level of competence. Materials can be modified and supplemented, and the use of visual aids, gestures, and the relating of ideas to context can all be part of rendering content and language

"comprehensible." Further, Krashen points out,"children do not have to respond in French until the middle of Grade 1, a year and a half silent period is provided in which children may use their first language until they acquire enough French to respond in French" (p. 60). Again, this all seemed straightforward at the time.

If the teacher's task can be presented as a straightforward one, then whatever difficulties impede the implementation process can be attributed to a teacher's personal failings. This creates a paradoxical situation in which the teacher's active role in the creation of new instruments is denied, but they are credited with a generous share of the responsibility for failure (Elbaz, 1983, p.17).

Hence, I felt that if children in my class were unable to understand, there must be something lacking in my own methods of instruction. For many years, I worked diligently to develop themes, and search out resources which would be of interest to children. This would ensure delivery of the program as it should be delivered, helping children achieve the necessary grasp of concepts and language skills. I spoke French at all times, used visual aids to understanding, provided dramatic demonstrations to help children understand the language of instruction. I used every 'performance' technique I could think of, and tried many others that were suggested by my colleagues.

I recall a visit to the local skating rink with my group of six year olds. I spoke French with every child as I helped with skates and mittens, taking advantage of each opportunity to repeat the words, "patins" and "mitaines" . One little girl in the group said to me very innocently, "Madame, don't you feel a bit silly, since you're the only one speaking French?" I did, in fact, feel a little foolish, but I also felt that this was part of my job, and that it would promote children's learning. In some instances, such persistence and belief in these methods have been effective, and in others they have not. However, speaking French only did not seem to work well in all situations. Therefore, I began to move beyond questioning and reflecting upon my teaching methods as the sole possible causes of limited success with certain aspects of classroom teaching. After a time, I came to question the theoretical premise upon which French immersion is based; that speaking French at all times is the best way to teach children the language and that all prescribed curricular concepts can be adequately developed in the second language.

Krashen's (1989) description of the approach to language learning in early French immersion might adequately describe the current basis of methodological practice in early French immersion, even though methods have evolved and varied somewhat over the years, and questions are being asked, however tentatively. Krashen's work is only one of the many sources to which French immersion pedagogical practice is linked. It has been quoted here as a representative sample

for the purpose of explaining the term 'comprehensible input'. The notion that the language can be rendered comprehensible for students is at the core of French immersion practice. While this may be true for certain language purposes and functions in the French immersion setting, the range of its application is being questioned in this thesis.

Literacy development in early French immersion:

The importance of integrating development of all literacy skills (speaking, reading, writing, and listening) is recognized in French immersion classrooms, as it is in English first language classrooms. In the early immersion setting, however, it is difficult to assess children's grasp of concepts covered, given their limited ability with the language. Does the French language that children produce adequately and accurately reflect children's understanding? Or, does the teacher's 'paraphrasing', (helping children with words they do not know) often give the children answers which they may not have produced themselves?

The types of errors children make while learning French in an immersion setting have been well documented. These errors do not disappear with repeated exposure to the language (Froc, 1995; O'Reilly, 1993; Lyster, 1987; Tarone & Swain, 1994). Error correction strategies meet with some success, but the

interlanguage evident in French immersion classrooms persists. How can the lack of vocabulary knowledge, limited comprehension/use of grammatical structures that this interlanguage exhibits be compensated for in the French immersion classroom?

Is there a general perception that these gaps in second-language knowledge need not be compensated for, that in fact the use of gestures, visual aids and other teaching resources will adequately fill these language gaps? Or, does the child's limited knowledge of vocabulary and French language structure inhibit understanding of concepts, both concrete and abstract? As children advance through school, concepts presented usually increase in levels of complexity and are more abstract. Does the child's language skill increase at a rate which enables comprehension of more complex and abstract subject matter?

Teaching practices in early French immersion:

During the observation period for this case study, teaching practices seemed to reflect the belief that input can be made comprehensible by speaking French 100% of the time, or as near 100% of the time as is possible. While such an approach may indeed prove successful in some areas of second language learning, there are aspects of young children's language development and learning which are not addressed by following this approach. "...Educational activities cannot be observed without reference to the shared educational values and beliefs of those

engaged in educational pursuits" (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p. 110). It is possible that beliefs which were held about children and how they might best learn a second language are subject to review at this stage in French immersion history. If the language is not made sufficiently 'comprehensible' for students by methods which are currently in use, then teaching practices may need modification.

Teachers are advised that children in French immersion must be encouraged to attempt speaking in their second language, without fear of constant correction. To focus on errors is unnecessarily discouraging for students, and does not contribute positively to second-language development within the classroom setting. While this may be true, the importance of achieving a balance with comprehension and accuracy in the French language is recognized by French immersion educators, and attempts are being made to meet the challenges that arise when children must learn about the world around them, and learn a new language at the same time.

If children are to learn the language through repeated exposure to French from the various sources available (teacher, print materials, audio-visual materials) and learning is said to be progressive with continued exposure, why is it that so many language problems persist? This question has been addressed by a number of researchers, and methods have been suggested as to how teachers might implement error correction strategies. Questions not addressed fully include these: How can children be expected to progress through the content areas of the curriculum when

their spoken language does not reflect an understanding of grammatical structure (i.e. verb tenses, agreements), vocabulary, and not least of all, word meanings? Do these aspects of language not transmit at least some part of the message? Is it possible to separate the message and the form, as Krashen (1989) suggests? Classroom teachers are confronted with these questions daily, as they try to deliver a well-rounded primary program in French.

In the practical context, it is the teacher not the learning theorist, who is the final authority on learning...Whether or not such authority is actually granted him, the teacher is the only one in a practical position to discharge it (Elbaz, 1983, p.17).

Researchers and French immersion teachers have come to realize that there are a number of factors which affect the 'natural' acquisition of the second language in the immersion setting. How well children are able to learn the language naturally determines to a large degree, how the content areas of the program are delivered.

Thesis questions: putting them into perspective:

The literature review of this thesis includes discussion and examination of research focusing on a number of areas which relate to French immersion instruction and practice, and their effect upon children's language development. A great deal of French immersion research has focused on children's productive

language skills, compiling information about what children can and cannot do. Such research has contributed significantly to knowledge about language proficiency, and what children are able to do *with* the French language. The purpose of this study is to explore how children actually make sense of the French language classroom environment, what they are learning *through* that language, and the resulting implications for concept development. By exploring situations children encounter during daily language and learning experiences in French immersion, it is possible to examine which of those situations might be most suitable to instruction *in the French language only*. One might then isolate subject areas or topics which do not appear to lend themselves to instruction in a second language, unless the learner is proficient in that language.

Ely (1991) describes qualitative study as being forged in the transaction among what is done and learned and felt by the researcher. It is an intensely recursive personal process, she says, and while this may be the hallmark of all sound research, "it is crucial to every aspect of the qualitative way of looking at life"(p.1) "The great majority of topics for study and research questions do not arise out of a vacuum or specious choice but instead, mesh intimately with the researcher's deepest professional and social commitments" (p.30). It is with this sense of personal commitment to the students I teach that I chose the questions which are explored in this thesis:

Do children fully comprehend the language of instruction in French immersion? How do children demonstrate their understanding in the classroom setting, and what are their own perceptions of the French language and learning in French?

Is it possible to extend children's knowledge and concept development through discussion and dialogue in the French language in Early French immersion, when children are just beginning to learn the language? If not, or if this can be done only in a limited way, what should be done?

An exploration of these concerns is essential to a deeper understanding of the process of learning *through* a second language and learning the second language concurrently. Do children show 'understanding' of the language when they respond to instructions by moving to the right place, or by getting an object they have been asked to find? Is understanding of the language not more accurately reflected by a child's ability to use that language to communicate his/her own feelings and ideas?

After a thirteen year period of teaching in early French immersion, I felt there were many reasons to be positive about children's successes, and the kind of teaching that was taking place in immersion classes. I particularly admired teachers' inventive approaches to making the language 'come alive' for students. I

also admired students' willingness to learn, and their enthusiasm for learning to speak another language.

However, a number of concerns were becoming increasingly difficult to address. The greatest came from feeling that the children's understanding of the language of instruction might be limited in many ways, even when every effort was made to ensure that the language was 'comprehensible'. How could I be sure? It was not always possible to determine from a child whether or not a concept or idea was understood by asking him/her to re-tell the story, or to explain in his/her own words how well the material was understood. With a very limited ability to speak French at the earliest stages, most children are unable to use the language to express themselves without a great deal of input from the teacher. This seemed to me a classic case of putting words in someone else's mouth. How was I to know what the child **wanted** to say? How was the child to know to correct me if s/he did not understand to begin with?

Very often, the teacher in a French immersion classroom must guide discussion and dialogue to such a degree that it is difficult to determine whether or not children would have reached the same conclusions without teacher help. Current trends in education emphasize the importance of allowing children to explore concepts independently through the use of appropriate materials, resources and activities. The use of children's literature as a teaching resource, for example, is

prevalent, and replaces the 'textbook' which purported to tell us everything children needed to know. This is viewed by many as a positive trend in teaching and learning, as children's literature can provide rich, meaningful subject matter for young children. However, if children do not understand the text of such stories, and are not familiar enough with the second language to express themselves in relation to these texts, then such resources have limited value in French immersion classrooms. I felt limited by what I was able to accomplish and frustrated that I was unable to guide children towards meaningful discussions through the use of these materials, or other resources which could be used in the child's first language. I had seen that children were easily engaged in English language books, plays, and movies that were based on themes of interest to them. They quickly responded to stories with predictable texts in English, joining in and becoming involved almost immediately. They also listened attentively whenever a story was read in English, although I always felt that this was something I should not do, as it did not conform to the 100% French guidelines for instruction.

Theories of how children use language to develop an understanding of the world and to extend their knowledge provide part of the theoretical framework on which this thesis study is based. A number of theories which direct fundamental aspects of French immersion practice are examined from this point of view. The inclusion of this perspective in the literature review is intended to help the reader

view this work as it is intended; its purpose is not to prove, but to explore. The truth and validity of my work are found in the realistic and honest portrayal of people who are actually involved in teaching in early French immersion classrooms. As previously mentioned however, I am very closely involved with students and teachers in French immersion, and it is important that a number of assumptions and beliefs be made clear at the beginning of this thesis study.

Assumptions:

Basic assumptions underlying the discussion in this paper are:

- that learning a second language is of educational and personal value to children, and that French immersion programs can, and do make a significant and positive contribution to children's second language development;

- that developmentally appropriate practice must become the accepted basis for all educational programs, none more important than those offered in early childhood; (Kindergarten Curriculum Advisory Committee, Provincial Department of Education, 1992). French immersion programs must indicate that the methods used to teach children reflect a knowledge of developmentally appropriate practice;

- that the role of a child's prior knowledge is an integral part of any instructional program and the French immersion curriculum should reflect an awareness of this. This idea does not seem to be fully integrated with theories which guide current practices, nor is it reflected in the choice of materials which is available at the various levels of early French immersion;

- that reflection on current instructional practice is necessary, to allow examination of programs from a perspective other than that which has been traditionally presented in research.

Qualitative research in French immersion:

Tardif and Weber (1987) outlined a number of issues that they felt needed to be addressed in French immersion research. Among them was the need to focus qualitative studies on language learning strategies and tactics used by children in the early immersion environment.

It is important in second-language research to consider the tactics which will be used and encouraged in a second-language classroom environment. Very little research has been conducted which considers the tactics used by children in making sense of their experience in a second-language immersion situation. "Children beginning a second-language immersion program must cope not only with the new experience of formal schooling but also with an unfamiliar language environment" (Tardif & Weber, 1987, p. 72).

Personal experience in teaching at the primary level prompted me to begin a case study involving children at the kindergarten and primary (Grades 1, 2, and 3) levels. I also felt that it would be relatively easy to gain access as a participant-observer in a school which offered the early French immersion program. "A case study can be a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single

depository of documents, or one particular event" (Merriam, 1988, p.62). Defined in this way, a case study seemed to suit the exploratory nature of the research questions examined in this thesis.

Fortunately, in recent years, there have been a number of researchers who have made advances in exploring how children make sense of their learning environment in French immersion (Duchesne, 1995; Weber & Tardif, 1991; Yeoman, 1996). I will add to the growing body of research which explores how children make sense of the language in that environment, and in particular, how those sense-making strategies might affect subsequent language development and learning.

The advice of Tardif and Weber has been influential in this regard. "The question of proficiency in a language cannot be measured solely by paper and pencil type tests. One must ask the question, 'proficiency for what purposes?' (Tardif & Weber, 1987, p. 74). I want to provide some insight into that question, without using tests of language proficiency, and to extend the question itself to include children's understanding of the language. The aspects of the questions under study here which focus on discussion and dialogue have been stimulated by reading the work of child development psychologists, and that of specialists in the literacy development of young children. The literature review serves to develop a framework which supports the validity of such questions.

Summary and Outline of Thesis Presentation:

Chapter 1 describes how I arrived at the guiding questions for the research which is the focus of this paper. It includes some discussion of the literature which provides the theoretical framework for this thesis, and puts the thesis questions into the desired perspective. The choice of research methods is briefly described, and justified.

Chapter 2 provides a background to the study by outlining in some detail theories of early childhood development, including language and literacy development patterns in a child's first language. Principles of developmentally appropriate practice are highlighted. A number of literature selections focus specifically on research in the field of French immersion.

By considering the work of developmental psychologists, and specialists in the field of literacy development in young children, it is possible to examine the early French immersion setting from a perspective other than that which focuses only on second language acquisition. Literature which describes the reality of teaching and learning in a French immersion broadens this perspective. It is important to note that in the French immersion setting, second language acquisition is not the only goal which must be achieved. Children must be engaged in the learning process if they are to develop independent thinking skills, and if they are to

progress through the learning experiences they will encounter each year, building on their prior knowledge.

Chapter 3 provides a description of the study itself and the methodology used to carry out this type of qualitative research. Limitations and strengths of the study are outlined in this chapter. The choice of qualitative methods, and how each of the methods is used are justified and explained in detail.

Chapter 4 focuses on the presentation and analysis of data collected through the course of this study. Student responses to interview questions are discussed and illustrated by bar graphs. The discussion which took place during teacher interviews is presented in a narrative format. Background and other information which was provided by teachers through the use of a questionnaire is summarized and integrated with the data obtained from the teacher interview. Observation data which is relevant to the thesis questions, and which often completes the 'picture' presented by the various participants in this study is interwoven with the presentation of data outlined above. Copies of all interview questions and questionnaires are included in the Appendices section of this document. As well, copies of letters requesting permission from all prospective participants in the study have been included in the Appendices.

Chapter 5 includes references to the literature review, linking a number of well-established theories to the current study's findings. Recommendations for

further study and suggested changes in French immersion pedagogy are outlined. The contribution of this study to the field of French immersion research is highlighted by the fact that important questions have been raised, which, up to this point in French immersion history, have not been dealt with adequately.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the literature:

It is generally agreed by most researchers that French immersion programs allow students to achieve greater success in second-language development than did 'traditional' core French programs. However, there remain some concerns about the grammatical and structural weaknesses which are shown in students' spoken and written French. Rebuffot (1993) summarizes his review of research dealing with levels of proficiency achieved by French immersion students by including the following comments:

Malgré l'enthousiasme de l'équipe de Lambert et Tucker(1972), on s'accorde, en effet, pour reconnaître que les capacités productives des élèves de l'immersion n'atteignent pas celles des locuteurs natifs, mais qu'elles dépassent celles des élèves ayant appris le français dans des programmes traditionnels. ... D'autres avis sont plus nuancés et mettent l'accent sur les faiblesses des élèves de l'immersion en ce qui a trait à la compétence grammaticale et au vocabulaire (Rebuffot, 1993, p. 110-111).

In spite of Lambert and Tucker's (1972) enthusiasm (about early French immersion), it is generally agreed that the productive skills of immersion students do not reach those of native speakers, but that they do exceed those of students who have learned

French in the traditional core French setting. Other researchers emphasize the weaknesses of immersion students as far as grammar and vocabulary acquisition are concerned (my translation.)

My own questions relate to how children make sense of, and use the language of learning to which they are exposed in an early French immersion setting, rather than assessing the receptive/productive skills of students. The question of whether or not children really do make sense of the language and language related activities in the classroom has not been explored in depth up to this point. It is particularly important at the initial stages of French immersion when children have no knowledge of the second language, and it is meant to be the language of instruction one hundred percent of the time.

The focus of French immersion research in the past has been, to a great extent, on the receptive/productive skills of students, and indeed, evaluation of such skills provides essential information about children's second-language acquisition. Researchers have examined the effect learning in a second language might have on children's English language skills and cognitive development. Generally speaking, research has found that children's receptive and productive skills in French are better as a result of the immersion process than was previously the case in traditional core-French programs, and that children's English language skills and cognitive development are not negatively affected by learning in French immersion.

In recent years, experts have advised that qualitative studies in the field of French immersion would be beneficial to our developing understanding of the processes of learning in a second language setting such as French immersion. It is not enough to analyze the language skills which children have developed.

The questions which are explored in this thesis have not been asked before. Because there is not a great body of research which explores concept development and "meaning" in a way that sufficiently answered my own questions, it is necessary to consult literature from a number of disciplines in order to put the research questions into the desired framework. There is no theory that explains how children can learn and acquire new concepts in a language they are just beginning to learn, especially when the concepts are appropriate to the age and developmental level of the child, if s/he were learning in the first language. There is a gap between the language proficiency of the child and the concepts s/he is expected to explore and develop at each level of the early Immersion program. Curriculum guides outline the same content and objectives for early French immersion programs as for the English language program, with the exception of language arts. In language arts, all aspects of literacy are meant to be developed by using French as the language of instruction.

The literature review in this thesis identifies established knowledge in the field of child development, particularly in the areas of language acquisition and

literacy development. It also highlights the importance of dialogue and discussion as a means of facilitating learning through play and other experiences. Research which has identified the kind of French children speak and 'know' in French immersion is used to confirm some of the deficiencies that exist. Rather than narrowly focusing the review on French immersion literature only, moving outside the boundaries of second language research allows me to "search for illuminating constructs from other disciplines"(Marshall and Rossman, 1989, p. 40).

Language and communication:

A child's use of language is one of the first ways in which s/he is able to communicate a response to external experiences and stimuli. Language is used by adults and children alike to question, to verify, to express emotions of all kinds - pleasure, surprise, fear, curiosity. Babies who have not yet learned to speak express themselves in other ways - crying, smiling, cooing, babbling. Parents respond to their babies language in a variety of ways. As they come to know their children, they recognize specific cries or responses. Generally, parents talk to their babies, and repeat words often, saying out loud what it is they think it is the child wants or needs. Individuals who cannot hear or speak have ways of expressing themselves that compensate for the senses they cannot employ. In most situations, where language is lacking or not available, other means of communicating messages are

used. These might include sign language, use of pictures, facial expressions, gestures. In many cases, language is accompanied by all of the above in order to communicate an even more precise message than words alone would allow. Learning depends fully on language of all kinds - spoken, written, heard, and seen. Without even being aware of it, we tend to adapt the kind of language we use for the person(s) to whom our messages are directed.

The term "developmentally appropriate practice" refers to the kind of teaching and learning experience which reflect a genuine understanding of how and at what stage(s) children learn. One of the guiding principles of developmentally appropriate practice is that children are best able to direct their own learning, but require the help and guidance of adults to help them progress through the various stages of development. "There is no more successful example of language learning than that provided by mastery of language during infancy" (Holdaway, 1979, p. 19). This model of mastery has, in some ways, influenced current practices of teaching French in early French immersion. Immersion in the second language is meant to imitate the child's initial encounters with the first language. Just as a child may not initially respond to the language itself with words in his native language, in French immersion the child is expected to learn and respond to instructions in the second language. At first, this theory seems to make sense. However, there are factors which contribute to the child's development of his/her first language which do not

exist in the French immersion environment. There are two very important factors which are instrumental to children's first language acquisition, and have particular significance in a typical school setting . They are:

- time to develop proficiency in listening and spoken language before being presented with written texts.
- being able to produce writing which reflects to some degree an implicit understanding of the predictability and structure of the language.

For example, most children who attempt to write in their first language will say, "That says Mommy," or "I love you," when asked to share something they have written. This is true even when the child's writing may not contain 'conventional' words. The response comes from experience with the language, and 'knowing' how to say the word. Vygotsky (1986) says that a word without meaning is an empty sound and that word meaning is both thought and speech. Young children in early French immersion are, based on this definition, confronted with many empty sounds. According to Vygotsky, word meaning is both thought and speech. To make sense of language, a child must employ strategies which link language and thought, and ought to associate words with thoughts. Children indicate that they do this when they fill in words in answer to questions, or when they say, "Oh, I know what that is, it's a squirrel."

The thinking and learning of younger children differ from that of older children and adults (Elkind, 1988). Before young children can enter the symbolic world, he says, they need to conceptualize the concrete world which the symbols represent. The early French immersion environment offers new symbols for nearly all of the concepts a child is about to develop or has developed prior to entering school. When a teacher speaks only French with a young child entering school, are there opportunities for that child to conceptualize what all those symbols, (in this case new words) represent?

Elkind (1988) expresses concern that in today's educational climate, early childhood education is becoming institutionalized, and is now subject to a host of social, economic, and political pressures from which in the past, it may have appeared to be immune. Elkind's discussion, though not focused exclusively on kindergarten and early primary years, is relevant when examining the purpose of enrolling children in early French immersion. He suggests that some parents and educators might be inclined to believe that young children are not adequately challenged by programs which have been offered typically in day care centres and schools. Educators and parents may believe that French immersion will provide a more stimulating and challenging environment than the first-language classroom might, because children must learn a new language, and will be challenged by the process.

Obadia (1994) suggests that, "Contrary to what one might think, being in an immersion kindergarten is no more difficult for a five-year old child than it is in a regular class. Like any other kindergarten, children participate in all kinds of activities and for most of the year they speak English" (p.8). Children are, as Obadia points out, guided towards language development in French by their teacher and begin to use some phrases and words on their own by the end of the year. While kindergarten French immersion may not 'appear' to be more difficult, can this type of environment allow the kind of discovery and exchange of knowledge which can take place through mutual dialogue between teacher and child? How can one be sure it "is no more difficult for a five-year old child than it is in a regular class" ?

Smith (1978) emphasizes the importance of children being able to test their theories about language. This is after all, "how they learn most of what they know, by conducting experiments" (p.88). Smith believes that children learn about the world through experimenting, and thus acquire implicit knowledge about human language and behavior that is essential for continued learning and development. He stresses the importance of context in language when a child is communicating with adults during the infant stages. When an adult speaks, s/he relates what is being said to the baby by touch or by pointing to the object mentioned. The infant, says Smith, can then hypothesize a relationship between the two. This is a highly efficient procedure, he says, that will work only if the child can make sense of the purpose of

the adult language. Because the language is meaningful to the child within the home and because these meaningful phrases are repeated often, they become predictable. When a child is able to predict, s/he is able to 'test' what fits, or what might fit. In an early French immersion setting, children are missing several critical elements which enable predictions and verifications. These are:

- enough knowledge of the language to allow testing of what fits (this is particularly so at the very initial stages of kindergarten).
- sufficient exposure to the French language to allow children to meet expectations for predicting and verifying their understanding of language.

Smith's (1978) theories have implications for early French immersion students and teachers. The importance of being able to predict and test language is obviously a significant aspect of developing literacy skills. Literacy skills are essential in all areas of the curriculum. The ability to make and verify predictions is crucial to the development of critical thinking skills.

Smith's (1978) theories regarding word identification and recognition are also applicable to second-language acquisition. His discussion centres around object identification, but is also applicable to concepts and ideas. Identification, he says, involves a decision that an object confronted be put into a category. Recognition means that the object confronted has been seen before, although identification may not be involved. In the French immersion environment, objects,

ideas, or concepts may be recognized and possibly identified by the child in his/her first language. The goal for the child then is to learn new words and phrases to associate with what was previously identified or categorized, thus extending knowledge and understanding. This is a daunting task for the kindergarten French immersion child who is still very likely in the process of recognizing, identifying and categorizing objects and concepts in the first language. If the adult person, (in this case the teacher) is to help the child during this process of recognition and identification, does the teacher not need to somehow assess the child's prior knowledge? It would seem that simply giving a child new words to identify and categorize the environment and experiences which take place within the classroom, omits a significant step towards real understanding. That is, that the child may not make the connection to prior knowledge, because the words which represent prior knowledge have changed.

Smith (1978) describes techniques which might be effectively applied in helping mediate word identification and recognition both orally and in the written form in French immersion. These include helping children focus directly on specific words and structures and helping them establish patterns for use of these words and structures by promoting their use in meaningful contexts.

Adams (1990), Church (1994), and Stanovich (1993) agree that it is necessary to help children establish patterns for language use. Predictable books,

rhymes, songs, and attention focused on repeated patterns in spoken and written language help to enhance pattern recognition. If the child is able to recognize patterns of language, s/he will also be likely to recognize what does not fit. The child may be more likely to ask questions about what does *not* fit in such cases, allowing opportunities for further learning.

Ruddell and Rapp-Ruddell (1994) say that children at the emergent stage and beyond are 'theory builders' and 'hypothesis' testers. "Throughout the process of acquiring oral language during the pre-school years, children actively construct rules about how language works based on adult models and responses" (p. 83). In early French immersion, children might have a confusing model upon which to develop their understanding of the French language, and certain concepts. Children speak English to the teacher, and the teacher responds to them in French. The teacher points out objects in the classroom, shows the children pictures to aid comprehension, reads stories using gesture and mime to help children understand. Theory building and hypothesis testing are part of this approach, but the teacher is directing the greater part of the learning in such cases. Without knowledge of the language, children must depend almost entirely on external factors, mainly the teacher, in order to understand, rather than by doing their own theorizing and testing.

Weber and Tardif's (1991) study of kindergarten students in early immersion indicates that children also latch on to key words as a means of understanding. By using this strategy of 'sense-making' children are often able to respond appropriately to requests, instructions, or answer teacher-directed questions when the only language used is French. This would seem to allow children to 'function' in a French language setting, but does not allow for any kind of extended dialogue or discussion, since conversation requires much more than comprehension of key words.

Schema theory and the role of prior knowledge in language development

Schema theory and the role of prior knowledge as they relate to children's language development have been the subject of considerable research in recent years. A reader's schema, or organized knowledge of the world provides much of the basis for comprehending, learning and remembering the ideas in stories and texts (Anderson, 1994). Without this knowledge, the basis for comprehending messages is limited.

Schema theory highlights the idea that many interpretations of a given text are possible. Based on previous knowledge and experience, family background, economic status, and so on, readers' interpretations vary. The "click of comprehension occurs only when the reader evolves a schema that explains the

whole message" (Anderson, 1994, p.473). With only a partially developed schemata in the second language, one cannot hope to engage children in the kind of discussion that calls on their ability to reason, to compare their own ideas and beliefs with those of others, and to express ideas that are not yet fully formed. The adult reader of this text will realize how difficult it is to convey an idea that has not yet been fully conceptualized. Part of fully realizing and understanding a concept is being able to convey ideas and messages with language. Anderson further elaborates on schema theory, and its relevance to language learning by making the following observations:

- Schema provides ideal scaffolding for assimilating text information; information that fits slots in the reader's schema is readily learned, perhaps with little mental effort.
- By verifying that a child understands a concept and has assimilated information in his/her own language, the teacher would then be able to help the child assimilate the new knowledge with that concept, perhaps with "little mental effort."
- Schema facilitates selective allocation of attention which is part of being a skilful listener and reader. Important aspects of texts (or spoken messages) are allocated cognitive resources, such as reading for meaning or knowing where to pay close attention in order to extract meaning.

This also recalls earlier references (Adams, 1990; Holdaway, 1979) to automaticity. Without a developed schema and knowledge of the language, the child must focus all or nearly all cognitive resources on simply understanding the words.

Anderson (1994) says that:

- Schema enables inferential elaboration. Based on the information that is available, one can infer what is not available. If a child is unable to comprehend the available information, or has difficulty comprehending the complete text this will very likely have an effect on what might possibly be inferred.
- Schema allows orderly searches of memory. By tracing through the schema used to structure the text, the reader is helped to gain access to particular information which was learned.
- Schema facilitates editing and summarizing. The organization of knowledge and structure allows the child to edit and summarize for his/her own purposes after reading.
- Schema permits inferential reconstruction. Missing information can be supplied by testing possibilities and making predictions based on what the reader is able to understand.

To establish such a fully functioning schema in a second language, the child must be exposed to the second-language learning environment for quite some time.

Noonan (1990) found that children at the Grade 3 level were **beginning** to develop a schemata for the French language. Prior to that level, children's oral language development reflects what might be termed a fledgling schemata, single words, phrases, and some routine expressions. It is reasonable to suggest then, that for children in early French immersion, comprehension of written and spoken messages will be limited, and that exploratory talk and concept development might be affected in a limiting way.

Residual difficulties that a child displays in his use of oral language (speech), or listening must be noted. All such children should be considered at risk as soon as their oral language problem has been identified. They should be assessed to determine the nature of inhibiting factors (Holdaway, 1978,p.171).

Certainly, teachers and all those involved with instruction in French immersion consider this fact by adapting their instruction and use of the language so that children have an opportunity to understand and to use their oral language to the best of their ability. This does not change the fact that the students' oral language and listening comprehension is limited. It might be said then that *all* children in early French immersion have residual difficulties with oral language. Consequently, difficulties with reading and writing may be caused by inadequacies in the child's oral language and comprehension of spoken French. Stanovich (1986) stresses the importance of early intervention in detection and remediation of language/reading problems.

Harste, Burke, and Woodward (1994) concluded after a six-year study that children's language exhibits:

- a definite syntactic structure
- sentence structure knowledge

- an understanding of story or text knowledge
- an ability to use picture clues to construct meaning from text and to comprehend stories which have been presented orally
- a developing sense of story chronology indicating that early meaning constructions are chains of related events that reflect a general sense of understanding (Harste, Burke, and Woodward, cited in Ruddell and Rapp-Ruddell, 1994, p. 93).

Background knowledge, combined with word knowledge and the ability to engage in word analysis, allows children to construct meaning from print. The most obviously transferable of these skills to the second language would be the ability to gain meaning from picture clues in texts, and to understand the purpose of stories. In an early French immersion classroom, it is not clear how students compensate for their lack of specific word/language knowledge. Nor is it clear that the strategies used by teachers during instruction such as gesture and visual aids adequately compensate for second-language deficiencies.

Types of language knowledge:

Wells (1987) defines four kinds of literacy:

1. the *performative*, which emphasizes the mastery and decoding and encoding skills;

2. the *functional*, which refers to using the code in practical ways such as filling out forms and reading signs;
3. the *informational*, where the focus is on reading for information, and;
4. the *epistemic*, which goes beyond the actual text to emphasize “creativity, exploration and critical evaluation” (p.110).

The third and fourth of these, the informational and the epistemic, are those which require the greatest degree of language knowledge and understanding. Without language knowledge, it is debatable whether or not children can achieve their full potential in areas of the program which demand an ability to focus on information, and to relay that information by speaking or writing. In terms of epistemic literacy, expressing one's thoughts or going beyond is next to impossible without a level of language proficiency which allows this. If basic, simplified vocabulary and grammatical structures are used, surface exploration of the epistemic elements of texts will be achieved at best. From the point of view of intellectual development therefore, what is important about reading and writing is not so much the communication of information, as the possibility of developing ways of using language as an intentionally controlled tool for thinking and feeling. “Worlds of experience, whether real or imaginary, which are created through words, may be apprehended, explored and connected through speech as well as through print” (Wells, 1987, cited in Yeoman, 1994, p.28).

Much of the child's language development prior to reaching school age and afterwards results from extensive encounters with narrative reading and discussions with significant adults in the child's life (Friedberg & Strong, 1989; Sulzby, 1994). During these encounters with print and through discussions, the child is likely to hear new words. Sometimes these new words represent a concept well-known to the child. In such cases, the child must assimilate the new term with the old concept. In the early French immersion setting, all words will be new (at the initial stages particularly). This process of assimilating new words with old concepts may be affected.

When initiating children to their second-language environment, teachers often show children what they mean by bringing the child to the area that is being described, or by pointing to objects, or using gestures, facial expressions, and other means to help the child understand. In this way, it is hoped that the child's receptive knowledge of the language will be developed as far as listening and comprehension are concerned. This method is successful to a degree, but does have limitations.

Weber and Tardif's (1991) study revealed that children in one kindergarten French immersion class understood what was being said in a global sense, indeed much as a very young child initially understands his/her first language.

Among the findings described by Weber and Tardif (1991) are:

- children's sense-making often focused on the organization of classroom time, or specific classroom contexts (i.e. "C'est le temps d'aller dehors," might mean to children that "it's time to get dressed," or "it's time to go home," depending on the time of day it is).
- the questions associated with classroom routines (i.e. "Quel temps fait-il?") might elicit an appropriate response suggesting sun or rain, but the question itself is not easily defined by the children. The teacher's response to learning that children did not know exactly what the words meant was one of some surprise.
- many children displayed a growing awareness of the meaning of specific words and demonstrated that their sense-making involved "latching on" to single words as meaning makers for whole sentences.
- there was evidence of the development of an interlanguage, where children incorporated French words into their English language conversations with their teacher and peers.

The findings of Weber and Tardif (1991) confirm many of the positive attributes of the early French immersion environment, one of them being that children are showing signs of learning their second language. The observation that children rely heavily on context to extract meaning is not one that helps to alleviate concerns about children's ability to develop epistemic literacy (Wells, 1987), and to enhance concept development. The sense-making observed by Weber and Tardif was mainly limited to classroom routines, weather, and other concrete topics.

It was unclear from Weber and Tardif's (1991) descriptions of classroom procedures how the teacher responded to children's needs with regard to learning, sharing, and thinking about others. Similarly, how children expressed their thoughts

and feelings, other than in response to the teacher's questions, was not fully addressed. For example, there was no mention of how the teacher facilitated learning when observing the children at play in centres, or when staging science experiments and the like. Tardif and Weber did point out that meaning was "continually being interpreted and negotiated within the social context of the classroom, between individual children and the teacher, between small groups of children, and among the larger group" (Weber & Tardif, 1991, p. 105). This comment was not clarified with regard to the 'meaning' which was being negotiated and interpreted, the meaning of concepts, or the meaning of the second language. Very often, in French immersion classrooms, it is necessary for students and teachers to spend a significant amount of time negotiating the meaning of basic instructions and routines, because specific vocabulary has not been acquired.

The interlanguage in French immersion

The term "interlanguage" often describes the type of French spoken by children in French immersion. This term refers to students' use of English language structures in French, or the insertion of English language vocabulary when they cannot remember or do not know the French equivalent. Such interlanguage is

common among bilingual learners, with the first language clearly dominant at the early stages of second-language development. The persistent dominance of first language structures in French immersion is cause for some concern however, as Lyster (1987) points out. He believes that without some form of intervention to correct the interlanguage, the problem will not be eliminated simply through exposure to the language. Kirschner and Stevens (1987) call the interlanguage evident in bilingual learner's communication a linguistic reality of "code-switching," or a transition made between the codes available. They see this ability as one of the benefits of being bilingual because it allows access to more than one code. Children have also been found to imitate the language of adults and create their own when they do not have the conventional words to communicate (Morrow, 1993), allowing them access to yet another code. It would seem that children's abilities to adapt and create codes is a language strength that may not have been exploited fully in French immersion to date. It is possible that with an increased awareness of what makes up certain codes, children might be able to use them more effectively.

Selinker (1983) defines interlanguage as an individual linguistic system created by learners as a result of five cognitive processes:

- interference from native language.
- effect of instructional approach (the approach, rules for language use provided by teacher, classroom activities).

- overgeneralization of target rules.
- strategies involved in second-language learning (such as memorization, use of formal rules, guessing in context).
- strategies involved in second-language communication (use of gestures) appeal for assistance from a conversational partner.

Corder (1983) prefers to describe the use of first language in second-language learning as 'borrowing', or transfer. In fact, he says, "usage of the mother tongue carries no sense of an inhibiting process at work as the term (interference) implies. What interference is now most often used to mean is no more than the presence of mother-tongue like features in the learner's performance in the target language" (p. 87).

Corder (1983) insists that previous knowledge and skills are intimately involved in the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. Language acquisition, he says, is a process of elaborating the basic grammar [evident at the initial stages of language learning] in the direction of the target language. "The mother tongue comes in to act as a heuristic tool in the discovery of formal properties of the new language, facilitating especially the learning of those features which resemble features in the mother tongue" (p. 95). Children can easily make mistakes with this strategy if they are not helped to recognize *when* this rule is applicable. For example, children may hear the word 'fatigue' in French, and think that it means

'fat', or some derivative thereof, when it really means 'tired'. Duchesne (1995), suggests that:

...le dynamisme observé dans l'évolution de l'interlangue permet de croire qu'une action pédagogique planifiée serait susceptible de contribuer positivement au développement linguistique des élèves (p. 527).

The dynamics observed in the evolution of the interlanguage in French immersion lead one to believe that planned teaching strategies [regarding the second language component of French immersion] would likely make a positive contribution to students' linguistic development [my translation].

Carey 1974, (cited in Rapp-Ruddell, 1994) studied young children's word learning and found that a single or very few encounters with new words allow children to enter the words into a mental lexicon and to represent at least some of the word's syntactic and semantic features. Carey called this "fast-mapping" and suggested that extended experience must follow fast-mapping for learning to be complete.

Duchesne (1995) observes that, "Comme l'acquisition de ce code (de la langue seconde) ne semble pas se faire aussi naturellement qu'on le croyait, il faut penser à l'enseigner" (p.528).

Since the acquisition of this code [of the second language] does not appear to occur as naturally as was previously believed, it must be taught [my translation].

Instead of suggesting a rigid program of formal language instruction, he suggests that there is a way to increase students' metalinguistic awareness by "l'aménagement de périodes de discussions ouvertes régulières sur le sujet, accompagnées parfois d'activités plaisantes telles que chansons, jeux, saynètes, etc." (p.527).

By regularly discussing the subject [of metalinguistic awareness] with students, accompanying these discussions with pleasant activities like songs, games, skits etc., one can increase students awareness of how the language works [my translation].

Duchesne (1995) concludes his analysis of the interlanguage of immersion students with comments on the implications for instruction which arise from his research:

Les implications pédagogiques vont dans le sens d'éviter de perdre du temps à expliquer ces structures aux élèves plus jeunes et de se limiter à développer des automatismes en utilisant les aides mnémoniques disponibles et ce, dès les tous premiers contacts avec la langue française" (p. 528).

The pedagogical implications [of these findings] are that it would be wise to avoid explanations of grammatical structures for young children, and to limit ourselves to developing automaticity with the language by using mnemonic aids [like those mentioned

above], and to begin doing so as soon as the child first comes in contact with the language [my translation].

Following Duchesne's (1995) advice may prove effective in providing children with opportunities to speak and understand French in *certain* situations at the earliest stages of French immersion. However, memorized rhymes or language routines will not sufficiently allow children to express themselves, or to comprehend in situations which require more specific and perhaps abstract uses of the language levels. The structures identified in Duchesne's study as most lacking in the language spoken by French immersion students were those which are required in such situations. He states:

Il est certain que les structures linguistiques identifiées et classées dans la présente investigation sont celles dont les élèves ont le plus besoin pour transmettre les messages qui leur tiennent à coeur. Un enseignement précoce et créatif centré sur ces structures pourrait accélérer le développement de leurs compétences linguistiques (Duchesne, 1995, p.529).

It is certain that the linguistic structures which have been identified and classified in the present study, are those which children need most in order to express their most heartfelt messages. Early and creative teaching methods which focus on helping children learn these structures would help accelerate their linguistic competence [my translation].

Even taking this into consideration, it is likely that no matter how quickly children develop linguistic competence, there will be a gap in their expressive language, and in what they are able to comprehend. Having identified which situations are most limiting for children in terms of self-expression leads one to reflect upon a number of very important questions. While waiting for this linguistic competence to develop, can it be considered pedagogically and ethically sound practice to respond to children's 'heartfelt' messages in French when they are expressed in English (as might be the case in Kindergarten and early Grade 1)? By doing so, is the teacher behaving in a manner which indicates a knowledge and understanding of developmentally appropriate practice? What takes the place of talking with children about stories they understand, experiences that come from their own lives, and discussions which evolve from children's questions and observations? There is at least some reason to believe that using the child's native language may enhance the development of concepts, and contribute to the child's developing sense of self, especially at the earliest stages of formal schooling when so much is new to the child. Several researchers discuss the role of native language in second language learning. Their theories are integrated with this discussion of French immersion pedagogy, how well children actually understand the language, and are able to learn in that language.

The role of native language in second-language learning

Guiora (1990) highlights the importance of considering the native language of second-language learners. Pointing to the significance of gender in certain languages (French being one of them), he brings new insight to the difficulties inherent in attempting to separate the form from the message. Gender being just one attribute of language which acts as a carrier of meaning, he states that "not having the internal schema that obligatorily divides the universe, animate and inanimate, into male and female categories, these learners do not feel the need to make these distinctions, do not have a "feel" for them, and will wander, if you will, into uncharted linguistic territories" (p. 13).

Guiora (1990) also discusses aspects of language which designate time. He refers to terms such as "I was, I will be, j'étais, je serai, je suis," all of which transmit meaning through their form."

Can one say that these tense markers are nothing but grammatical forms that have no connection with the way we describe, conceptualize, and experience events and processes in and around us? Can one say that internalization of formal categories, imposing an obligatory segmentation of experience will have no effect on the

emergence of evolving, interweaving developmental templates, that it will leave no mark on the overall cognitive/affective schema? It is doubtful (p. 13).

Bransford (1994) argues that "activation of appropriate knowledge is not only useful, it is a fundamental aspect of comprehending and remembering." It must, therefore, become a fundamental aspect of teaching, following this logic. Bransford believes that there are two important consequences of activities that enable a learner to understand the significance or relevance of new factual content. These consequences are:

- that people who understand the significance of facts develop knowledge of structures that help them deal with novel situations.
- activities that enable people to understand the significance of new factual content also facilitate memory. Facts that initially seemed arbitrary and confusing become meaningful. The information is, therefore much easier to retain (Bransford, 1994, p. 487).

Background and other knowledge: influences on second-language learning

Bialystok (1988) examines the role of "other knowledge" in second-language learning. She describes this knowledge as all the knowledge of the learner which is not specifically relevant to the target language. Included in this category are:

- knowledge of other languages (i.e. language knowledge)
- knowledge of the world (i.e. conceptual knowledge)
- knowledge of the specific situation (i.e. contextual knowledge) (p. 42).

Bialystok says that the extent to which this other knowledge is implicated in language performance varies as a function of the type of language task. Specifically, she points out, tasks which are more communicative and occur in a known context permit the learner to rely more heavily on other knowledge than do tasks which are more abstract. This might have important implications for the kinds of activities which can be effectively carried out in French in the early French immersion classroom. If teachers and educators know that certain types of learning rely heavily on language knowledge, what is the rationale for insisting that they be carried out in French, regardless of the degree to which children understand them? In a French immersion classroom, putting language into a meaningful context means relating it to the language and experiences of the child.

Bialystok (1981) discusses formal and functional uses of language and the development of implicit and explicit knowledge. The implicit knowledge source is a working system containing unanalyzed information about the language, that which is automatically understood. When implicit knowledge exists, ideas are formulated and expressed in a relatively automatic fashion. The fluency that results from this

automatic process, Bialystok says, is essential to preserve the social aspects of conversation. This differs from explicit knowledge in that:

Explicit language contains an analyzed set of features which can be articulated and examined. The entry into implicit knowledge is more restricted [than the entry to explicit knowledge]. Since the system is analyzed, then all the information must be conscious and understood at the time of learning (p. 65).

Implicit knowledge of the second language is virtually non-existent when children come to early French immersion programs. However, by speaking to them in French 100% of the time from the beginning of kindergarten, teachers behave as if there were implicit knowledge. The same is true when young second-language learners are asked to keep journals, or to attempt creative writing projects without at least some degree of automaticity in the language.

Observing children: how they use language :

Hood (1986) stresses the importance of "kidwatching" as a strategy in helping prevent the fossilization of incorrect structures when young children are involved in the second-language learning process. She describes her observations of students in a bilingual classroom, and notes the apparent dominance of first language structure in Spanish speaking learners of English as a second language. Her aim was to assess the development of the children she observed in ways other than with

traditional assessments on written tests of knowledge. She found that the young language learners in her classroom knew a great deal about language use. The child she focused on, Alberto, spoke only Spanish to his family, as they spoke no English. Alberto was speaking only English at school, and had therefore assigned roles for his languages, Spanish at school and English at home. This observation suggests that, contrary to the notion that children must perceive the French immersion teacher as a unilingual model in order to speak French, children might be able to switch uses of language when it is appropriate, and more importantly, **when** they are able to do what is expected of them.

French immersion children were observed during the course of this case study as being selective in their use of French and English. Their response to some interview questions indicated that they were aware of the need to speak French at school, and the need or desire to speak English at home. As time spent in immersion increases, children usually speak only French with their teacher, French with their classmates inside the classroom, and English with their classmates and other school friends during play, and in corridors.

The natural language for children to use during play is the first language. Automaticity (Adams, 1990) in spoken language would allow full attention to the important 'work' of the child, just as automaticity in word recognition and meaning allows the child to become fully engaged in the text to be read. The imaginative,

descriptive, collaborative nature of play in young children "You be the enchanted princess, and I'll be the wicked witch," could not possibly be achieved without a certain level of automaticity in spoken language. It is common practice for Kindergarten children to speak English nearly all year long in French immersion. However, the expectation that children speak to each other in French exists long before children have outgrown the need and desire to engage in such imaginative play. A teacher's role as facilitator and guide for children during such imaginative play is problematic in French immersion if the teacher must speak French at all times. For the child's knowledge and awareness to be extended, or for the teacher to recognize the child's "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978), there must be some exchange in a language that both can understand. Wells (1986), Halliday (1994) and Vygotsky (1978) insist that such exchanges are crucial to the appropriate development of knowledge and understanding for young children. The schemata, or knowledge of language that the children have developed in French is an important factor in determining or guiding such communication in the classroom.

Second-language schemata :

Bransford (1994) says that a partial schemata may be sufficient for some types of understanding and not for others. A pre-existing schemata may affect

interpretations of texts by both teachers and students. Bransford also states that new facts can seem arbitrary unless they are precisely elaborated in a way that clarifies their significance or relevance. When new facts are not elaborated, he says, or are imprecisely elaborated, they are difficult to remember and are not available for future use as a result. This may result in children not retaining important information and important concepts. Elaboration and precision appear to be critical to comprehension. As Wells (1986) suggests, by engaging in dialogue, the teacher and child work together to elaborate and clarify information effectively, mutually verifying comprehension.

This is true for oral language exchanges, and also when students are attempting to write and read independently. It is much more difficult for the language facilitator (i.e. the teacher) to intervene with the same kind of immediate attention that is possible in conversation. The teacher may be able to fill in gaps in a child's second language schemata during conversations, but obviously cannot do this when the child is attempting to read a text or write a story independently. Prior knowledge of content will undoubtedly help children understand the content of a story or lesson. Without an understanding of the **words** in that story, however, comprehension of concepts may be very limited. Without knowledge of the language to express what s/he wants to say, the child's writing expression is hampered. Neither of these cases

provides the child with the optimum situation for learning, nor do they seem to be beneficial to second language acquisition.

Rivers (1974) found that second-language students tended to be controlled by the task of writing itself, and were not able to achieve and sustain self-regulation by using language to control the task. First language writers, comparatively, were able to decide themselves what they *wanted* to write, and were not limited by what they *could* write. In River's discussion of second-language narrations, he suggests that writers found the task much more difficult than a similar task in the first language. "Thus, in an attempt to gain self-regulation, they write to instruct themselves in the task, rather than to relate the narration to some audience." Can this be described as the most purposeful and meaningful use of writing? Without an adequate vocabulary and knowledge of sentence structure to express one's ideas, the process of writing, as Rivers says, "becomes a process of instruction and not communication." There are a number of strategies which are currently used by teachers in early French immersion with varying degrees of success. However, there is little in the way of second-language 'strategy literature' which satisfactorily answers the question of how to teach all content and concepts through the second language. This section focuses on some strategies which are suggested for second-language teaching, and, where appropriate, brings attention to the practical reality of what is missing from each for teaching concepts and content.

Strategies used in second-language teaching and learning :

Instructional conversation (Gallimore, 1992) involves encouraging a thematic focus for discussion and activities by using or providing background knowledge throughout by:

- direct teaching as necessary
- promoting more complex language and expression by students
- promoting bases for statements or positions
- fostering a challenging risk-taking environment
- minimizing known answer questions in the course of discussions.

During instructional conversations, teachers look for what children offer as clues to their comprehension and use them as "hooks" to guide children towards further understanding (Gallimore, 1992, p. 214). When children use their first language to verify the meaning of words or expressions in the second language, teachers can use those hooks to pull children towards competence in the French language, and at the same time gain a sense of how well children are comprehending.

Freeman and Freeman (1992) suggest that "second-language teachers know that the greater the contextual support provided by objects and actions, the lower the necessity for students to rely on their new language itself" (p. 25). Observations of immersion classrooms in this study confirm that teachers and students depend on

context in many situations as a means of understanding, and of communicating messages. There may be an excessive reliance on context. Context is *one* element of comprehension. Without language comprehension, inaccuracies can result. Freeman and Freeman suggest that to avoid this, teachers of second-language students may use the student's first language to provide contextual support for the second language. Using a method called "preview, view and review," teachers will discuss the topic at hand with students in their first language, to ensure that they have the big picture. This helps them understand the "view" which is the instruction in the second language. Finally, the teacher may provide additional context for the lesson by reviewing the main concepts again in the first language.

In order to construct interpretations of language, an individual must refer to his/her own knowledge of what is heard or read. Without that knowledge or means of "connecting" the message with personal experience, there may be some degree of confusion. French immersion teachers have developed expertise in anticipating problems children might have, and make efforts to compensate for language difficulties. This is often done by presenting unknown vocabulary prior to teaching the lesson, or by referring to previous lessons which will help the child draw on prior knowledge in French. However, it appears that, without the kind of exchange which allows a child to question his understanding and to verify predictions, there is a danger that comprehension and concept learning are affected.

In the past, considerable time and effort have been expended in French immersion classrooms trying to make texts "fit" the instructional level of students whose knowledge of French is limited, or at the initial stages, practically non-existent. Making the 'input' comprehensible (Krashen, 1989), is not always a simple or feasible endeavour. This is particularly true of children's literature, informational texts, and in subject areas where content and background schemata are critical to comprehension. The dilemma for teachers and students is whether or not a lesson is truly meaningful when such a high degree of concentration is required simply to understand the lexicon.

Conclusion of literature review:

The theories which have been examined and discussed in this literature review support and help to clarify a number of aspects of this thesis study. Most significantly, with knowledge of the circumstances in which children are most likely to achieve maximum levels of comprehension and language development, the reader is able to understand the rationale for exploring how well children actually understand the French which is used in the classroom. Which situations appear to lend themselves to total instruction in the second language? An awareness of how children's language and literacy development occurs, or ought to occur during the early years puts the thesis questions into the desired perspective.

Certainly, as children progress through French immersion, their language develops. So does the level of difficulty in texts and concepts which students encounter. Is the level of language development in French sufficient to explore concepts adequately and to develop a child's knowledge and critical thinking? The principles of developmentally appropriate practice in early French immersion demand that children be assured of this possibility. The following chapter describes the design and methodology of the study undertaken. After a lengthy period of reflection on teaching practices in early French immersion, child development theories, second-language learning theories and ideals, the study was initiated.

CHAPTER 3

Design of Study :

The guiding questions of this thesis are neither straightforward, nor precise in nature. There are no simple, one-step answers to such questions. Any exploration of children's conceptual development and understanding requires more than testing to see whether or not they can identify flash cards or whether they can repeat songs and vocabulary. It also requires more than observation to determine if children are able to follow routines and general classroom instructions. To extend my own knowledge and perceptions of how children develop and learn through a second language, it was necessary to go beyond where personal experience and classroom teaching had taken me. "A research activity is something that people *do*, and as such is only made intelligible by reference to the overall purpose for which it is undertaken" (Carr and Kemmis, p.107). One of the main purposes of this study is to determine whether my concerns regarding children's conceptual development through the use of the second language are well-founded. If, indeed, there is reason to be concerned, what can be done about it?

At the outset, then, it is important to recognize that since it is the investigation of educational problems that provides educational research with whatever unity or coherence it may have, the testing ground for educational research is not its theoretical sophistication or its ability to conform to criteria derived from the social sciences, but rather its capacity to resolve educational problems and improve educational practice" (Carr and Kemmis, p.109).

The objects of action research, as described by Carr and Kemmis (1993), are teachers' own educational practices, their understandings of these practices, and the situations in which they practice (p.180) This ideally describes **why** I wanted to do this study, and **what** I hoped to achieve.

Qualitative methods of research, and the process of analysis which typically accompanies such research, guide the design of this study. There are elements of action research and personal narrative included, and these fit easily and appropriately into the overall design. Each component of the study is described in this chapter, the rationale for choosing each data collection method is described, as well as the intended purpose of each method. "Students who combine methods will have to cross borders and risk being defined as illegal aliens, and transgress the hedgerows that define and protect traditional interests and practices." (Mishler, 1991a, cited in Reissman, p.102). This task was not undertaken lightly, or without

trepidation. I felt very strongly that such a study was necessary, and could make a positive contribution to developing pedagogy in French immersion which is soundly based on what is best for children.

Selection of the study site:

Rossmann and Marshall (1995) describe the ideal study site as one where:

1. entry is possible;
2. there is a high probability that a rich mix of the processes, people, programs, interactions, and structures of interest are present;
3. the researcher is likely to be able to build trusting relations with the participants in the study;
4. data quality and credibility of the study are reasonably assured (p.51).

In carrying out the study, I was fortunate to have access to a site which offered all of the above, and the support of parents, teachers and administrators involved with the school in carrying out the study. The population of students at the school is such that I did not have to limit my invitation to participate in the study. Letters were sent to all parents explaining what I planned to do, upon receiving their permission to carry out the study. As a result, parents and children themselves created the sample for student interviews; those who agreed to be interviewed were

interviewed. Responses from more than 50% of the student population create the data derived from this portion of the study.

The study took place in a two stream urban school which has a population of approximately 400 students. The site was chosen because it offers an early French immersion program to children from Kindergarten through Grade 6, and it was possible to visit the classrooms to observe daily routines at each of the targeted grade levels. I concentrated my research on children at the earliest stages of French immersion (Kindergarten through Grade 3) for several reasons. Although I have taught French as a second language in a variety of situations, all of my experience teaching in French immersion has been with children at these levels. I felt that my experience would be an asset during classroom observation, allowing me to differentiate between usual and unusual occurrences. Researchers who may not be familiar with the primary school setting would probably need to spend extended periods of time in the field to get a 'sense' of the daily routine. With a scheduled amount of time available in each classroom, this was the ideal site at which to begin my case study.

A qualitative case study can be described as an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit. Case studies are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic, and rely heavily on inductive reasoning in handling multiple data sources (Merriam, 1988, p.16).

This case study focuses on students and teachers at the kindergarten and primary levels of one early French immersion school. The analysis of the data also relies on my knowledge of French immersion practices, goals and programs.

Description of study site

Most students enrolled in French immersion at the study site are from two-parent families, either with both parents working or with one parent at home as the primary care-giver. There are a number of children at the school who are enrolled in English second-language classes, and who attend classes in the English program. The majority of parents at the school who responded to a background information questionnaire said they had enrolled their children in the French immersion program to offer them challenge and opportunity. A number of parents also said they felt it was important for their children to be bilingual in both of Canada's official languages. The language environment at the school is primarily English language, with most messages, posters, and print being in English. Most visitors to the school speak English during assemblies and presentations. Most parents of the children in the French immersion program use English as their language of communication, although there are several who speak French.

Methodology

Many qualitative studies combine several data collection methods over the course of the study. Limitations in one method can then be compensated for by the strengths of a complementary one (Rossman and Marshall, 1995 p.99). The data collection methods used in this study include:

- observation in the classroom setting, with the researcher acting as a participant observer
- interviews with students at each of the four grade levels
- questionnaires completed by each of the four participating teachers
- interviews with each of the four participating teachers

Procedure

Prior to beginning the study, it was necessary to obtain written permission from school board officials and school administrators to gain access to the school, and to contact those who would later be directly involved in the study (see Appendix A). Once this permission had been obtained, letters were written to teachers and parents requesting their participation in the study. Signed permission forms from parents or guardians indicating that they would allow observation of their children for the designated period of the study, and that children were permitted to participate in an interview were collected (see Appendix A). Teachers also returned forms or

responded verbally to the researcher's request for involvement. With permission to proceed, schedules were arranged for classroom observation periods.

Observation

My purpose in completing this study was to extend my knowledge and experience, and to determine whether or not there is cause for concern with regard to children's conceptual development in French immersion. Most current research in the field of French immersion does not focus on this aspect of children's development in the school setting. My initial instinct was to go where the reality of French immersion teaching and learning existed, to a primary school which offered an early immersion program. I felt that the opportunity to observe children in the school setting, without being the 'director' of their experiences (as is usually the case for the classroom teacher), would allow me to 'see' what I might have missed when teaching. As described by Merriam (1988), participant observation was an important part of the data collection process in my case study research.

Observation periods

A period of one week was spent in each of the four classes, beginning with kindergarten. The study took place over a six week period, beginning mid-May, 1995 and finishing June, 1995. The observation period in each classroom focused on general interactions and language use during the activities which occurred.

Observation data was recorded, and field notes were later analyzed to determine relevance to the thesis questions.

Inductive analysis begins with empirical observations and builds theoretical categories instead of sorting data pieces deductively into pre-established classes.

The units of analysis or data segments are not predetermined but are carved out from the data according to their meaning” (Tesch, 1990, p.90).

The absence of certain types of activities or discussions during classroom routines were also recorded. For example, children were not involved in dialogue with their teachers unless the language was very specific. Similarly, no instances were observed when a spontaneous discussion about a subject arose as a result of a student’s comment or involvement with a story.

The observation data provided very useful information about the learning setting. It allowed me to see how the children use second-language knowledge in different ways as they progress through the program, and to see how language development evolves. The time spent in each classroom gave me the opportunity to know the children by name, perhaps putting them more at ease during the interview sessions which followed.

Student interviews

I felt that interviews with students would allow me to ask children questions about their experience in French immersion. As a teacher, I had previously had little opportunity to engage children in conversation in French regarding their personal feelings about school. Such conversations had never occurred naturally. Because of the required emphasis on speaking French at all times, I had never felt comfortable having long conversations in English with the children. The interview sessions allowed me to ask children questions I had wanted to ask for some time.

Permission requests were sent home to parents via their children, having been distributed by the classroom teacher. Of approximately one hundred and twenty children enrolled in the primary French immersion program at the study site, a total of ninety parents gave permission allowing children to be interviewed. This response may be considered very positive. Interviews took place towards the end of each week-long observation period. At the time of interviewing, there were a number of children who were away on holiday, or not at school. Children were not coerced in any way to comply with the request to be interviewed. If a parent had given permission, and the child later chose not to be interviewed, the child's choice was accepted without question. Forty-eight children were interviewed (of the total number of children whose parents had given permission to participate). Nineteen

children from kindergarten, fifteen from Grade 1, nineteen from Grade 2, and fourteen from Grade 3 participated in the interviewing process.

Interviewing technique and procedure

Interviews with children took place outside the classroom. Each child accompanied me to a place that was available and relatively quiet within the school setting. Although interviews in qualitative research may be conducted without adhering to any list or predetermined pattern of questioning, I decided to conduct the interviews with the children by using the prepared questions (see Appendix B) with all students for three important reasons:

1. these were questions for which I wanted answers, from the children's point of view;
2. the questions were sufficiently open-ended to allow children the opportunity to add any comments or information they felt necessary ;
3. I felt that by asking children at all levels the same questions, I would also gain insight into how children understood the questions, and how their experience influenced their responses.

A more experienced interviewer might have been able to reword questions for kindergarten children who did not fully understand the intent or meaning of the

question. My initial attempts at re-wording or creating analogies for kindergarten revealed a great deal about how children think (see Chapter 4). However, after one or two attempts at explaining the questions through use of analogy, I allowed children to simply answer questions in the best way they could, or offered simple definitions of words to help understanding. I feared that by providing too much explanation, I might lead the children. Because of my personal involvement with the issue, I wanted to participate in the conversation, but not inadvertently influence the children's point of view.

Children were told that the interviews would be taped so that I would have access to all responses, without having to write them down. Each interview lasted from five to fifteen minutes in duration. Responses were later transcribed in note form, and then categorized according to type of response. The process of categorizing responses resulted in the development of bar graphs to accompany the discussion of student responses.

Student interviews were carried out to supplement data gathered from the observation of students in the classroom setting. During the early phases of the study, it became obvious to me that my observations of children within the classroom were limited by what I could see and hear, influenced by my adult/immersion teacher perspective. As interviews progressed, it became obvious that the student perspective supplemented my classroom observations of how

students' knowledge of French and perceptions of learning that language affected concept development. In particular, students offered insight into the types of strategies they use to understand the language, how they felt about conversation and listening to stories in French, and asking questions and giving answers in dialogue situations.

“In qualitative research, interviews may be used in two ways. They may be the dominant strategy for data collection or they may be employed in conjunction with participant observation, document analysis, or other techniques. In each of these situations, the interview is used to gather descriptive data in the subjects' own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world. (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p.96)

Interviewing process

Students at all four grade levels included in the study were asked a total of nine questions, and encouraged to make comments or ask questions at anytime they wished. I explained that if there was any question they did not wish to answer, or did not understand, they should feel free to let me know. Certain questions were answered more consistently with the same or similar response than others within and across the grade levels. The discussion which accompanies the analysis of

student responses indicates which questions were answered most consistently, and which questions elicited differing points of view.

Categories of responses

Questions used to guide the student interviews were designed to elicit responses about a variety of experiences and situations to which children are exposed in school, particularly in an early French immersion classroom. The questions were open-ended, and served to obtain general information about student perceptions of school and learning in a second-language environment. Other questions related specifically to students' understanding of stories and the language itself, and to strategies children use to express themselves in the French language. All questions are included in Appendix C.

A single category or classification of responses was not suitable for descriptive purposes, nor was it a goal of the research. However, student responses did fall into categories, based on similarity of response. For example, questions 1, 2, and 3 ask students to describe their feelings about school, learning and speaking French. The categorization of responses was done by examining responses, classifying them into positive (i.e. "I love school"), neutral (i.e. "School's O.K.") and negative (i.e. "I hate school") categories. Examples of responses are included in the discussion of each

question to clarify this point. Categories were not pre-defined, but established after students' responses had been transcribed and patterns were identified.

Presentation of student interview responses:

The results of interviews with students are presented in the first section of Chapter 4. Each question is highlighted, followed by a narrative discussion which includes student comments, and references to instances which were observed in the classroom. Because of the number of student responses, and the way in which the responses were categorized, student interview responses are also presented by a bar graph. This clearly indicates which question was asked, how many students were interviewed at each grade level, and what their responses were according to the basic categories. "... every category, every theme, every finding, whatever its form arises from the fact that it exists in the data and as such may be counted even though the researcher may choose not to do so" (Garner, 1991, p.154). Although it is not usual to include bar graphs, and 'quantities' in qualitative research, I decided to do so as a way of organizing the data. The categories arose from the data, as did the descriptions of responses. I found it helpful to have the data organized according to grade level, as I determined that there was a difference in the way children responded, and in what they said. As the discussion of student responses indicates, there is no attempt to suggest that the reader rely only on the bar graphs to evaluate

student responses. In fact, it is made quite clear that the graphs do not tell the whole story.

Garner (1991) description of how she presented data which might **appear** quantitative in a qualitative study helps to further clarify my choice of using bar graphs in this study. Garner's presented data describing children's play styles by using a "rather complex table that presented numerical results about each style category as observed over time"(p.155). She presented frequency counts in order to compare quantitative loadings in play-style categories, as well as consistencies/inconsistencies over observations and contexts. The presentation of data collected from student responses in my study allows a clear view of the numbers of students who have for example, a positive response to learning French, but clarifies such responses very clearly in the accompanying discussion. The numbers of students who gave a particular response lend some meaning to the response, but numbers alone would not have told the same story. Streamlined categories permit the physical organization of the data. However, simply saying **how many** students respond in a particular way is not enough; the narrative analysis of student responses gives a fuller context.

Teacher interviews and questionnaires:

Teachers are an integral part of any educational or instructional program. Their philosophies, opinions, life experiences, and methods of teaching affect program delivery. Teachers' classroom experiences and their interpretations of how language is best learned are important to understanding what happens in a French immersion classroom. Since application of theory is the teacher's responsibility it was important to speak with teachers to gain further understanding of the thesis question.

I also decided to offer teachers the opportunity to complete questionnaires, using a combination of open-ended questions, which included questions designed specifically to obtain information about length of time teaching in French immersion, and total teaching experience. The study took place during a very busy time in the school year. Questionnaires were completed whenever time was available; interviews required that the teacher take time from her day. I felt that the questionnaire format might give teachers a chance to reflect and perhaps offer comments which they might not include during an interview. Because the background questions were straightforward, they were included in the questionnaire.

All teachers responded to a questionnaire (see Appendix B) designed primarily to obtain background information on professional training and educational

background. Questions (for the teacher questionnaire) focused mainly on teacher background and general impressions of the early French immersion environment. Each teacher's responses were used to create a teacher profile, briefly outlining opinions and beliefs, as divulged in the questionnaire. This information was combined with teacher responses to interview questions and presented narratively. The responses are important to the central question of this thesis because teacher attitudes and methodology are directly linked to the type of language experience a child is likely to have in any given classroom.

Each teacher who participated in the study agreed to a short interview, to take place as schedules permitted. Interviews were tape-recorded, and followed questions prepared in advance. The interview was guided by a number of open-ended questions which were designed to elicit teacher opinion and response, based on teachers' own experiences in French immersion. (See Appendix D for a list of questions.) The exchange with teachers was informal, and they were encouraged to make comments and add information. The purpose of the interview was to encourage teachers to elaborate on their feelings and perceptions of the early French immersion program. Following each interview, tape recordings were transcribed into written form. Following the analysis of teacher comments in their entirety, a summary of those comments, including direct quotes, was prepared.

The purpose of collecting data through teacher questionnaires and interviews was to gain further insight into the background and opinions of teachers involved in teaching in the early French immersion program. I wanted to know if teachers were satisfied with current programs being offered in French immersion, and where they might see changes being made, if they felt any changes were necessary. I felt that it was essential to include the teacher's perspective on the types of learning experiences which take place in their classrooms.

Limitations of the study

Ideally, this study would have been carried out over a longer period of time, allowing a more in-depth period of observation in each classroom. The observation period reflected the busy reality of school days, as students and teachers prepared for a spring concert. There were many opportunities to see teachers and students interacting, but daily routines had obviously changed during this time. As this was the only term of the year when I was not working full-time, this was the only opportunity I would have to observe in a classroom setting other than as full-time teacher.

Although my involvement as a French immersion teacher is an asset to conducting research in that field, it may also affect the responses given to me by teachers and students. An independent researcher with a different background and

experience might receive a different response from interviewees and might present the questions from yet another perspective than I.

Strengths of the study:

The study offers a substantial amount of information about learning in an early French immersion setting, which comes directly from the children participating in the program. Their perceptions and suggestions might provide invaluable guidance to educators when assessing programs. Students are not usually the first to be consulted about their education, and in fact are often last. This study shows that they have some definite ideas about how the process should be undertaken, particularly as they get older.

I have knowledge of French immersion programs, and the ability to speak French and communicate easily with children and teachers involved with the program. This enhanced ease of access to the study site, and also the ability to fit in with classroom activities during the observation period.

It is important that theory and practice be examined regularly, by all who are involved in education. The questions in this thesis have not been asked before, or in this manner. My study makes a contribution to the field of primary education, and early French immersion, by examining the realities of theory and practice from a number of perspectives.

The design of the study may easily be modified or transferred to another like setting to explore the same or similar questions. This is particularly important for teacher/practitioners who may lack the confidence to question existing theories, and methods of research, or for those who may wish to challenge or extend the findings of this study.

Summary of Chapter 3

This chapter outlines the methodology undertaken for completion of this thesis. It presents the rationale for the qualitative methods chosen to carry out the research, and identifies elements of the study which might initially appear to deviate from the boundaries of traditional qualitative research. The choice of data collection instruments is justified and explained, as is the purpose for which each data collection method was chosen. Most importantly, the purpose for having undertaken the research study is defined in this chapter. This statement of purpose gives meaning to the research process, and justifies the methods used to explore complicated questions relating to language and conceptual development. The challenges which face French immersion teachers and students are many, as are the joys of learning and assisting the learning of others. The following chapter presents the findings of the study, and offers insight and information into the early French

immersion setting. This insight and information will encourage reflection upon existing practices in second language instruction.

CHAPTER 4

Introduction:

In the previous chapter, I explained the choice of data sources, and the data collection and analysis procedures in some detail. "For the social scientist or researcher in applied fields, research is a process of trying to gain a better understanding of the complexities of human interactions" (Marshall and Rossman, 1995, p. 15). Qualitative methods of analysis have been used to help create a view of the early French immersion class, and of how children interact, learn, and understand in that environment. Marshall and Rossman advise that a comprehensive qualitative study will include data from a variety of sources. Their guidelines for beginning qualitative research, which is exploratory in nature, suggest the use of interviews, questionnaires, and observation. For example, interviews can complement and clarify observations which might be made during visits to a particular site. Questionnaires can elicit a type of information different from that of interviews, and give the respondent an opportunity to reflect privately on questions being asked. Inclusion in this chapter of data from all of these sources in this chapter allows a comprehensive view of one early French immersion setting.

In addition to the outcomes, [when writing a final version] we want to integrate into our discussion relevant information about other research

studies, if available, to give a broader context to our work” (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p.160).

For this reason, there are occasional references to literature which may or may not be included in the literature review. Such references aid in the analysis of data.

This chapter presents the results of the thesis study in the following sequence and manner:

Student interviews and observation data:

Student interview responses are discussed in narrative format, using relevant observation data to clarify, explain, and illustrate points that the students made. Sample comments are included from each of the grade levels where appropriate. The bar graph which follows the discussion serves to illustrate clearly the numbers of students who were interviewed, and to clearly indicate in which categories their responses were placed. It is important to recall the purpose of this illustration, and not to interpret the graph as attempting to portray the results in a quantitative manner. Responses as they appear in the bar graphs are not meant to be viewed without reading the accompanying text. The bar graphs are meant to complement, and add to the overall ‘story’ which is created with text and pictures, just as a child’s story might. The bar graphs immediately follow the discussion which accompanies each question/response section of this chapter.

Teacher questionnaires and interviews:

Responses to the teacher questionnaire provide background information, which helps to create a profile of each of the four teachers who participated in this study. This information is combined with the data collected during each teacher's interview, and is presented in narrative format. Personal experience in the field of French immersion education is also used to clarify or support information obtained through the data collection methods above.

Student interviews/observation data:

Question 1: What are your impressions/thoughts about school?

Question 2: How do you feel about learning French?

Student responses to these questions were generally very positive. Grade 3 students' responses may initially appear to be somewhat less so (see Figure 1). This shows the beginning of a pattern which developed, showing Grade 3 students to be much more specific in their responses than students at other grade levels. Instead of offering responses like "I love it." Grade 3 students were much more likely to specify which subject areas they liked, or to qualify their responses. One boy said,

for example, that he "liked school sometimes, and sometimes I prefer to be at home. It depends what's going on at school, and what's going on at home. If there's nothing going on at home, I like it here." Such a response was categorized as neutral.

When asked how they felt about learning French, students responded that they enjoyed learning French, and made comments similar to those given for Question 1. Most liked the idea of learning a second language and a number of children said learning French was "fun." These responses are illustrated by the first of a series of bar graph figures.

Figure 1

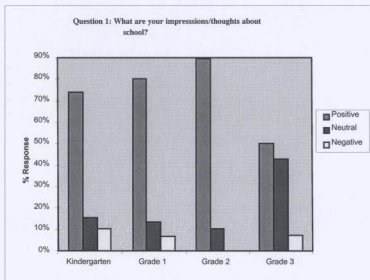
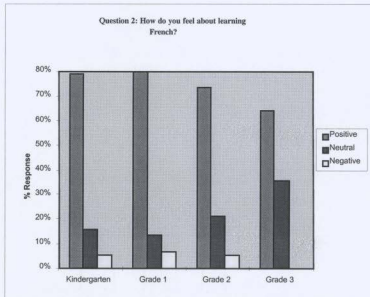


Figure 2:



Question 3a: Do you enjoy speaking French?

Question 3b: Do you find speaking French easy or difficult?

Question 3 was asked in two parts. Children were asked if they enjoyed learning French, and they responded positively for the most part. A number of children in kindergarten were careful to point out that they enjoyed French, but they

"didn't know much French." Kindergarten children seemed to feel very much at ease with the idea of using French or English, but were observed to speak English nearly all of the time with each other, and with their teacher.

Grade One students typically responded to this question by saying that they enjoyed learning and speaking French, but were not always able to say everything in French. One child pointed out, for example, that she liked French because "It's a French class, and we're supposed to speak French." Another child said, "Sometimes I know the French words, and I always know the words in English. I would pick English because I might get stuck in French." Another child responded by saying, "We're supposed to speak French when we're playing on the carpet, but if you don't speak French, you have to go back to your seat. And sometimes I don't know how to say the things in French." Duchesne (1995) found a similar type of response from a Grade One student who refused to speak French at the school where his study took place:

Cause I'm trying to talk French, but I can't. Maybe when I'm in Grade Two I could talk more French, but I can't talk cause she (the teacher) doesn't tell us no French. She ... she talks in French but she doesn't teach us no French (p. 528).

In immersion classrooms, it appears that discovery is often limited to learning new words in French, or engaging in 'hands-on' type activities. Discovery does not stem from discussion and observation.

In immersion classrooms, children learn an academic second language; they learn for example, how to read/discuss geography, how to do math, how to read science in the second language. Their input from the teacher focuses almost exclusively on the business of the classroom. While the teacher may occasionally nominate other topics (play, hobbies, etc.), these topics are not usually dealt with in depth (Tarone & Swain, 1994).

Unlike the students interviewed in Grades 2 and 3, Grade 1 students seemed to be unable to do what they felt was expected of them. Grade 2 and 3 students, for the most part, seemed to have acquired enough French language skills to cope with classroom demands and expectations.

Question 3b asked children if they found learning French easy or difficult. Some kindergarten children needed an explanation for the words easy and difficult. A number of children initially said they found learning French to be easy. When I asked them to tell me which words they found easy, they said "Bonjour" is easy. When asked if they knew any other easy words, most said they only knew a few words of French. The majority of children said they found some words easy and

some words hard, but had difficulty when asked if they could give examples of such words.

As interviews progressed through the advancing levels, children were able to express themselves more clearly when asked this question. Words that are familiar "words that I know" are easy, "big" words are hard. Routine expressions such as "Est-ce que je peux aller aux toilettes?" were considered by children to be easy. The 'unfamiliar' was often described by kindergarten children and Grade 1 children as a "big" word. When I asked children who referred to "big" words as being difficult if they understood the word "récréation," they responded that they did. Children in Grade 2 and 3 were able to specify more clearly what they found difficult. One child in Grade 2 said "It's easy when you know the words, it's hard when you don't." Another child in Grade 3 pointed out that "It's easy now that I've been doing it for a long time." These comments and classroom observations suggest that words and concepts which have been repeated and used often by the children in meaningful situations are those that they find 'easy'. 'Difficult' words or concepts might be those which are unfamiliar, and not often repeated. It is also important to note that children did not give examples of sentences or ideas that might be considered abstract when they gave examples of what they *knew*. Learning in French immersion appears generally to be at a more concrete level than in an English language program of the same grade.

Figure 3a:

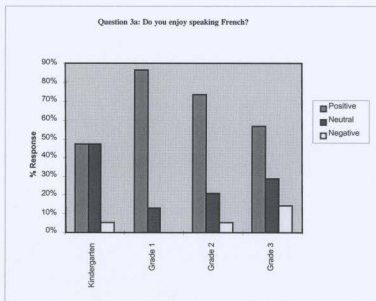
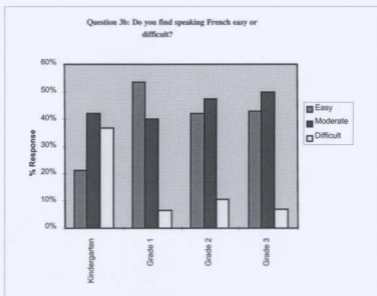


Figure 3b:



Question 4a: Do you speak French at home?

Question 4b: Do you watch French television?

In response to question 4a, many children said they speak French at home occasionally, with sisters and brothers who are also French immersion students, or while they do homework. Several children in Grade 2 said "sometimes the French comes out first," when doing homework, or school-related activities. If parents or

others at home are able to speak French, it is possible that second-language knowledge might be extended. If not, children will likely be using English with their parents when completing reading, writing or other French homework. This response also recalls Hood's (1986) comments about Alberto, and how he 'assigned' languages to certain situations.

In response to question 4b, no one watched French television programs on a regular basis. Most children said they watched cartoons, exercise shows or sports. I found the choice of programs to be interesting. Exercise shows and sports (golf, surprisingly, seemed to be a favourite) are reasonably self-explanatory. It is possible to follow the action without relying on accompanying dialogue. One Grade 3 child said that he found people "talked too fast" on French shows, and did not tend to watch French television for that reason. It is unlikely, given these responses, that children's language proficiency will be developed from watching television, one possible second-language resource in a predominately anglophone community. The lack of interest in French television also indicates that while students understand classroom French in a general sense, they do not understand French well enough to enjoy it.

Figure 4a:

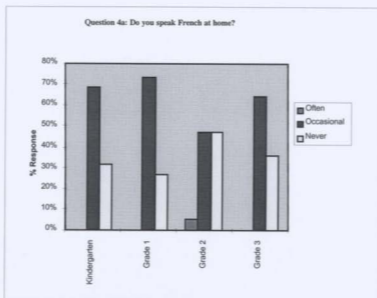
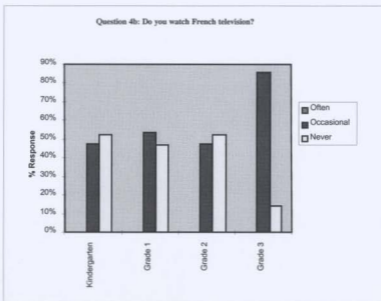


Figure 4b:



*The fifth question asked students to tell me about their favourite and least favourite activities at school. I asked this question thinking that there might be some links between favourite activities/least favourite activities and ability to understand the language. I found children's answers quite interesting, and it is possible that further exploration of this question would lead to links between subject areas and language ability. However, there were no distinct relationships established,

and a wide variety of preferences was expressed. It is for this reason that analysis of responses to question 5 is not part of this chapter.

Question 6a: When you share stories or experiences, are you able to do so in French?

Question 6b: When you share stories or experiences are you able to do so in English?

Question 6c: When you share stories or experiences in class, do you prefer to use English or French? Why?

Question 6d: Do you enjoy/understand stories in French?

Through asking these questions, I wanted to discover children's perceptions of what they *knew*. I wondered how well the sense of knowing their own language was developed, and how they might express themselves in this regard. Student responses indicated that they felt they had made progress in their ability to share stories and experiences, and to express their ideas in French. Younger children seemed to be less definite in their response to this question, and my use of the word 'stories' may have confused some children. One kindergarten child responded to this question by saying " I don't know any French stories." I

attempted to clarify such confusion by asking children to tell me if they would be able to tell their teacher what they planned to do after school, or tell something that had happened to them the day before. I used a specific example in kindergarten, asking children if they had been playing after school (i.e. riding bikes), if they would be able to tell their teacher what they had done. One child said that " I don't need to know all the words in French, the teacher knows them, I only need to say "bicyclette."

There are a number of concerns with regard to concept development and extension of ideas which arise when children consistently respond to questions with single words, or partial phrases, as they were often observed to do during this study. First of all, the teacher is asking all of the questions. Secondly, it appears that children are expected to give answers that the teacher either already knows, or will not question. A child might for example, respond with 'bicyclette' when he would really like to say 'skateboard'. The impression the children gave about this type of conversation was that it did not really matter what their response was, as long as it fit reasonably well. The language that teachers use in communicating with students varies a great deal, even though teachers may use the least complicated form of French possible. In response to the teacher's instruction, "Va prendre ta boîte de crayons," one child was heard to say, "P'en ta boîte - that means get your crayons." The child was able to act appropriately, and get what he needed, but meaning was

understood in a general sense. A similar response might have been achieved if the teacher had said, "Allez chercher vos crayons." In this case, specific understanding was not required, nor did it appear to have been achieved.

During a play period in this same kindergarten classroom, one child came to me for help with a broken fishing rod. I asked the child if they had been playing the alphabet fishing game in French (speaking French to ask the question), and the child responded in English, "I don't know what happened." This was an appropriate response to a question that *might* be asked in that situation, but it was obvious that the child had not understood my question. Many children and adults follow patterns and routines and the behaviour of others in unfamiliar situations until they gain understanding that allows them to behave independently of others. This is an effective strategy in some situations, but as the description above points out, ineffective in others. Using these strategies constantly, as children in early French immersion might tend to do, may enhance some aspects of learning and hamper others. Bruner (1990) says, "It is only *after* some language has been acquired in the formal sense that one can acquire further language as a bystander" (p. 73).

Based on classroom observations, it appears that kindergarten children are not pressured to *speak* French. They do not *appear* to be limited in what they can say, because they speak English nearly all the time. However, the absence of meaningful conversational exchanges between teacher and students in this case is

noteworthy. By this, I do not mean to suggest that the teacher or children did not say meaningful things; instead, no conversational exchanges were observed showing both people talking together in mutual dialogue. There was no visible language connection other than a physical response to what had been said, or a verification of meaning by hearing the children describe an object in English. Children often responded with one word to questions or instructions.

During the observation period in kindergarten and in the primary classrooms, there were no conversational exchanges observed where children were invited to express feelings or emotions about events or stories. Such questions are usually phrased with references to experiences that a child might have, allowing him or her to relate the question to personal experience. If children were invited to do so in French, it would be essential that the question be understood fully before a child could formulate a response. Is it possible to ask children how they feel, or what their response to a story is without using language that refers to events and feelings with which children can identify? If the child does not understand the question, s/he will not be able to formulate a response. Even if children are permitted and encouraged to respond in English whenever they wish in kindergarten, (or in later grades), they must understand the questions being asked. Observations during this case study suggest that such questions are rarely asked,

perhaps because there is no point in asking them, or that asking such questions would require an intensive language lesson prior to beginning.

From a second-language teaching perspective, question/answer scenarios allow the use of the French language, and permit students to use the language, even if the language is limited to single words. They also enable the teacher to speak French at all times, providing the unilingual French 'model' that children will hopefully learn from and emulate. For French language instruction alone, this might be one of the most effective methods of teaching the language. For conceptual development, it appears to be lacking. It is expected and understood that children at the kindergarten level in early French immersion speak English on most occasions. In this study, the teacher spoke French at all times, and responded in French to student questions and comments. The children responded to most questions with single words in French, or sometimes with questions in English to verify comprehension of the question being asked. There were no occasions observed where the children were actively engaged in questioning and answering using language to extend their learning. Children responded to instructions in French with appropriate behavior by getting crayons when necessary, or naming objects when asked. This could indeed be described as a limited use of language. The same could be said to be true, to varying degrees, of each of the levels

observed. Invitations to share thoughts, ideas and emotions might depend greatly on the teacher and/or teaching style, but it would appear that children's language proficiency levels would not be conducive to such exchanges, either when promoted by the teacher, or when spontaneously initiated by the children.

Another interesting observation was made in the kindergarten classroom.

The children had made butterflies out of tissue paper, and were singing the song:

Joli, joli, papillon
Vole, vole, vole, vole,
Joli, joli, papillon
Vole, vole tout le temps

The children "flew" around the classroom, landing on blue, orange, and yellow chairs before finally landing on the carpet, to sing the song a final time. One of the children asked, "What does that mean, "vole, vole, tout le temps?." The teacher replied in English, "It means it never stops." and then continued with the song. The child said to himself, but loud enough for me to hear, "No, it doesn't, it stops sometimes." In such a situation, what should the early immersion teacher do? Should she respond to the child in French with " Ah, oui, c'est vrai que les papillons s'arrêtent pour butiner les fleurs. Tu as raison." , which a kindergarten child will not understand in any detail. Or, should she take advantage of the situation to talk about butterflies, in English, of when and how they fly. The French response would not have extended the child's knowledge of butterflies, nor would it have been likely to

extend his French vocabulary. It is cases such as these which appear to inhibit the natural curiosity of children, and subsequently the opportunity to promote concept development and critical thinking. This is not to suggest that the entire experience described above was without value. On the contrary, the manner in which the song was sung and the children's ability to follow the movement of the butterfly was excellent. The use of the song to reinforce vocabulary skills was also effective. It is the lost opportunity for discussion and discovery about butterflies which is lamentable.

Grade 1 students offered some very insightful comments and responses to this question. Many children felt, as previously mentioned, that they should be speaking French when they told their stories or related experiences, because they were in school to learn French. They also indicated that they wanted to speak French on those occasions, because they liked learning French, but "didn't know enough words." Children said that they could use the French words they knew to tell stories, and sometimes the teacher filled in the parts they did not know.

During one classroom session in Grade 1, children were studying farm animals, and were planning to make butter. The teacher asked the children, in French, what kinds of things butter could be used for. The children were able to respond in French with many words, "Tu mets-le sur le pain" or "tu manges-le sur les pancakes." This exchange allowed the children to share their knowledge, and

increase their knowledge of French vocabulary, even though the language structure is incorrect. Children used English words when they did not know the appropriate word in French. The experience of making butter very likely added to their sensory experience, since they were able to see and hear the cream change to butter as they each had a turn shaking the container. In this case study, French immersion teachers typically made an effort to engage children in the second-language learning process in the manner described above. Such hands-on activities are effective in involving children in a meaningful way with the content matter which must be covered as part of the curriculum.

LaPlante (1996) observed the teaching strategies of a number of Grade 1 French immersion teachers during science instruction. He compared the strategies of two of these teachers and suggests that the 'way' teachers teach is shaped by their representations of language. In the butter-making lesson described above, this teacher incorporated language, hands-on activity, and discussion with the children about the subject with the content to be covered. 'Mme Legault' (in LaPlante's 1995 study) involved students by arranging a visit to a rabbit farm, followed by discussion with the children about what they had seen and learned about rabbits. Mme Legault helped children use the French language during the lesson. By comparison, 'Mme Tremblay' organized lessons in such a way that vocabulary tended to take precedence over content, by pre-teaching vocabulary that she felt was

necessary to ensure students' comprehension of the subject matter. LaPlante makes the following observation:

.... l'orientation pédagogique est marquée par la transmission des connaissances: ce sont surtout le discours et les idées de l'enseignante qui dominant la communication" (LaPlante, 1996, p. 455).

... the teacher's pedagogical orientation is marked by the delivery of 'knowledge': it is essentially the teacher's ideas and discussion which dominate classroom communication. [my translation].

The implication is that Mme LeGault's method of teaching proves more effective in involving children in discussion, and that her approach results from a pedagogical orientation which emphasizes the communicative nature of language. While it may appear to be so, and may indeed be more interesting and enjoyable for the children, I would suggest that in both cases the teacher is dominating discussion, since the teacher is the only person who really has an adequate knowledge of the language to guide students in French to discuss any subject. In Mme LeGault's lesson, the children spoke an 'interlanguage', and Mme LeGault spoke French.

Teachers seem to be aware of their tendency to dominate or lead discussions but might find it difficult not to do so when children are unable to respond in French. During the butter-making session as described earlier, children were able to

share their knowledge in a limited way, but it was unclear to me to what degree children's knowledge had been extended. Children were sharing what they knew, either from having recently learned it in class, or from prior knowledge of how butter was made and where it came from, and what it can be used for. The teacher spoke French, and encouraged the children to do so but was still required to help children communicate as 'Mme Legault' did in LaPlante's (1996) study. She mouthed words for the students, gave hints, and translated what they said in English. The children's language was a definite mixture of French and English, and it appeared that they were drawing heavily on their knowledge of the subject in their first language.

LaPlante (1996) describes the exchanges which took place in Mme LeGault's class as allowing the children access to a rich and varied vocabulary. However, in the excerpts included from the classroom observations in his study, the children's language was not rich and varied. It was hesitant, and predominantly English. The teacher replaced the children's hesitant French with the correct structures and vocabulary, but they did not do most of the talking, nor did they seem to offer any new information about rabbits. Similarly, the butter-making episode observed in my study emphasized both language and information acquisition, but there were no 'new' discussions initiated, and none of the exploratory talk that might lead to extended concept development. One might expect children who were

making butter to share stories about a family farm, or a visit to one of the historic sites in Canada which shows how butter was churned or to ask more complex and detailed questions about the process, considering the background experiences of many of the children at this particular school. On this occasion, none did. The extended learning that this type of exchange might allow is difficult to manage in French. It requires a language knowledge on the part of all students to be able to share in the story told by another student, and perhaps to have some aspect of their own experience or knowledge activated by the shared experience. Unfortunately, even when a child begins to share such an experience, with the emphasis on speaking French, the story is not told fluently, or necessarily from the child's point of view. The teacher must 'translate' as the child goes along so that the French language is heard and every possible opportunity for language acquisition is used. In such situations, however, it is very unlikely that the vocabulary will register sufficiently with the child who is telling the story, or with the listeners to be "fast-mapped" (Carey, 1978) or to be adequately retained for future use.

This seems to be a limiting factor of French second-language instruction. With time spent to ensure that children become familiar with basic vocabulary and instructions, concepts are generally presented in their simplest, most concrete form, to ensure that vocabulary and content are understood. Many children may be ready

to extend their knowledge of concepts and ideas, but may be limited by the emphasis on language acquisition.

In Grade 2, students tended to speak French more readily with their teacher and with each other than they did in kindergarten and Grade 1. There is a general impression of improved comprehension judging from students' responses to questions and instructions. However, children still relied heavily on teacher guidance when answering questions, and participating in discussions. In fact, it would appear that most group discussions in French immersion classes depend to a great extent on the teacher's lead. Discussions did not follow naturally from students' comments. Students often needed help from their teachers to express their ideas. This would seem to inhibit the natural flow of conversation, and limits the possibility of children being inspired by each other. Wells (1986) uses excerpts from conversations between parents and children, as well as discussions between children and teachers, to illustrate the importance of free conversation. According to Wells, the child's questions, observations of other children, and the guidance which can be provided by an adult allow the child's knowledge and understanding of concepts to be extended. In the situations observed in the Grade 2 classroom, conversations which took place during the week spent in the classroom were not of this nature. Grade 2 students were also involved in more independent types of activities such as completing written exercises, or math sheets. They were also

involved with performing a short play based on a story they had read in class. A longer period of observation in Grade 2 may have resulted in more opportunities to see how children engage in conversation and dialogue at that level.

Grade 3 students were able to describe how they used French to share experiences or tell stories. They felt they were able to say most of what they had to say, or they were able to find ways to "get around" speaking English, as one child put it. One child in Grade 3 said that he was able to "say things in a different way" if he did not know exactly how to say something in French. He answered that he could use a dictionary to look up words he did not know, or could check charts and posters in the classroom. He also added that he could write down a word in English and pass the message to a fellow student to avoid actually *speaking* English. A number of children also commented that the teacher helped with words they did not know. Students in Grade 3 spoke French with each other, and with their teacher almost exclusively, but still tended to verify their comprehension with English words on some occasions "Oh that means" One student pointed out that she felt confident speaking in French, now that "I've been at it for a long time." She qualified this statement however, by saying that "I can't put the same detail in there though, say if I'm talking about sports. I know all the names of equipment and stuff in English, but I don't know all of them in French." Another child pointed out that "I can tell or write stories in French, but I can't make them detailed or exciting like I

can in English." Making stories detailed and exciting and listening to stories which exhibit the same elements can be motivating and interesting for children.

Yeoman (1996) describes a similar type of comment from a young French immersion student she interviewed about her feelings about stories in French.

.... But when we hear a story in French, I mean we find it boring because we don't quite know all the words and understand it exactly.

Their words that they know [the French writers] mean exciting stuff, they'll write, but the stuff it means in English is boring. It's just the switch. (p. 599).

Yeoman attributes this to a lack of engagement with the language on the child's part. Even though the child may understand in a general sense what the words mean, the language does not evoke the feelings required for a child to become truly involved with the text. This suggests that French immersion/second-language pedagogy must include methods which consider development of the 'affective' as well as academic domains.

With the exception of one kindergarten child who was confused by many of the questions, most children responded that they could easily share stories and experiences in English. When asked questions about French and English, the kindergarten child did not seem to know what I meant. I asked if he knew the

difference between French and English, and he did not appear to understand that there was a difference. He was unable to answer the question.

A number of children at each of the grade levels 1, 2, and 3 added that, even though they **could** tell stories in English, they felt they **should** be speaking French, either because the teacher expected them to, or because they were in school "to learn French." (A small number of Grade 2 students seemed to feel strongly about this, and the category "not well" in Figure 6b reflects their uncertainty about this question).

In response to being asked about a preference for using English or French, I expected children to choose English almost unanimously, considering their comments about not always knowing the words to use in French. Their answers were somewhat surprising.

Kindergarten children were more definite in their preference for English than children at the other grade levels, although there were several students who said that they would like to "know more French" at the kindergarten level. In Grade 1, students were anxious to clarify that their reasons for choosing English were that they "knew more English, but would like to know more French." A number of Grade 3 students pointed out that it depended on the situation, "things I've known for a long time it doesn't matter, both languages work." Children explained that "things they had known for a long time" meant, "Est-ce que je peux aller aux toilettes?", and other routine questions. I observed that classroom and school

routines seemed to present few problems for children in Grades 2 and 3, and that they seemed comfortable 'functioning' in French. The number of students who said they would choose both languages was higher as students reached Grade 2 and Grade 3, supporting this observation.

When asked if they liked listening to French stories, a number of responses required some clarification and discussion with individual children to determine what they meant. Several students in Kindergarten said they "I like stories but I can't understand them". One student said she "liked stories with funny words like 'anas.' A student in Grade 1 said that she enjoyed "short stories, not ones with a lot of big words, or ones that are too long." Many students in Grade 2 responded that they "like stories, but sometimes I don't understand them." Students in Grade 3 expressed similar responses. One boy said "Some stories are O.K, if you understand them." I asked about a story his teacher had been reading aloud in class, and he said, "That story, "Le Camp de la Peur," I don't understand a single word." It would seem then, that children can and do enjoy *some* stories in French, but they must be engaged with the story in some way. According to the comments above, humour is engaging, as are short stories which are easy to understand. Rhyme, song, repetition and illustrations help to engage children with stories and books. Knowledge of what children like and understand can provide the basis for choosing appropriate reading/listening materials for young children in early French

immersion classrooms. It is possible that the story "Le Camp de la Peur" was chosen for a read-a-loud in the Grade 3 classroom because students at that age are expressing an interest in the English language versions of such stories. It is also possible, that because at the Grade 3 level students are often expected to, and enjoy reading what they call "chapter books," this type of book is selected. While "Le Camp de la Peur" may have been at the suitable reading level for some students in the Grade 3 class, it was not suitable for all those who were listening.

Figure 6a:

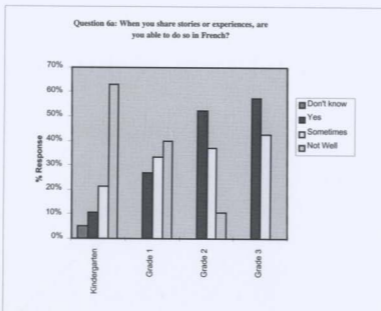


Figure 6b:

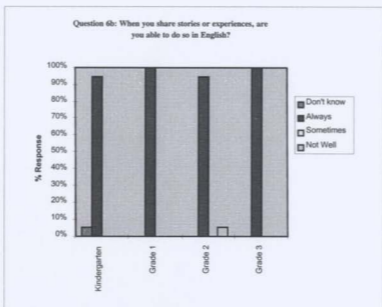


Figure 6c:

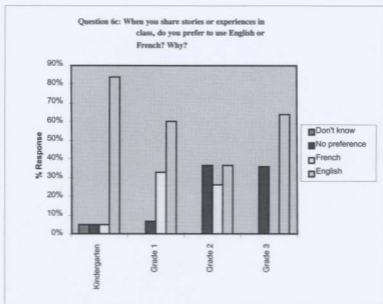
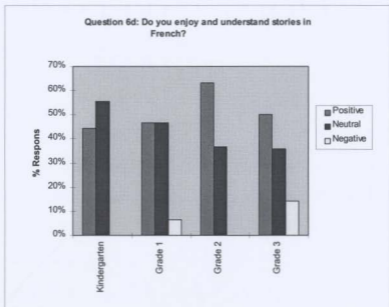


Figure 6d:



Questions 7: Is there anything you would change about school/school work if you could?

I had expected that some children might suggest that speaking more English or working in English might be desirable in response to this question. This was not the case. Most children did not think in terms of academic subjects when asked this question, and because of this, it seems that they do not have a sense that second-

language proficiency is a major concern for them. Even though responses to earlier questions showed an awareness that they "didn't know French," children did not relate this question to 'language'. They tended to refer instead to social aspects of school, such as "longer recess," or "more play-time."

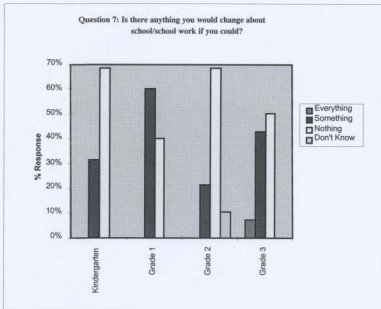
I attempted to clarify the question for kindergarten children on two occasions by saying, "If you could change the school, or the things you would do at school in any way you wanted, what would you do?" When the child still did not seem to understand, I suggested, "If you had a magic wand, and you could change things at school to be the way you wanted them to be, what would you change?" One child responded by saying, "I would change it into a bunny rabbit." Another answered that she would "change the school into a swimming pool." Consequently, I decided to phrase the question in subsequent interviews by asking children if there was anything different they would like to do or have at school. One child responded, "I would like to have my mom at school with me because it's a long time without my mom." These responses were endearing and informative, reiterating the importance of keeping in mind what young children really need, and how they think.

Grade 1 students offered a number of suggestions, similar to those mentioned above, but seemed to be happy with things the way they were. Grade 2 students offered suggestions like "having a piano in the classroom" or having "a cafeteria instead of eating lunch in the classroom."

Grade 3 students offered the most specific responses to this question. When I asked one child if there was anything he would like to change about school, he responded with a question for me: "You mean within reason?" Grade 3 students had suggestions about how the day might be organized, "I would like to have free-choice centre time in the afternoon. That way you could do math, or science or whatever subject you like best." Another student suggested that he would "like to study more geography." One student who said he hated school said that he would change "everything." This was not surprising.

The purpose for including these responses and their relevance to the thesis questions is that children can often tell us what they like and want, but may not always be cognizant of their own abilities, and are not informed about the processes of learning. It is the responsibility of educators, teachers and parents together to determine how effectively children's needs are being served within the school environment, and in this case, in early French immersion. Of particular concern for the purposes of this thesis is the fact that the language of instruction might be a limiting factor in what children want or need. It is a positive sign that children appear to be well-adapted to their second-language learning environment. Further exploration is necessary to determine if optimum levels of learning take place, and whether or not teaching practices might be modified in early French immersion to accommodate this.

Figure 7:



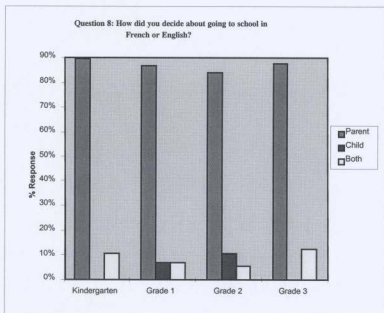
Question 8: How did you decide about going to school in French or English?

Response to question 8 shows that the choice to enroll children in an early French immersion program was obviously made by parents. A small number of

children said they had decided themselves, because their brothers and sisters spoke French. Others said that they had discussed learning French with their parents, and thought that "it's a good idea to know other languages," or "I already know English so my mom and dad thought it would be a good idea to learn French." One Grade 3 child said "I know it will be good for me when I'm about 40." One of the Kindergarten children said that he had decided to come to Kindergarten French immersion, because "they had big blocks in the French class, and they don't have them in the English class." One Grade 2 student said "I looked in the dictionary, and decided French was easiest." I asked this question thinking that a child's own sense of purpose often makes experiences meaningful, and wondering how children felt about the choice which had been made for them, learning in French. None of their answers indicated that children felt any personal need or desire to know French. I realized at the same time, of course, that many children may never feel a need to go to school at all if parents did not make that choice. In the child's first language, however, given appropriate experiences, this sense of purpose should develop as learning evolves through exposure to books, personal observations, and meaningful exchanges with adults and other children. The children's answers suggest that a necessary component of the early French immersion curriculum would be to help children understand what language is, and how all languages and modes of communication are connected. This might help them establish a deeper sense of purpose for speaking the language. Learning a language is another way of

connecting with the world, and it is essential to connect language with the child's world. This question also merits further exploration of how children's perceptions of second-language learning might affect the development of language proficiency, and how children's answers to questions might guide curriculum development in the future.

Figure 8:

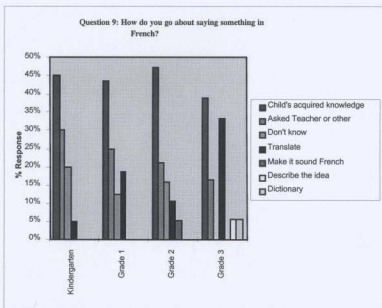


Question 9: *How do you go about saying something in French?*

Responses to question 9 indicate that there are a variety of ways in which students access the language which they must use to express themselves throughout the school day. One observation that can be made as a result of this response is that students use their language knowledge as the main source of language. This is, of course, to be expected. However, observation and students' comments regarding their language knowledge suggest that this language is not adequate for students to express all their ideas, or to read and write as they seem to wish they could. As students spend more time in the program, there are more words and structures they say they "just know." A number of the methods which children said they used, "make it sound French", for example, may seem to work for the child. However, making the English words sound French, saying "ordrer" for "commander", as one child suggested, might only be understood in a French immersion environment. The teacher is obviously an important source of knowledge, but unfortunately will not always be available or able to answer each child's questions when s/he needs the answers. "Describing the idea" when specific words were unavailable, seemed to be an excellent strategy for communication, and I was impressed that children in Grade 3 felt able to do this. It would seem that all of the ways that children feel they can express themselves in the second language allow them to communicate. This question merits further exploration with regard to the types of information and ideas which can be communicated by using these strategies. If links are established

between strategies and types of communication, (or knowledge and information which can be transmitted effectively in the second language by the use of such strategies), then teaching practice might be guided by use of certain strategies for certain purposes.

Figure 9:



Summary of student interview data

Students at all primary grade levels in the early French immersion program at the school where this case study took place appear to have a positive attitude towards school, and towards their second-language learning experience. They are motivated to learn French, and understand that at least one of the purposes for being enrolled in French immersion is to learn French. However, I did not gain a sense that children see this as a *personally* meaningful endeavour for them. Instead, they accept speaking/learning French as a natural part of school life, and it is not an unhappy reality for the majority of these students. Considering that most students who were interviewed are the children of anglophone parents, living in a largely anglophone community, it is not likely that children would be confronted by the necessity to speak French outside the school. They are also aware that the dominant language of use in the school and with their peers is English.

The purpose of the student interviews was to discover, in the children's own words, how they made sense of their learning experiences in French. By asking children to explain their feelings, impressions, perceptions, and preferences, I have attempted to establish links between the children's second-language development and the learning which takes place through and with the use of that language. Classroom observation data has enhanced and enriched the data collected through

interviews and questionnaires. I have also added to my practical knowledge of children's concept development and epistemic use of language in French immersion as a result of having completed this case study.

It appears that children are able to acquire knowledge in a range of content areas in French immersion classrooms, and that, according to their own responses, they can function happily in this environment. The degree to which knowledge is extended through discussion, relating of personal experiences and shared knowledge is obviously inhibited by the language level of students, and by the necessity to cover all curriculum areas in French. It also appears that students are highly dependent on teacher intervention when it is necessary to communicate in the target language. Older students (Grades 2 and 3) express themselves for functional purposes with relative ease, because they have acquired the language used for such purposes. This is the language which is used everyday within the classroom, and is often repeated. However, when expressing ideas or thoughts about unfamiliar subject areas, students rely on a number of strategies to help them out (see Figure 9). The strategies used are effective in a limited way. Students are not able to express themselves with the fluidity which might be possible if there was a greater degree of automaticity in the language. For other participants in a group discussion, struggling to understand the idea that another child tries to convey in halting French is not likely to jog the child's memory, or to encourage sharing of a similar

experience. The natural flow of conversation is inhibited. When this happens, thoughts, meanings and ideas may also be inhibited.

The findings of the student interviews confirm that language proficiency affects concept development in a limiting way in certain situations. Observations made during this case study suggest that the child's limited knowledge of the second language is a major factor in situations where the child's existing knowledge of concepts could possibly be extended through the use of appropriate questioning techniques, allowing the child to share discoveries, and enabling the teacher or peers to guide the student through a more exploratory use of language.

Results of teacher questionnaires and interviews

The following section presents the results of teacher questionnaires and interviews. Responses from both are combined. Each teacher is 'introduced' by summarizing the background information obtained through the completion of a questionnaire. Teacher responses to interview questions are also summarized, and presented in a narrative form. Direct quotes from teachers are included. The questions asked in the questionnaire, as well as those which guided teacher interviews are either stated or implied in the responses and in the summary of information. (All questions are included in their original form in Appendix B).

Teacher #1:

Teacher #1, the kindergarten teacher at the time of this study, has been teaching in the early French immersion program for 10 years, and also has two years experience teaching adults. She became a French immersion teacher "partly by choice, and partly by obligation." She said that there are many frustrating moments at certain points in the year, but finds it very rewarding to see the progress that the children have made by the end of the year. This teacher felt strongly that the "immersion" environment was something of a misnomer, as there is very little French spoken outside the immediate classroom.

In response to the question, "Do you feel early French immersion programs are successful?", this teacher pointed out that the materials currently being used in French immersion, particularly those used in the language arts program are old and out-dated, in contrast with the English program where more books and age or level appropriate materials are available. She made the point that materials must be adapted and suited to the age level and interests of the children in French immersion and that this is not always an easy or feasible task. She also feels that children who begin school at age 6 and older achieve greater success in early immersion than do younger children, stating that the age of the child is a determining factor in that child's success or failure.

This teacher feels that the child's background knowledge is very important in early immersion. She noted that in French immersion, adding to a child's knowledge is difficult because of time constraints, lack of suitable resources, and second-language limitations. This comment leads me to consider that the way a child's knowledge is developed in French immersion may be adequate for a child from a home background where enrichment is possible, but not for others. Can French immersion provide adequate background knowledge and concept development opportunities for everyone, or is there an assumption made that children already have, or will obtain those opportunities outside the school environment?

Subject areas which this teacher considered easier to teach were math and science, because at the kindergarten level, there are many ways of involving children in concrete experiences. Teaching abstract concepts in content areas like religion and language arts or more advanced math was described as being most difficult.

This teacher perceived differences in the atmosphere of the English language classroom at the same level, noting that children seemed able to advance with a more natural, relaxed rhythm. In immersion, she said, the teacher must always ensure that children are listening attentively, and that vocabulary is repeated in many different ways.

Most effective forms of instruction would include memorization of poems and songs to create a 'reservoir' of vocabulary, and helping children develop a certain level of automaticity. She feels that immersing a child in a language s/he does not understand is not the most effective way to learn that language. A progressive development of language skills, promoted to a large degree by memorization of songs, poems, rhymes, and repetitive phrases would be more beneficial. Duchesne (1995) made a similar observation regarding songs, poems, and rhymes.

This teacher concluded her response to the questionnaire with another reference to the out-dated materials available for use in French immersion, and the frustration she felt as a result. She added that many children seem to adapt well to the immersion environment, in spite of the obstacles she had previously described. She feels that children who have not reached a certain level of maturity, or who have learning difficulties in their own language will likely have those difficulties compounded by the French immersion environment.

TEACHER #2:

Teacher #2, the grade one teacher, had been teaching for five years in the early French immersion program at the time of this study. She became a French immersion teacher after a period of time as a substitute teacher. She feels satisfied with teaching in French immersion most of the time, but is frustrated with the lack

of resources and access to remedial education for students who need help. Her general impression of the immersion environment is that children miss out on a considerable amount of language experience that results from lack of background knowledge in French, but make significant progress in learning their second language.

In response to the question, "Do you feel immersion programs are successful?" this teacher responded, "Yes, and no." This was clarified by noting that she feels English language 'interference' often over-powers the French milieu. At the same time, she feels the child's background knowledge and exposure to books in the first language are of great importance.

Areas which posed most difficulty for teaching at this teacher's level were math and science concepts. She gave the example of grouping numbers in math, teaching children to understand 'ones' or 'units' and 'tens.' Because the children must learn the concept, and new words to represent that concept, she feels that the children experience more difficulty than they might in their first language. This teacher said she sometimes uses English to explain concepts such as this. Kessler, Quinn, and Hayes (1990) say that "processing mathematics in a second language need not be an obstacle to learning if the complexities of the relationship between the precise language of mathematics and natural language are recognized and

properly addressed" (p. 162). Crandall, Dale, Rhodes, and Spanos (1990) assert that:

The role of language in mathematics is ubiquitous. It is the medium by which teachers introduce and convey concepts and procedures, through which texts and problems are read and solved, and by which math achievement is measured. Language skills, particularly the reading skills needed to comprehend mathematics texts and word problems, and the listening skills required to understand and follow an instructor's presentation of a problem's solution - are the vehicles through which students learn and apply skills (p. 130).

These authors effectively describe the complexity of math language. (They point out that math is often considered to be 'language free' and therefore an easy subject to teach when language skills are limited.) It would be wise to consider these comments, as well as those made by this teacher, when reflecting on instructional practice in immersion.

This teacher feels that the most obvious difference between instruction in English language and French immersion classes is the amount of time that must be spent acquiring basic vocabulary. She noted that comprehension of basic vocabulary is sometimes difficult for children, even when they have no difficulty

with the idea being expressed. An example of this would be following simple instructions, such as "On va dehors pour la récréation." The child would have no difficulty understanding the meaning and implications of this sentence if s/he understood the meaning of the individual words, "We're going outside for recess."

She believes that the most effective methods for teaching language (and other subject areas) are 'hands-on' activities, singing and story-telling. She finds that the materials available for use in French immersion are generally good, but that it is often difficult to find a program where all materials are level appropriate.

This teacher always speaks French with students, except in cases where a "difficult concept has not been understood". This teacher also said she spoke English if a child was upset, in danger, or in some sort of emotional need.

TEACHER #3:

Teacher #3 , the grade two teacher at the time of this study, had been teaching in the early French immersion program for four years. She became a French immersion teacher because of her love of children, and French, in that order. She enjoys teaching in French immersion even though it can be very challenging. She gains great satisfaction, as did Teacher #1 from seeing the progress children make towards becoming French speakers. Her general impressions of the French immersion environment are that it is very interactive and visually oriented. "The children are pulled into the learning activities."

She feels that immersion programs are successful, but that it is important to "continue studying and refining our approaches." She echoes Teacher #2's concerns about lack of remedial support and time constraints on this support when it is available.

This teacher feels that children's background knowledge facilitates understanding when concepts and ideas are presented in French. She feels that science is one of the most difficult subjects to teach because of the "specific scientific language in French which is often difficult to understand in the upper primary grades, and in elementary grades." This comment echoes concerns about "math-specific" language made earlier.

The French immersion environment is perceived by this teacher to be more interactive and visually oriented than English language classes, and she believes that students are more dependent on teacher guidance.

Similarities in instructional methods in French immersion and first-language instruction relate to language development and instruction, but this teacher feels that many aspects of language development are taken for granted in English language instruction. In French, all aspects of language must be consciously taught.

In this teacher's opinion, use of concrete examples and visual supports are effective in instruction. She feels that abstract concepts need to be "brought alive" for students. She feels that lecturing, or simply 'talking', is the least effective

method of instructing students in the classroom. This explains, at least in part, why some teachers may not attempt to engage students in dialogue or discussion about certain subjects.

Textbooks in primary French immersion are of little value, said this teacher. She finds children's literature, tapes, videos, student-authored books, and games to be most helpful in classroom instruction. This teacher speaks French "99% of the time," and only speaks English when a potentially dangerous situation arises (usually relating to behaviour).

TEACHER #4:

Teacher #4, the grade three teacher at the time of this study, has five years teaching experience in early French immersion, and loves teaching in the program. She finds that the children are usually very eager to learn French. She feels that within the School Board, however, there is a lack of concrete support for French immersion. She considers early French immersion the most successful of available second-language instruction choices (i.e. Core French or Late immersion). For immersion students, she feels French is synonymous with school. This teacher thinks that students' background knowledge is not as important as aptitude and attitude in learning in French immersion. This teacher's perceptions about background knowledge may be related, at least in some ways, to the language ability and grade level of her students. Grade 3 students have developed the greatest

number of strategies for understanding the second language, and for working independently. Of the students interviewed, Grade 3 students had also spent the longest period learning the second language.

The most difficult subject area to teach is science according to this teacher, because of the precise nature of the vocabulary to be taught. She notes that there are similarities and differences in first and second-language instruction. "Patterns exist in both languages, and can be approached in the same manner, as can math and word games." She feels that when a child already understands equivalent vocabulary and language structures in English, they will be more easily able to relate to concepts being taught in French. (This relates directly to background knowledge even though this teacher said she considered attitude and aptitude more important). She pointed out that "all the basics, for language and vocabulary must be taught in French". Therefore, if children already have some knowledge relating to the subject, she consider it easier to teach the subject than if children are unfamiliar with the concepts.

This teacher feels that the most effective methods of instruction in French immersion include:

- much discussion before beginning activities

- teacher modelling language to be used
- building vocabulary
- group work before beginning work individually
- visual support as necessary

This teacher rates the materials used in early French immersion as generally satisfactory, but notes that it is difficult to collect suitable French materials in an anglophone community.

Teacher #4 speaks French with her students nearly all the time, except to "lend gravity to a situation, or when safety is concerned." English is rarely used to explain concepts or ideas.

Overview of teacher comments:

Teachers answered questions relating to their perceptions of the success of the program, and which methods of instruction they felt to be most effective. They indicated which subject areas they felt were most difficult to teach in French, the language of instruction for all content areas in French immersion. There are two distinct areas which must be highlighted as a result of teacher comments and information: background knowledge and abstract concepts:

- Three of the four teachers felt that background knowledge of subject areas, as well as relevant experience were very important for children who receiving instruction in French, as it helps children understand information and concepts presented in the second language. This includes, for example, having had the opportunity to read books, or travel. One teacher felt that aptitude and attitude were more important than background knowledge or experience. This might relate to the fact that this teacher is teaching at the grade three level, where children have acquired a considerable knowledge of the French language, as well as knowledge of school routines and expectations. A fundamental element of schema theory, outlined in the literature review, is that background knowledge and experience are essential to full comprehension, and the ability to build on what one has already learned. Schools need to provide many kinds of background knowledge and experience, some of which are very difficult, if not impossible to provide in early French immersion. The lack of suitable resources in French, access to remediation where necessary, and language limitations all restrain the flow of information which might be possible in a typical French immersion setting.
- Abstract concepts, in whatever subject area (i.e. mathematics and science), are among the most difficult to teach. The absence of dialogue between teacher and student, or between peers, may contribute to 'surface' development of concepts,

as it is extremely difficult to assess how well children have understood a concept without asking them to reconstruct certain sequences of events, or to explain in 'their own words' how they understand a particular event or idea. Children, at the earliest stages of immersion have not yet acquired an adequate knowledge of French to have found their own words to express themselves.

While there are similarities in response regarding methods of instruction provided by teachers at all grade levels, it would seem that students' knowledge of the language is an integral part of 'how' students are taught. The language dictates what can be covered. It seems that certain methods of instruction might be more effective at some levels than others, and that these are directly related to the amount of French children have learned by the time they have reached that level. The resources available also seem to dictate what is covered. Depending which materials are available for use in the classroom, at an appropriate language level suitable for students, certain topics may or may not be covered.

A number of teachers' beliefs and opinions about the curriculum and program might be specifically related to experience at a particular level. In general, all four teachers appear to agree that children's ability to understand the second language does impose limits on the depth to which concepts are and can be explored. This varies according to subject area, and is expressed more strongly by kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers than by Grade 2 and 3 teachers. Suitability of

resources is also perceived to be more of a problem in kindergarten and Grade 1 than in Grades 2 and 3. Teachers' assessments of effective methods of instruction at all levels, (based on their own experiences) is relevant for educators seeking to develop and expand second-language methodology.

It seems then, that teachers recognize the successes of second-language instruction within the French immersion setting, but are also aware of certain limitations regarding instruction in content areas, particularly in those involving exploration of abstract concepts. These limitations were defined as relating, at least in part, to the students' need to acquire basic vocabulary and grammatical structures in the second language before being able to extend their knowledge and understanding of concepts and information in content areas.

All teachers agreed that children made significant progress in French language acquisition as they progressed through the program. There were varying opinions expressed regarding resources at the various levels, with the kindergarten teacher being very frustrated with the lack of suitable resources available at her grade level. Others suggested that support for the program is necessary for acquisition of resources and exposure to language outside the classroom and for remediation. They felt that children would benefit from increased use of French within the school itself. One teacher mentioned if parents knew even a little French, "it does seem to help,

perhaps it has more meaning for the children then." Another teacher suggested that the enthusiasm parents felt for their children's learning of a second language was transmitted to the children. As the results of student interviews indicate, a positive attitude towards French is apparent.

With regard to students' participation in conversation, teachers at the beginning primary levels felt that their students' ability to participate was limited. One teacher said that children usually had to search for words, and had difficulty expressing ideas in French. She found that the material which might be presented in English would be "limitless," but in French, each subject requires streamlining, because of the limited French language. The implication relating to learning through discussion and dialogue is that such learning does not exist to the degree which might otherwise be possible, because of children's limited language knowledge. She pointed out also that the majority of activities are teacher-directed, and that there appears to be less continuity in the immersion than there is in the English program. "There are bits and pieces from everywhere." This might be explained in part by the lack of suitable resources. This same teacher believes that French immersion teachers cannot expect the same outcomes as teachers in the English language program, because of the emphasis which must be

placed on learning the language. This raises important questions. Day (1994) says that in French immersion:

Curricular materials should offer equivalent conceptual complexity and informational content as do those materials of corresponding grade levels in the regular English program. At the same time, they should be made accessible to students who are in the process of learning their second language by improving upon available material and by assisting teachers to develop strategies for mediating between written materials and students. (pp. 17-18).

Prescribed content in French immersion is exactly the same as that of the English program, with the exception of the language arts program. However, in practice, the content seems to be much more streamlined, concrete and teacher directed. French language is used in the development of literacy skills at all levels in early French immersion, with the exception of English language arts, introduced at the Grade 3 level. It is the language of instruction for **all** content areas at these levels.

All teachers seemed to agree that it was necessary to "teach the language," and that it would not be adequately learned through exposure alone. Teachers of children who had already acquired some receptive skills in French, directed their

concerns towards the development of reading and writing skills, and felt that children would benefit from an analytical approach to certain areas of the curriculum. They did not feel that children would have difficulty understanding structural, grammatical, or descriptive elements of the language which were appropriate to their language levels. For example, children could begin to learn the structure of the language by analyzing it in some detail (i.e. verb tenses and agreements).

Teachers feel that students are able to participate in discussions and conversations, but that participation when speaking French is limited, particularly at the earliest levels, kindergarten and Grade 1. Teachers at these levels noted that it is difficult to expand on content areas when students' language is limited, and expressed frustration at not being able to do so. They feel students are ready for the content which is available to them (i.e. science experiments, children's literature selections), but are not ready for the language required to teach this content. It is for this reason that teachers feel it is necessary to present information in the simplest way possible, 'streamlining' the language where necessary. Teachers suggested a number of ways in which improvements might be made:

- access to appropriate resources at each grade level.
- a more analytical approach to the language was suggested by teachers at the Grade 2 and 3 levels. The kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers did not make

suggestions as to a particular approach but did acknowledge that it was necessary to 'teach' the language. To teach content, teachers feel that children must understand the language, and as previously discussed, separating words and form in language is virtually impossible.

- greater continuity in instructional practice. This was implied by all teachers in their suggestions that children be exposed to various elements of the language at different levels. This seems to be a valid suggestion, and would offer a solution to what one teacher described as "taking bits and pieces from everywhere."
- improved knowledge of second-language teaching methodology, and the nature of language/literacy development in young children.

Teacher responses indicate that language proficiency has a direct effect on the type of learning experiences which a teacher can offer students in her classroom. It appears that the teaching of vocabulary and language structure may in some cases take precedence over concept development and understanding. To fulfil curriculum requirements at each level, and teach in French at the same time, teachers must ensure that students acquire a level of language proficiency which permits the teaching of factual content through spoken language. Visual aids and experiential learning are effective supports to learning, but cannot replace the language itself. In a way, the 'teacher-directed' classroom as opposed to 'child-centred' classroom in French immersion is a result of the way the program is designed. The goals of the program are at odds with a primarily child-centred program, because learning the second language takes precedence over what the child may be ready to learn in other domains .

In summary, teachers feel that nearly all students make significant progress throughout the various levels of the immersion program, particularly in their ability to comprehend spoken French, and to follow classroom routines. They recognize that there are limitations to what can be covered in French with regard to content areas, and often find it necessary to ensure that children have acquired basic vocabulary before development of concepts or ideas can be pursued. They feel that parents have a positive attitude towards the program, and that parental support and involvement are helpful to students. The perceived lack of support for immersion outside the classroom is viewed as a negative factor. Teachers felt that it would be helpful to students learning in French immersion if there were greater remedial support available for students, improved resources and more exposure to French inside and outside the school setting.

Summary of Chapter 4:

During interviews, I found the children to be very forthright, enthusiastic, and friendly. They seemed to welcome the opportunity to answer questions, and their answers did indeed broaden my own perceptions, and challenge my preconceived notions of what children would like. For instance, I had expected that difficulties students might encounter in understanding French would lead them to wish for more English in the classroom. This was not the case. I have often thought

as a teacher, "if only I could explain things to children in English, it would be so much easier to get the point I am trying to make across." While this may indeed be true, and important to realize, the children's solution was much more to the point, considering the reality of French immersion programs as they currently exist. They felt they needed to know more French. "If I knew the words in French I would say it in French." It would seem that children are very positive about learning French, and would not be inhibited in the use of that language, if they simply had a better grasp of the language and a wider vocabulary base.

The results of the classroom observations, student interviews, and exchanges with teachers were enlightening and affirming. Children are learning a great deal in French immersion, but there are changes which can and should be made if early French immersion programs are to fit the criteria established for child-centred, developmentally appropriate classrooms. If the French immersion classroom is to reflect a knowledge of the child, then it is essential that the teacher truly know the child. What better way to know a child than by engaging in conversation and dialogue which leads to mutual discoveries? If the child's second language is not adequately developed to allow this, then practice in French immersion must allow situations which permit such discussion and dialogue to occur. Perhaps only certain subjects should be taught in French only at the earliest stages. The following chapter presents the implications for current practice which

result from the findings of this study. Recommendations for further research and concluding discussion are outlined.

CHAPTER 5

Summary analysis of study data, discussion, and reflection :

The guiding questions of this thesis have been described as multi-faceted. Consequently, one would not expect a single response to these questions, nor would one expect a final and definite answer to these queries. Following the exploratory case study completed for this thesis, there is, however, a reasonably clear indication that language limitations affect the way children learn, and the way that subject matter can be taught. As students and teachers both describe, and observations illustrate, there are instances when it is difficult to "get the message across," or to "explain difficult concepts." This might suggest that certain subject areas or concepts to be presented are simplified, or presented in their most basic form because the language to be used must also be simple and basic to ensure understanding. Based on the observations made in class during this study, student responses, and information shared by teachers, it would seem that there are certain areas in which learning and teaching are made more difficult by a limited knowledge of the second language. They would include reading, sharing, and discussing stories, introducing abstract concepts in mathematics and science, or other subjects. Concepts or materials which are more concrete can be presented more effectively in the French language.

Practices observed during this case study show that teachers adhere to the policy of speaking French at all times, following the theory that language will be learned through exposure, and that contextual and other supports will make 'input comprehensible'. It cannot be denied, however, that language is inextricably linked to learning. In a number of situations in the French immersion classroom, extended learning and concept development may be limited by the use of French alone, since children do not understand the language in its many contexts and forms. And while students are highly motivated to learn French, they are aware of its limitations for self-expression. This is not to say they exhibit a negative attitude towards French as they advance in the program. Instead, they seem to become more aware of their language limitations. This is ironic considering that one would expect children to be increasing their levels of proficiency in the language as they spend more time learning. Children should then feel less limited by the language. This did not appear to be so for the children involved in this case study. To compound the problem, O'Reilly (1993) found no evidence of progression in students' second-language development in Grades 4, 5, and 6 except for the variety of vocabulary which was used. Such findings accentuate the need for exploratory studies in early French immersion with a view to ensuring a consistent and noticeable progression in students' second-language development.

The results of my study indicate that there are certain situations where language proficiency is crucial to the development of concepts and comprehension of ideas in children in French immersion. Teachers perceive that abstract concepts and ideas are difficult to present when students have not yet acquired an adequate knowledge of the French language. Students felt that there were some things that they could not say or understand because of the language. Teachers felt limited by language with regard to resources and manner in which subject areas could be presented.

It would seem that children and teachers have developed a number of effective strategies which help to compensate for the limited second-language skills of young children in early French immersion. Certain learning and teaching situations lend themselves more readily to adaptation for language and content learning purposes, as one teacher observed in her reference to language patterns. However, the French spoken by the children involved in this study indicates that their language profiles might fit very closely with those described by Noonan (1990). That is to say that students are developing an internal schemata for second-language use, but are still highly dependent on teachers, visual aids, other children, and their background knowledge in English which allows them to translate to French. Spontaneous thought processes, or utterances which might lead to further discovery and extension of concept knowledge are certainly inhibited by the amount

of time and effort that goes into just finding the words. The number of strategies for learning that children have acquired by the time they reach Grade 3 is impressive, and may also provide a framework for isolating areas in which children are best able to function in the second language. These strategies that children have acquired however, do not offer solutions as to how children can deepen their understanding of the language.

It appears that there are deficiencies in the ways children can express themselves in French immersion classrooms. Based on the level of awareness exhibited by the students involved in this case study, particularly at the Grade 3 level, it is very likely that students at that age, as well as students in Grades 4, 5, and 6 would be able to choose which subject areas are best suited to their language skills. Knowledge of student perceptions and preferences would be helpful to those seeking to develop a modified early French immersion curriculum.

Implications for teaching practice

Early French immersion programs, as they currently exist, have a pre-defined goal of achievement at every level. This is inherent in the nature of the program itself. Children are expected to communicate and respond in some fashion to the second language, even at the earliest stages of instruction. Students themselves do not decide when the time is right to begin speaking and writing in

French. It is expected that children should begin to attempt speaking French in many situations as soon as possible, usually around the middle of grade one. As these study results show, students do not feel ready in all situations to begin speaking French in Grade 1, as they sometimes do not feel they know enough words. Theories of first language development suggest that the child's ability to predict and test personal theories about language are essential to that child's understanding. Insisting that children must attempt to understand or speak French at all times is not consistent with child development theories. How can one insist on the use of a language that children do not know?

Based on the findings of this study, and the theories which support the study analysis, it is not unreasonable to suggest that if a child is unable to predict and test theories in some way, language and concept development will be hindered. If children were able to converse in French outside school, meaningful aspects of learning the second language would be enhanced, and language skills would be likely to develop more quickly. This is often included as a recommendation following studies which discuss strengths and weaknesses of French immersion instruction. While this may be possible in some cases, it is not a practical solution for most children. Opportunities for travel or access to francophone communities and culture are not available to most students enrolled in French immersion.

A more realistic solution might be to work towards creating a balance in the French immersion classroom. Part of achieving this balance would be to encourage children to discuss their developing understanding of concepts in their own language. When concepts, objects, ideas, have been recognized, identified, and categorized (Smith, 1978), they can be "labelled" in the second language.

With this in mind, targeting a series of words and expressions for "fast-mapping" (Carey, 1974, cited in Rapp-Ruddell, 1994) at each grade level, might be advisable. This would mean that children would **not** be presented with the whole language in every classroom situation starting at the introductory levels of French immersion. Instead, situations which lend themselves to 'whole language' instruction should be identified. As Duchesne, 1995 suggests, children might be encouraged to develop automaticity with the language through the use of songs, rhymes, and dramatizations at the earliest stages of language acquisition. As children acquire some degree of automaticity, and familiarity with the language, strategies may be implemented to help children retain and use this language on a daily basis. This would allow a systematic 'building-on' of language structures and vocabulary which would truly imitate the acquisition of the first language. With the current practice in French immersion being to present the child with the 'whole language' in all situations, it might be that very few words are fast-mapped, because so many new words are encountered everyday.

It is unlikely that children will gather information as quickly or as efficiently in their second language as they would their first. This problem has not been dealt with adequately and may lead to unnecessary pressure for students, teachers and parents. Further reflection on the goals of French immersion and the best way to achieve those goals from the child's point of view is necessary. To suggest that students can cover the same content area through the second language as can be done in the first language, is naive and unrealistic. There are many factors which contribute to language and content learning. To say that children can manage to achieve all that is required in first language programs while working in a language in which they are far from proficient, reflects an inadequate understanding of children and learning.

Carey (1978) found that children begin to use new words after they have heard them read in stories, or have encountered them in conversations where there is a meaningful setting for their use. This is most evident in early French immersion classrooms in children's use of French for routine purposes, and in situations where vocabulary has been encountered on many occasions, mainly those pertaining to classroom life. Classroom life is indeed meaningful to children, and it makes up a large part of their day as young children. A knowledge of good teaching practice dictates that children's personal experience must be integrated with their school life, and not separated from it. In early French immersion, this requires an even greater

demand on the child's language knowledge. Not only must s/he learn the language of the classroom, the language of life must also be learned. This is much more difficult when French is encountered exclusively in the classroom.

Teachers often express wonder at the fact that children might hear a word in French everyday, but still not be able to use that word or expression appropriately. The method of echoing the child's error and repeating it correctly in French, as parents often do, has been found to be relatively ineffective in reducing the occurrence of incorrect grammatical features in children's speech. In the child's first language, for example, s/he might over-generalize the past-tense rule of adding 'ed' to the infinitive of a verb, and say "I goed", meaning "I went". In English, a parent might correct the child by repeating the correct form of the past tense, and after a time the child will 'know' what is right. In French, the child often combines the forms, what the adult repeats by way of correction, and whatever form of the verb that s/he had used. An example of this is the perennial "J'ai a" a sort of "I have have" situation. This phenomenon may result from the fact that the words or phrases in the teacher's' correction were not sufficiently recognizable to allow entry into the child's mental lexicon. Without being part of the child's mental lexicon, the word or phrase will not be available for future use, and the child guesses at what might be correct. In most instructional and conversational discussions which were observed during the course of this study, the teacher provided cues for retrieval from

the original context in which the word was used and helped the child express ideas when he or she struggled to find words. This helps the child in the immediate situation, but is not an efficient way to learn and remember words as it is both teacher and context dependent. Neither does frequent correction of this kind foster independent thinking, or creativity and exploratory use of language.

At the initial stages of second-language instruction, a more direct focus on vocabulary development and language comprehension might allow students to become familiar enough with French to express themselves with some degree of automaticity. As tasks become less cognitively demanding children will not have to struggle with every word, and meaning may be more easily attained (Adams, 1990). If children are allowed to develop a basic understanding of word patterns and structures in French first, they would likely be able to understand certain phrases and sentences automatically. They demonstrate an ability to do this with the everyday language they have come to use in French. This means higher levels of comprehension could possibly be achieved from language exchanges that present new words. At the entry level in French immersion, there is not usually a focus on specific repetitive patterns. This is one aspect of the instruction. Young children are not able to identify specific repetitive patterns in a language that they have not yet learned. As a specific teaching/learning strategy in French immersion, it might be advisable to begin by teaching children to recognize certain patterns and routine

expressions in the language, leading them to the stage where they are able to predict and test what might fit.

For a child to develop a sense of self, and a sense of belonging, it is essential that s/he be able to express needs, wants and experiences. For young children who begin school in early French immersion, the language which would allow such communication is the child's first language. Certainly, this is considered by the understanding that children will speak English for the most part during the Kindergarten year. How is the teacher's communicative role assessed by the child? Does the child feel a sense of belonging, and a sense of being truly understood by the teacher when s/he responds in a language that the child only partially understands? The situation of the teacher speaking consistently in French while children speak English does not seem to be one that will foster dialogue, or creative use of language.

In French immersion classrooms, children speak English almost exclusively at the kindergarten level, particularly with their peers. They tend to speak a significant, but decreasing amount of English at the Grade 1 level. The French immersion teacher understands and accepts the children's communication in English, responding as much as possible using gestures and context as an aid to comprehension where necessary. From a developmentally appropriate perspective,

this practice poses problems. Wells (1986) asserts that appropriate dialogue between adult and child is essential to the child's growing level of understanding.

All interactions in French immersion classrooms need not be turned into opportunities for specific second-language instruction. In fact, to do so, might deter a child from asking questions and communicating freely, particularly at the early stages. As one student said when asked how she went about saying things in French, "Well, sometimes I know what to say, then it's no problem. But if I don't know the words in French, I just don't say it." Children's spontaneous reactions to events or unsolicited comments allow the teacher to know the children and learn about their interests. This knowledge can then be used to motivate and encourage children to share their ideas and participate in activities and conversation. Moving from this point into second-language development might be the most developmentally appropriate and advantageous route to take for early French learners.

It is possible that an early concentration on developing children's understanding of single words and phrases might offer them a broad vocabulary base, which could be naturally extended as the years progress in French immersion. This might allow for a greater focus on the structure of the language as children become ready. Teaching factual content and concrete information through hands-on activities, and repetitive exercises might be an effective method of teaching

French and content at the same time. More abstract concepts and ideas might be discussed in English, ensuring that the child's questions and developing understandings are guided appropriately. A partial immersion program, with emphasis on the language structure and vocabulary in the French component, and on concept development (with stories, discussion and dialogue) in the English component might provide a more balanced and meaningful education for children than does the current practice of "100%" French immersion.

Using the child's first language as the point from which to extend the child's development, a meaningful framework for language learning could be developed by the child. It is very likely, based on theories of first language development, that the child would then be better able to retain French language vocabulary, and use the French language effectively to communicate. With more precision in listening comprehension and oral language, the child would then be in a position to further develop language abilities by listening to stories and by reading independently, progressing towards a more fully functioning language ability. "Making education developmentally sound means treating education as a general aim, not as the achievement of specific tasks" (Gallimore, 1992, p. 155).

While the emphasis throughout the primary and elementary years in French immersion is on the "message," it is possible that the "form" is perceived by students to have little significance. What may seem arbitrary to someone who has

already developed expertise in a language might be totally confusing to someone who has not. Tardif and Weber's (1991) kindergarten study illustrated this point effectively. The teacher involved in the study was surprised to learn that students did not understand exactly what she meant during the daily weather routine. They knew the correct responses to the question, "Quel temps fait-il?" but did not necessarily understand the words. During the observation period spent in the Kindergarten classroom during the completion of this case study, children responded appropriately to requests, but did not indicate that they knew what the words meant. Trial and error, and verification by asking what the teacher meant in English were very much in evidence.

Bialystok's (1988) references to "other knowledge" are recalled at this point. Specifically, as she points out, tasks which occur in a known context permit the learner to rely more heavily on other knowledge than do tasks which are more abstract. This theory might have important implications for the kinds of activities which can be most effectively carried out in French in the early French immersion classroom. Teachers and educators know that certain types of learning rely heavily on language knowledge. This places in serious doubt the rationale for insisting that French immersion classes be carried out entirely in French, when language knowledge is limited, and is not acquired at the rate of a child's need to know.

An active, hands-on approach to language teaching was highly evident in the classrooms observed for this study. This approach is based on the premise that the content or the activity itself will help children to acquire the language and vocabulary necessary to understand. It also reflects the knowledge that children learn by doing. They also learn by listening and talking, sharing observations and asking questions. The findings of this study suggest that students do have difficulty understanding the language of instruction, and have relatively few opportunities for extending concept development **with** language. While this study did not attempt to determine conclusively *which* concepts would be most affected by language limitations, the results suggest that abstract concepts, and those which are largely developed through extended discussion, questioning and dialogue are those which might be most directly affected. Science is mentioned by several teachers and is only one of the subjects taught in school which requires abstract thinking, and the asking of questions to develop understanding.

Teachers and parents are often heard to say that young children learn languages more quickly than adults do. Daigle (1977) addressed this question and concluded that young children are less likely to be inhibited by the second language than are adults, but that adults and children learn languages at about the same rate, given similar circumstances and amounts of exposure. Some children learn quickly. Some adults learn quickly.

Mais il est une question qui revient souvent, peut-être trop souvent lorsque l'on parle de l'acquisition d'une langue seconde, existe-t-il un âge idéal, parce que, ce qui différencie le plus l'acquisition d'une langue seconde de la langue maternelle, c'est que contrairement à la langue maternelle, la langue seconde doit être enseignée (Daigle, 1977, p. 24).

It is a question that often surfaces, perhaps too often when speaking of learning a second language, "Is there an ideal age?" What differentiates a second language most of all from the first language is that the second language *must* be taught [my translation].

It does not seem to have been given full consideration in French immersion programs that teaching a language takes time, and children need time to learn. Experience and research suggest that linguistic competence will take time to develop, even if it can be developed quickly. While we wait for this linguistic competence to develop, can it be considered pedagogically sound and developmentally appropriate to respond to children's 'heartfelt' messages in French when they are expressed in English? This is often the case in kindergarten and Grade 1 French immersion in particular. The restrictions on deep emotional communication through language is another problem. A child might want to share the fact that a family member has died, or that his or her best friend is coming for a sleep-over, and the teacher responds in a language that the child does not understand. Or, the teacher might respond with sympathy or shared excitement

which she attempts to express with simple words and tone of voice. In such exchanges, there is no invitation for the child to share more information resulting from the teacher's questions or comments, unless the child has learned enough French to understand.

One way that this redefinition of goals might be achieved is to have the percentage of English language instruction, and its introduction into French immersion programs reversed from the current arrangement. Children might begin with a significant percentage of instruction in English, gradually decreasing English language instruction as language proficiency in French increases. This would seem to follow a more natural progression of language development than the present situation which is to begin by using French as the language of instruction in kindergarten, and progressively decreasing the amount of French used in the classroom from Grade 3 through the elementary and high school years.

Evaluation and assessment were not discussed as issues of concern during teacher interviews. However, methods of evaluation and assessment which are holistic in nature must be adopted in French immersion. One cannot expect to adequately determine a child's level of language development or literacy skills based solely on second-language skills. It would seem that few teachers depend entirely on evaluation in the second language, but evaluation methods are often imprecise and haphazard. This area of French immersion instruction must be improved. The

case study results suggest that children might benefit from some discussion and evaluation in their first language, particularly at the earliest stages when diagnosis and intervention are crucial to minimizing learning problems. More specific and immediate recommendations for French immersion programs are based on the results of this study, and supported by my own experience in teaching at the earliest levels of French immersion. They are:

- ensuring the availability of age, interest, **and** language appropriate materials.
- recognition of the fact that content cannot be covered in the same manner, or to the same degree as might be possible in first-language settings. The French immersion curriculum should therefore be modified to reflect an appropriate balance between language and content instruction. A partial immersion program might allow the achievement of such a balanced program.
- greater support from outside sources (school board, school environment) for French immersion programs.
- improved access to real language outside the classroom (i.e. school or community sponsored events where the target language is featured).
- improved access to remedial support for children who may experience difficulty in French immersion.
- changes in teaching approach and strategies. The current practice of involving children in hands-on activities would be more limited to concrete concepts, with more abstract conceptual exploration being done in English. The use of English part of the time would allow for a more child-centred and dialogic classroom.
- redefinition of instructional goals of French immersion, to include the use of English for reading stories, and for discussion and presentation of abstract concepts

Recommendations for further research

Any one of the sources used to collect data during the completion of this case study could offer opportunities for further exploration. Students and teachers in particular might be best able to inform researchers about the reality of second-language learning and teaching. Further study is recommended in the following areas:

- It might be advisable to explore the relationship between children's preferences for certain activities and/or school subjects in French immersion and language proficiency. Is there a direct link between the two? Is it possible that a child might dislike a subject because of difficulty with the language? Is it possible that the second language might promote learning in some subject areas?
- Further exploration of how children make sense of the second language in a French immersion setting is desirable. A case study of students in Grades 4, 5, and 6, similar in design to this study, might offer further insight into what children feel they know and want to know. Longer and more systematic classroom observations would likely be helpful in this area of study.
- Research into how English and French instruction might be combined in French immersion to reflect a true understanding of children's developing language

abilities and interests would help to determine how French immersion programs might be modified. Would children's second language proficiency develop as well if they began with some instruction in English, gradually moving toward a greater percentage of instructional time in French?

- Comparative research in a variety of French immersion settings should be undertaken to determine whether or not children's second language development is affected by the use of the first language as a 'starting point.' For example, in a modified immersion setting, children might be exposed to French in high concentration but in specific contexts and more gradually than is currently the case. Would second-language development be negatively affected?
- It is also recommended that more extensive research be initiated to further explore the questions of this study. Is the teacher-centred nature of French immersion inevitable, given children's lack of independent ability to read, write and converse in French? Which curriculum areas lend themselves most to instruction in French? Which areas might best be taught in English? Is there a possibility of effectively combining the two?

A similar study focusing on children in grades 4, 5, and 6, in French immersion and their teachers would likely result in a broader perspective on how children perceive the program, and in particular, if they feel that the second language environment limits learning and/or concept development in any way.

Children at this age level would likely be able to articulate their feelings quite adequately, and could be encouraged to tell their own stories about their school experiences, and how they feel about learning in French. Teachers would likely have a great deal to contribute about presentation of abstract concepts and ideas through the French language, as there are typically fewer opportunities in the elementary grades to engage in hands-on activities than in the primary grades.

Concluding comments

Based on the findings of this study, and on my personal experience in the field of early French immersion, it is reasonable to suggest that a partial French immersion program can offer a well-balanced and more developmentally appropriate program for kindergarten and primary children than does the current early French immersion program. Children would have the opportunity to learn French, and to experience the benefits and joys of knowing a second language. Teachers would have the opportunity to know children by communicating with them in their first language about the many learning situations they encounter in school. Through dialogue and discussion in the first language, as well as through more formal methods of evaluation, teachers might also be able to identify learning problems and to begin early remediation of those problems. Teachers would be able to provide learning opportunities for children which build on the language and other

knowledge children have already acquired, instead of beginning with the 'basics', as is so often necessary in French. Most significantly, the teacher can become the facilitator of the child's learning, and not the director, by engaging the child in dialogue, by introducing the child to the wonder of stories which s/he is already able to understand on the very first day of school. The French language is one of those wonders to which the child can be introduced, in a variety of ways. French immersion educators have already developed many effective strategies for teaching the second language in a meaningful and exciting way. This cannot be said for teaching all of the content which must be covered in a primary program.

In an era which allows and encourages people to be citizens of the world, learning more than one language would seem to be a natural aspect of our educational evolution. However, there is a danger inherent in trying to learn too many things too quickly, or in assuming that because children are young, they are naturally predisposed to adapting to a second-language environment which immerses them in a language they do not understand. Levels of development must be considered when choosing appropriate programs for young children. Individual interests, emotional, social and intellectual development and needs must also be considered when developing such programs. An appropriate program will allow for individual growth within the overall goals for achievement and learning at any

particular level. Learning a second language can be integrated with these goals, but not if the second language is an inhibiting factor.

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APPENDIX A
PERMISSION LETTERS

PERMISSION LETTER TO SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Box 50578, SS #3
St. John's, NF A1B 4M2
April 21, 1995

School Principal

My name is Adele Walsh, and I am currently a student in the Graduate Program of the Faculty of Education at Memorial University. My studies are focused in the areas of Primary Language Arts and Reading, and I am particularly interested in the progression of first- and second-language development. My background as an Early French Immersion teacher prompts me to study the question of second-language proficiency and its relationship to concept development in Early French Immersion.

I would like to carry out a study in the kindergarten and primary grades in Early French Immersion at your school that would allow me to explore this relationship. Such a study would, with your permission, take place during the spring session of this school year, 1995, and would involve:

- observation in each of the Kindergarten, Grade 1, Grade 2, and Grade 3 classrooms, on a daily basis, for a one-week period. The purpose of the observation period would be to collect data relating to children's use(s) of French, response(s) to spoken French during story-time, instructions, etc.
- interviewing each child for a period of approximately 15 minutes (please see enclosed sample interview questions)
- interviewing each teacher (please see enclosed sample interview questions)
- completion of questionnaires by parents and participating teachers.

Anonymity for the school and all participants in this study is assured. Participation is strictly voluntary and permission may be withdrawn at any time during the study if so desired. Students, parents, and teachers may withdraw from the study at any time, and may refuse to answer interview questions or refrain from responding to questionnaires if they wish. Letters requesting consent from students, parents, and teachers have been drafted and are enclosed. These will be sent when approval has been granted from the school and from the school board superintendent. I understand that I must receive permission from the

Avalon Consolidated School Board Superintendent, before beginning any classroom study. I have written to request this permission.

This study has received the approval of the Faculty of Education Ethics Review Committee. If you wish to speak with a resource person not associated with the study, please contact Dr. Stephen Norris, Associate Dean, Research and Development, Memorial University.

I feel that my proposed research will be beneficial to children and teachers who are involved in French Immersion programs. I am requesting your permission, and the participation of the designated classroom teachers to carry out the study I have described.

Your cooperation would be greatly appreciated. All results of the study will be made available to you upon completion of my thesis.

Thank you very much for your consideration of my request.

Sincerely,

Adele M. Walsh, B.A., B.Ed.
Graduate Student (MUN)

PERMISSION LETTER TO SCHOOL BOARD

Box 50578, SS #3
St. John's, NF
April 21, 1995

School Board

As you know, I am currently on leave from my position as a Grade 2 French Immersion teacher. I am hoping to begin the classroom study portion of my thesis this spring.

My proposed study will involve an exploration of the relationships between levels of second-language proficiency and children's concept development in an Early French Immersion learning environment.

I would like to request permission from the school principal to carry out a classroom study involving the Kindergarten, Grade 1, Grade 2, and Grade 3 students at that school. This study would include:

- observation of students in each of the four classrooms for a one-week period on a daily basis
- interviews with participating students (please see attached interview questions)
- interviews with participating teachers (please see attached interview questions)
- completion of questionnaires by teachers and parents of Early French Immersion students (please see attached questionnaires)

I have enclosed copies of the letters which have been drafted and will be sent to the parents, teachers, and school principal pending your approval of this proposed study. Results of the research will be made available to you upon completion of my study. The study has been approved by the Faculty of Education's Ethics Review Committee at Memorial University. If at any time you wish to speak with a resource person not associated with the study, please contact Dr. Stephen Norris, Associate Dean, Research and Development, at Memorial University. Thank you very much.

PERMISSION LETTER TO TEACHERS

Box 50578, SS #3
St. John's, NF A1B 4M2
April 21, 1995

Teachers

My name is Adele Walsh, and I am a graduate student at Memorial University in the Faculty of Education. My studies are focused in the area of Primary Language Arts and Reading. A great deal of my work during the past year has involved studying and comparing first- and second-language development in learners of all ages.

I plan to study the relationship between second-language proficiency and concept development in my thesis. To do this, I hope to spend some time in each of the Kindergarten, Grade 1, Grade 2, and Grade 3 classrooms at your school. I would like to spend a period of one week, on a daily basis, in each classroom to observe children and their use of their second language as part of their everyday routine. I would like to note their responses to spoken French and would examine the possible links between receptive language and written/reading expression.

If permitted to observe children in your classroom, I would make every effort to be as unobtrusive as possible (i.e., participating in activities where necessary, playing the role of teacher helper where appropriate).

Teacher behaviours are not the focus of this study. It may be necessary, however, to describe the type of activity that was carried out during an observation period, or what was said when describing a student's response to instruction. I will, with your permission, record classroom language/activities, as recording language usage by taking notes might not always be effective. All tapes will be destroyed immediately after data has been transcribed. You, and the children in your classroom, will be informed on all occasions when an audiotape recorder will be in use.

I would also like to request, as part of this study, that teachers complete a questionnaire and agree to be interviewed by me. The length of the interview might be approximately 30 minutes and longer if you wish. This would allow me to create a more extensive profile of the relationship between language proficiency and concept development than might otherwise be established. I would audiotape the interview so that our

conversation not be slowed down by my taking notes or recording responses. These audiotapes will be destroyed immediately after responses are transcribed in written text.

This study has received the approval of the Faculty of Education's Ethics Review Committee at Memorial University. If you wish to speak to a resource person not associated with the study, please contact Dr. Stephen Norris, Associate Dean, Research and Development, Memorial University.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at:

Adele Walsh
739-0053

Results of the study will be made available to you upon completion of my thesis.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Adele M. Walsh, B.A., B.Ed.
Graduate Student (MUN)

I, _____, agree to participate in this study, as described by Adele Walsh in this letter dated _____, 1995. I understand that my participation is purely voluntary, and that I may withdraw from the study at any time. (I may refuse to answer any or all questions contained in the proposed questionnaire, and I may choose not to participate in the requested interview.) All information is confidential and no individual will be identified.

Date: _____

Signature: _____

PERMISSION LETTER TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Box 50578, SS #3
St. John's, NF A1B 4M2
April 21, 1995

Parents/Guardians

My name is Adele Walsh, and I am currently a graduate student at Memorial University. I am focusing my studies in the areas of Primary Language Arts and Reading. A particular area of interest for me relates to language development, as it is seen through listening, speaking, reading, and writing. As a French Immersion teacher, second-language development in those same areas is of primary concern to me.

I am now on leave from my position as the Grade 2 French Immersion teacher and will be returning to that position in September, 1995.

This spring, I hope to begin a study at your child's school which will explore the questions of second-language proficiency and its relevance to concept development. With your permission (as well as that of the school's administrators and teachers), I hope to spend a period of one week in your child's classroom for observation/data collection purposes. Data collection refers to audiotapes of language activities and notes recording observations made in the classroom. These observations would include, for example:

- children's ability to express themselves in French
- responses to spoken French (i.e., listening to stories, instructions)

I would like to interview each child very briefly to ask questions about their experience in a French Immersion setting. These interviews would be held after I have spent time in your child's classroom so that he/she will be familiar with me and, hopefully, comfortable with the idea of an interview. If your child feels uncomfortable, or shows any hesitation to be interviewed, he/she will not be coerced in any way. With your permission, I will audiotape the interview so that children will not be distracted by my taking notes. All tape recordings will be destroyed immediately after information has been transcribed into written text.

I would also appreciate your help in completing a questionnaire, which will be sent home with your child following the observation period. These questionnaires will not include your name unless you wish to give it.

Your child, your child's teacher, or school will not be identified in my thesis by name or by any other possibly identifying characteristics. This ensures anonymity for all participants in the study. All information gathered in this study is strictly confidential. My purpose is not to assess individual children in any way. I wish to gain information about children's use of their second language in an Early French Immersion environment and how they learn through use of that language.

This study has received the approval of the Faculty of Education Ethics Review Committee (of Memorial University). If you wish to contact a resource person not associated with the study, please contact Dr. Stephen Norris, Associate Dean, Research and Development, at Memorial University.

The results of the study will be made available to you upon request. If you have any questions or concerns about the proposed study, please contact me:

Adele Walsh
Tel. 739-0053
Fax. 739-6182

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You and/or your child may withdraw at any time, or decline to participate in any aspect of the study if you choose to do so.

If you have no objections to your child's participation in this study, please complete the attached permission form.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Adele M. Walsh, B.A., B.Ed.
Graduate Student (MUN)

Name: _____
I _____, grant permission for my child to

participate in the research study as outlined in the letter dated _____, 1995 from Adele Walsh. I understand that my child will be a participant in this study by being observed, but not identified, and by being interviewed for a brief period of approximately 15 minutes.

I understand that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and that my child and/or I can withdraw permission to participate at any time. All information is strictly confidential and no individual will be identified. No permanent audiotape recordings of my child will exist upon completion of this study. Audiotape recordings may be made of my child's response to interview questions and kept only until information is transcribed in written form. Interview questions will be supplied to me upon request.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B
QUESTIONNAIRES
TEACHERS AND PARENTS

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

- What is your teaching/education background?
 - How did you become a French Immersion teacher?
- How do you feel about teaching in French Immersion?
 - What are your general impressions of the Immersion environment?
- Do you feel that Early Immersion programs are successful?
 - What contributes/detracts from that success/failure?
- Is a child's background knowledge important/not important in instruction?
 - How so?
- Are some areas more difficult/easier to teach in French than others, or would you consider all areas to be equal?
- Do you perceive differences in French Immersion and English language instruction? If so, please give details. If not, please note similarities.
- What types of activities do you see children choose during free play/free choice time in your classroom?
- What language do children use during:
 - work periods
 - free play
 - recess time
 - group work/collaborative activities
 - with parents

- with teachers

9. What language is heard most at school:

- in the classroom
- in the hallways
- on the P.A.
- at assemblies/school functions

10. Do you always speak French with students? Please give details.

11. (a) Are first-language/second-language methodologies linked/combined?

(b) How?

12. (a) What do you believe works most effectively in French Immersion instruction?

(b) What is least effective?

13. How do you feel about the materials used in French Immersion instruction (books, tapes, etc.)?

14. How would you assess your knowledge of first-language and second-language development?

15. Please add any comments you wish to make.

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How would you describe your child's impressions of school?
2. How would you describe your child's language development in the pre-school years? (Did the child begin to speak early? Did the child talk a lot or a little, or did it depend on the situation?)
3. Do you speak French? How would you describe your experiences with French and learning French (if applicable)?
4. Did your child express an interest in speaking French him/herself before coming to school?
5. Does your child seem to enjoy learning French? Does your child speak French at home? Does your child watch French television, choose French language books, comics, etc., to read for pleasure?
6. Does your child understand words in English that you expect him/her to understand?
7. Do you notice differences/similarities in your child's language and the language of children who attend classes where instruction is given in English?
8. What are your impressions of Early French Immersion?
9. (a) What is your involvement with your child's school work at home/in school, etc.

- (b) Would this be different/same if your child were receiving English language instruction?
10. What were some of your reasons for choosing to enrol your child in French Immersion?

APPENDIX C
QUESTIONS FOR STUDENT INTERVIEWS

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENT INTERVIEWS

1. What are your impressions/thoughts about school?
2. How do you feel about learning French?
3. Do you enjoy speaking French? Do you find it easy/difficult?
4. Do you speak French at Home? Do you watch French television? Please give details.
5. Tell me about your favourite/least favourite activity at school.
6.
 - (a) When you tell stories, are you able to tell them in French?
 - (b) Are you able to tell them in English?
 - (c) Do you have a preference? Why?
 - (d) Do you enjoy/understand stories in French?
7. Is there anything you would change about school/school work if you could?
8. How did you decide about going to school in French or English?
9. When you want to say something in French, how do you go about it?

APPENDIX D
QUESTIONS FOR TEACHER INTERVIEWS

QUESTIONS FOR TEACHER INTERVIEWS

1. In your opinion, how do parents perceive the Early French Immersion program?
2. In your opinion, how do children perceive the Early French Immersion program?
3. How do you perceive this program?
4. In your opinion, are there outcomes of Early French Immersion programs that differ from English language programs of the same level? Please give details about your answer.
5.
 - (a) What kind of language development do you observe in your students?
 - (b) How would you describe your students' participation in conversations, descriptions, narratives, etc?
6. Please feel free to discuss any area that you would like regarding your involvement in Early French Immersion teaching.



