# Challenging the French Immersion Orthodoxy:

# Student Stories and Counterstories

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**ABSTRACT**

Through this study I have provided an understanding of what French immersion was like for children who left the program. I have considered an important aspect of the French immersion program that has been neglected in the research literature. My main research question was: What were the experiences of French immersion students who withdrew from their program during the elementary years? Subsequent questions included: How did they deal with repeated failure? How did they cope with the frustration? How did these failures and frustrations change after they left the French immersion program? How do they make sense of their experiences?

In this study, I listened to students' voices to gain insights that lead to an understanding of how they make sense of what school was like for them during their years in French immersion. Using narrative inquiry, I focused on the lived, storied experiences of students who have not succeeded in a French immersion program. By listening to the students' storied conversations, I have developed a deeper understanding of failed immersion experiences than that which is currently provided in the literature.

The six students in this study were aware of their lack of progress in the French immersion program and were unable to become active participants in the classroom community. The inability to become engaged further marginalized them as learners and led to the development of school stories about them. These school stories soon became designated identities with which the children had to cope.

By honoring the experiences of the students and including their voices, I have outlined information to aid educators to make decisions for more appropriate programming choices. This information demonstrates the need for timely intervention for

some students to improve their school experience. Parents, teachers, and policy makers

can then make decisions with the added knowledge provided by the students' stories.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My final thank you is to my husband, David, who encouraged me with patience and support throughout this project. I offer a sincere thank you to him, to our children, and to other family members.

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

> As it pays closer attention, it hears the muffled cries coming from the voices of a forgotten few. It remembers and wonders why it did not hear those cries so many years ago. These memories are like ghosts, shimmering, flickering, uncertain; something that was not there when it first looked, a slight movement where there had been stillness. The school seems to shudder and almost shift uncomfortably as it remembers. As it sifts through these memories the school reaches back to pull away long forgotten cobwebs and unlocks the door to reveal still more memories. The school sighs and appears to sag a little under this weight, for these memories too, must be acknowledged as part of its heritage. (adapted from Lavigne-Beaupré, 1997)

## Unlocking the Door

The need for this study became apparent to me over a period of years. Personal experiences as a teacher in the educational system raised questions for which I did not have answers. The literature about second language acquisition and French immersion could not explain the failure of some of my students. I began to question the suitability of the French immersion (FI) program for all students.

My first teaching assignment was in a French immersion kindergarten classroom. As a francophone and a new university graduate with a ten-year background in early childhood education, I was confident in my ability to introduce the French language to twenty-four, English-speaking, five year olds. With much gesticulation, I told stories, we sang, we counted, we danced, we played, we repeated, we colored. We even learned to sing the national anthem, Oh Canada, in French. After a few months, it was evident that, although many of my students were learning the French language, others were failing to make progress in the acquisition of the French language. They were still perplexed when spoken to in French; they still refused to communicate their most basic needs to me in French despite the fact that we had concentrated on these "survival phrases" since the first days of the school year. I redoubled my efforts. What we had previously concentrated on for ten minutes, we then did for twenty; I introduced incentives,

rewards, and contemplated bribery. But to no avail. The end of the year approached and I was still met with the same blank stares.

I was relieved when my assignment changed for the next year from kindergarten to the middle years in a different school. Thinking that my new students who had been in the program all along would not display the same frustration as my kindergarten students, I eagerly approached my new teaching assignment. How wrong I was. I listened to their silent frustrations; I felt their anguish. I recognized the same blank looks of my kindergarten class in my teen students. Despite repeated attempts I was forced to accept that some of the students in French immersion were not going to succeed.

Then an opportunity came for me to do something about what I perceived to be a problem. I was appointed vice-principal of the school where I had started teaching kindergarten. As the first French-speaking administrator in the school I was excited at the prospect of addressing the issue of suitability of the program for all students—an issue I considered pressing in the French program. However, the teachers forcefully defended their philosophy about French immersion, beliefs firmly ensconced in the research about the program's suitability for all children, and that difficulties experienced in French would be similar in an English program. Furthermore, the fear of having the program perceived as an elite program influenced the teachers not to broach the subject of transfer out of the program with the parents.

As I looked around the French classrooms, I saw that my former kindergarten students who had struggled with the program were no longer in the FI classrooms. Some had transferred out of the program as recently as the previous year. What had happened to these children in those four years? What had they experienced? Where are they now and what is their current school experience? What sense were they making of this whole journey?

I needed to hear their stories. Their teachers need to know what happened to them. We need to value their experience and learn from it. We cannot assume that we know how to describe their experience, how they make sense of it, nor can we speak for them. Edward Said spoke of Flaubert's widely accepted rendition of the *Oriental* woman. "She never spoke of herself; she never represented her emotions, presence or history. *He* spoke for and represented her" (Said, 1994 p. 133). As a result, his rendition of the *Oriental* woman contributed to the created body of theory and practice that existed in relations between the East and the West for many generations. Listening to and interpreting the stories of these students will contribute to the theory and practice of French immersion by adding the missing voices of those who know.

Significance of the Study

Although the French immersion program has proven to be a positive experience for many children (Krashen, 1987; Stern, H.H., 1984; Swain & Lapkin, 1981), others have not fared so well (Bibeau, 1984; Halsall, 1991; Keep, 1993; Mannavarayan, 2002; Stern, M., 1991). Successful students in a French immersion program are those who attained both a communicative proficiency in the French language and learned the subject matter of the regular school curriculum thereby meeting the two goals of the program. The premise of the French immersion program is that it is a program suitable for children with a wide range of abilities and from various socio-economic conditions (Cummins, 1984; Genesee, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1991; Swain & Lapkin, 1982). However, Stern (1991) reported these statistics: "While many children are successful in the French immersion programs…approximately 40% to 50% of the children transfer out of the French immersion program between senior kindergarten and Grade 6" (p. 12). That statistic represents thousands of students who fail to complete the program. Some researchers (Bruck, 1978; Genesee, 1976) elaborated that if students are going to experience

difficulties in the French immersion program, they will face the same problems in an English program.

My research differs from the majority of research about French immersion. Past research about the program has dealt primarily with successful students; much less study has been devoted to those who did not succeed. And although some exploration of attrition has taken place, that work has tended to focus on the reasons why students chose to leave the French immersion program and on the resulting pedagogical implications for the program (Halsall, 1991; Hart, Lapkin, & Swain, 1998; Hayden, 1988; Lewis & Shapson, 1989; Parkin, Morrison, & Watkin, 1987).

Past research in French immersion has paid little attention to the lived experiences of students who have left the program. It is crucial that parents, teachers, and policy makers understand that the stories of these children as told in the literature are not those of the students. Rather the stories told by researchers are stories about the children. These stories contain little of the students' thoughts and perceptions about what it was like for them and do not provide an exploration of their lived experiences. To deepen our understanding about the students' constructed meaning we must explore new directions and new dimensions of the French immersion experience. To understand the phenomenon, we must uncover the untold, the unheard, the silent, the ignored, and the remembered stories of these students.

## Historical Background

Before one can start to develop an understanding of the experience of students who do not succeed in the French immersion program, it is essential that one understand the history and growth of this program in Canada. Because French immersion is a relatively recent phenomenon, an examination of relevant precedents from Canadian history is necessary.

Language duality and bilingualism in Canada were contentious even prior to Confederation (Joy, 1992; Marchand, 1997; MacMillan, 2003; Stebbins, 2000; Warren, 2003). Magnet (1995) provided a historical overview of language rights in Canada. He wrote that the defeat of New France by the British on the Plains of Abraham in 1759 extended British colonization into the French community. The *Proclamation of 1763* provided for the abolition of French institutions, including those that governed civil law and administration. Magnet described the intent: "Francophones were to be excluded from higher civil service. The French speaking community was to be drowned by a flood of English immigration" (pp. 5-6).

Subsequent to Confederation in 1867, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald sought to accommodate Canada's French speaking population. George-Etienne Cartier, one of the Fathers of Confederation, was the strong voice for Québec at the time of Confederation and proved to be an effective spokesperson for the French presence in Canada. He and Macdonald agreed that French Canadians and their language deserved protection (Moore, 1997). Macdonald supported those Canadians who wanted equality of the French and the English languages saying:

> I have no accord with the desire expressed in some quarters that by any mode
> whatever there should be an attempt made to oppress the one language or render
> it inferior to the other: I believe that would be impossible if it were tried, and it
> would be foolish and wicked if it were possible. (Canadian Heritage, Government
> of Canada, 1999, ¶ 6)

The British North America Act (BNA Act), enacted in 1867, recognized the official status of both French and English in parliament and the federal courts as well as in the legislature and courts of Québec. However, Armstrong (1981) and Creighton (1970) pointed out that the terms of the BNA Act were not the result of a "cultural compact" (Creighton, 1970, p. 11) that

recognized the equality of each of the two founding groups, French and English. Rather, the BNA Act demonstrated the political nature of an agreement between several colonies. Creighton wrote that the intent was not to perpetuate cultural diversity but to establish a united nation. The establishment of a central government sought to eliminate the problems encountered by the American federal union to the south. The intent of Confederation was to strengthen the federal government and confer only such powers to provincial governments as required for local purposes. Armstrong (1981) reported that the colonies' consent to the terms of Confederation was grounded in a belief that local interests would be protected while economic development of the nation would lie within the central government's domain.

At the time of Confederation some issues regarding the jurisdiction of the federal or provincial governments were not clearly delineated. Among these issues were education and language rights. Talks leading to Confederation included little discussion of ethnic and cultural questions. "Language was only one of the many components that made up the curious cultural medley that was British America before Confederation" (Creighton, 1970, p. 11). The BNA Act held no general declaration that Canada was bilingual or bicultural. Subsequently, various legal battles ensued between Oliver Mowat, the premier of Ontario, and the federal government led by John A. Macdonald. Ontario won most of the disputes (Armstrong, 1981, p. 5). As a result the courts granted powers to provincial governments that had not initially been granted at the time of Confederation. As the powers of provinces expanded, education and language rights increasingly fell under the jurisdiction of the individual provinces. Consequently, Ottawa lost control over bilingualism and education in the nation (Armstrong, 1981; Creighton, 1970).

Despite a well-meaning Prime Minister, John A. Macdonald, francophones struggled to protect their linguistic rights throughout Canada. The Manitoba Act of 1870 and the Northwest

Territories Act of 1875 established laws that protected French language rights on the prairies (Morton, 1970). This enactment ensured the language rights of the Manitoban francophone population, which numbered one-half of the new province's total population, as well as those francophones living in the North-West Territories. This large francophone population included the Metis who had been a French-speaking presence on the prairies since the time of the fur trade. The Michif language that resulted, with stems from both the Aboriginal and French languages, was a language in itself and significantly different from French. However, the Metis people retained strong ties to French communities and in 1869-70 sought the protection of their French language from the federal government (Conrad & Finkel, 2008).

However, twenty years later, the non-franco Canadian immigrant population had surpassed that of the francophones by a ratio of approximately fourteen to one (Conrad & Finkel, 2002, p. 277). As a result, official bilingualism, guaranteed by the Manitoba Act, was eliminated in 1890 from the education system after the third grade and as an official language in legislative proceedings in Manitoba. The Northwest Territories adopted the same stance in 1892. In 1897, restoration of minimal instruction of French in schools in Manitoba was short-lived and eventually abolished altogether (Friesen, 1990, pp. 258-259). The abolition of public funding for separate schools and the restriction of French instruction to one hour a day in the prairie region in 1896 and in Ontario in 1913 followed (Chevrier, 2003; Conrad & Finkel, 2002; Friesen, 1990; Martel, 1991). When Saskatchewan and Alberta became provinces in 1905, Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier was pressured to limit the use of French to one hour a day in the two new provinces' schools (Julien, 1993; Morton, 1970).

An example of the shift that took place in power from Ottawa to the provinces comes from the German-speaking Mennonite community. When the Mennonites arrived in Manitoba in

1874, Ottawa granted them authority to control the language of educational instruction. Later the issue of language use in schools became an issue. By World War I (1914-18), it was clearly established that the provinces controlled these matters. A subsequent showdown between the Mennonites and the governments of Manitoba and Saskatchewan resulted in thousands of Mennonites leaving for Mexico. The same transfer of powers to the provinces also affected the Francophone population outside Québec (Quiring, 2003).

The loss of the protected status of French and other minority languages in schools and in government in these regions further eroded the position of French in Canada that existed since the time of Confederation. This erosion was related to the meager pattern of French settlement in the West (Blay, 1987; Conrad & Finkel, 2002; Magnet, 1995; Martel, 1991). In many respects, the French became only one of many minorities in the region. The French Canadians, along with the Mennonites, Ukrainians, Germans, and other minorities found their provincial governments did not protect their first languages and cultures (Conrad & Finkel, 2008).

Academics who wrote about French immigration within Canada often focused on the violation of poorly defined French language and cultural rights. In contrast, Silver (1969) presented a slightly different view, arguing that reasons other than persecution accounted for a diminished French presence in the prairie region. According to him, Quebeckers did not settle in the West in larger numbers because they did not hold a typical frontier mentality. Silver maintained that French settlement in the West was discouraged by others in Québec because of a belief that the land was unsuitable for settlement— "térrritoire aussi dangereux que peut fertile" (p. 17), a fear of the loss of identity—"il s'agit de l'avenir de notre race dans ce vaste térritoire" (p.21), and a sense that Québec was their country—"To go to Manitoba was not to colonize; it was to emigrate, to abandon the *sol natal*" (p.25). The early Catholic missionaries to the

Northwest who stressed the negative nature of the region reinforced these opinions. Silver expanded that most colonizing societies were societies in movement: migratory and exploratory. Quebeckers were not like that. They were defeated in the 18$^{th}$ century and again in 1837-38 and as a result had withdrawn within Québec. The Quebeckers viewed their area as already settled, while the English speakers and other immigrants saw vast areas left for settlement. The vast majority of Quebeckers rejected mobility. Quebeckers who did leave, left for economic reasons and not in the spirit of adventure or for exploratory reasons. With a decline in the Quebec economy, hard economic times saw an estimated 30 000 emigrants leave Quebec in the 1840s alone. In an attempt to provide for their families most of these people emigrated to the United States to work in the textile mills of New England (Francis, Jones, & Smith, 2000 p. 355).

The historian W.L. Morton (1970) maintained that the French-Québec reluctance to participate in the settlement of the West played a role in the loss on the prairies of bilingualism and a dual track school system. The French element on the prairies was perceived as "small and weak" by others living in the region. As a result the provision for French schools that would guarantee the French-Canadian presence on the prairies was eliminated. "The failure to establish significant French-Canadian immigration in the first generation of settlement was fatal to the French cause in the west during the post-1900 boom" (Morton, 1970, p. 259).

Throughout much of Western Canada, francophones became a relatively small minority. Table 1.1 presents statistics taken from Robert Stebbins (2000) reported by Statistics Canada in 1998. Remembering that in 1870 the French in Manitoba represented 50% of the total Manitoban population, it is clear that the French presence has diminished significantly.

Table 1.1

Francophone Population in Western Canada in 1980

| Province | Mother Tongue Speakers | 2$^{nd}$ Language Speakers |
|---|---|---|
| Manitoba | 50,565  or  4.5% | 104,635  or  9.5% |
| Saskatchewan | 20,509  or  2.1% | 50,784  or  5.2% |
| Alberta | 52,375  or  1.9% | 180,125  or  6.8% |
| British Columbia | 60,675  or  1.6% | 250,365  or  6.8% |

*Source: Stebbins (2000, pp. 165-171)*

Not all the blame for the decline of the French presence in the West can be placed on low levels of French immigration. Strong pro-English sentiment also swept over the region and damaged the place and status of the French language and culture. Although French remained one of the two officially recognized languages of the country, the French Canadian population outside Québec suffered a serious blow in terms of educating their children in French (Friesen, 1987; Martel, 1991). Friesen summed up the situation when he wrote: "the passage of Manitoba legislation on schools and language in 1890 made plain, the defining elements of prairie society were henceforth to be Protestant, English-speaking, and British" (pp. 463-464). Scholars of Canadian history generally agree that:

> though French has maintained its presence as a major language of culture
>
> and technology internationally, it remains that in Anglo-Canada, French was
>
> historically relegated to a low status position not unlike that of ancestral
>
> languages of Europe. Francophone minorities … have long been the target of
>
> discriminatory practices which have in turn contributed to the Anglicization
>
> of French Canadians across the whole country. (Bourhis, 1984, p. 9)

Jean-Paul Marchand (1997) summed up the anti-French sentiment demonstrated by English Protestants as "Maudits Frogs! On vous aime bien, mais…Speak white!" (p. 11).

However, events within Québec would prove to have an effect on bilingualism and bilingual education across Canada. Profound changes occurred in Québec society during the late 1950s. By the early 1970s a rapid decline in the birthrate, "insufficient even to replenish the population" (Magnet, 1995, p. 24), established Québec as the province with the lowest birthrate in Canada. Some thought "that trends in immigration combined with the low fertility rate of French Canada would overwhelm the French language, even in Québec" (Magnet, p. 24). In addition, especially from the 1960s onward, Québec's Roman Catholic Church lost its central role to government institutions in education, public charity, and health. The Church had once exercised control over educational matters, the dispensing of welfare benefits to the needy, the provision of hospital and health care, and control over reproductive matters such as birth control and abortion. A new thinking emerged among the Québec citizenry that supported these governmental, social, and cultural changes. These changes in turn forced a reevaluation of Québec's place in Confederation. This came to be known as the "Quiet Revolution" (MacMillan, 2003; Stebbins, 2000; Warren, 2003). Beginning in 1960, Premier Jean Lesage and subsequent premiers, through the "Quiet Revolution", led the modernization and secularization of Québec.

Events in Québec attracted attention in the rest of Canada. In 1963, in response to events in Québec, Lester B. Pearson's Liberal government established the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. That Commission confirmed in a preliminary report that "Canada, without being fully conscious of the fact, is passing through the greatest crisis in its history" (Magnet, 1995, p. 26). As well, the Commission concluded that the rate of assimilation of French Canadians was so alarming as to support Québec nationalist claims that something had to be done to prevent the disappearance of French culture in Canada (Francis, Jones and Smith, 2004; Magnet, 1995; Trudeau, 1968).

In 1969, parliament passed the Official Languages Act, placing French on an equal footing with English, at least throughout the federal government. It became federal government policy to expand the use of French across the country to meet the new requirements for bilingual employees within the federal government (Blay, 1987; Canadian Heritage, Government of Canada, 2004; Joy, 1992; MacMillan, 1998, 2003; Larrivée, 2003; Marchand, 1997). As well, New Brunswick enacted its first Official Languages Act in 1969 making it the first and only officially bilingual province in the country.

Although the political will existed at the federal level, it did not readily translate into policy across Canada. Education remained under the jurisdiction of the provincial governments. As a result, expansion and protection of French language education varied greatly from province to province.

Demographic and linguistic data compiled by Chevrier (2003) helped to provide a clearer picture of the "French fact in Canada". Until 1961, the French population in Canada remained at 30%. In 1931, 7.2% of the Canadian population outside Québec had French as a mother tongue. The definition used here of "mother tongue" refers to the first language learned and still understood (MacMillan, 1998). By 1996 this percentage had dropped to 4.5% and the decrease is even larger if we consider language of use rather than mother tongue. From 1971 and 1996, the use of French fell from 4.4% to 2.9% across Canada, from 4.6% to 2.9% in Ontario, from 4.0% to 2.1% in Manitoba, and from 1.7% to 0.6% in Saskatchewan. Only in New Brunswick did the use of French appear stable, remaining at 30.5% in 1996, the same figure as in 1971. In 2001, 90% of the French speaking population in Canada resided in Québec (Chevrier, 2003, pp.124-125).

Stebbins (2000, p. 192) provided a language continuity index that reports the numbers of people who continue to speak their mother tongue at home. An index figure of less than one means that French suffered more losses than gains in its exchange with other languages, primarily English. The figures in Table 1.2 suggest that between 1971 and 1996 French had declined significantly as the language of use in the home in all provinces outside Québec.

Table 1.2

French Language Continuity Index

| Province/Territory | 1971 | 1981 | 1991 | 1996 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Newfoundland | 0.63 | 0.72 | 0.47 | 0.42 |
| Prince Edward Island | 0.60 | 0.64 | 0.53 | 0.53 |
| Nova Scotia | 0.69 | 0.60 | 0.59 | 0.57 |
| New Brunswick | 0.92 | 0.93 | 0.93 | 0.92 |
| Ontario | 0.73 | 0.72 | 0.63 | 0.61 |
| Manitoba | 0.65 | 0.60 | 0.49 | 0.47 |
| Saskatchewan | 0.50 | 0.41 | 0.33 | 0.29 |
| Alberta | 0.49 | 0.49 | 0.36 | 0.32 |
| British Columbia | 0.30 | 0.45 | 0.43 | 0.46 |
| Yukon | 0.30 | 0.45 | 0.43 | 0.46 |
| Northwest Territories | 0.50 | 0.51 | 0.47 | 0.43 |
| Canada less Québec | 0.73 | 0.72 | 0.65 | 0.64 |

*Source: Stebbins (2000:192) from O'Keefe (1998:43)*

The new emphasis on the French fact in Canada did not bring the hoped for results. Instead, it appears that the assimilation of Franco-Canadians outside of Québec accelerated, even after the passage of the Official Languages Act. Joy (1992) provided some cautionary words about interpreting historical data. He reminded readers that the census questionnaire has changed over time in wording, instructions, editing procedures, and the attitude of the respondents. Respondents may be confused by phrases such as "mother tongue", "home language", and

knowledge of a language. As well, the political climate of the day might prevent respondents from accurately acknowledging their ethnicity. An example often cited was the sharp decline in persons declaring German origin during the periods when Canada was at war with that country. Another example was francophones, who in response to English attitudes towards French, changed their surnames from "Roi to King", "Beauchamp to Greenfields", "Télesphore Lalumière to Ted Light", "Lucien Chatvert to Brad Greencat" and even, from "Ovide Chalifu to Emptybone Catbedcrasy": All in an attempt to be more "respectable" (Marchand, 1997, p. 67). Canadians living as a French language minority in a majority English society might be influenced in this manner. Furthermore, the Census of Canada format for reporting information is restrictive because questions require answers that are of a yes/no nature that may not provide accurate information about how people linguistically identify each other. Keeping this caution in mind, the position of French in most of Canada is in decline.

Yet, developments took place that counteracted some of the pressure on the French language in Canada. In part as a result of federal action, a profound transformation has occurred in the way many non Franco-Canadians perceived themselves in Canada and on the international scene. Despite the fact that English had become the international language of business, science, and diplomacy, Canadians chose not to settle into a unilinguistic smugness (Clift, 1984; Joy, 1992; Magnet, 1995; Stebbins, 2000). Clift wrote, "Unilingualism, even in the case of English, is seen increasingly as a liability in a world that is not only competitive but multicultural as well" (p. 65). The long-standing parochial attitudes perpetuated by educational authorities seeking conformity in cultural and political matters were replaced with more pluralistic attitudes. In part, these new attitudes may have grown out of repeated exposure to the influx of post-war

immigrants and through contact with foreigners who were able to communicate complicated ideas in languages other than their own.

More Canadians came to see unilingualism as a severe limitation, not only because it restricted ever-increasing competitive business possibilities but also because it emphasized the achievements of the new multicultural Canadians (Magnet, 1995; Olson & Burns, 1981; Safty, 1992). Olson and Burns (1981) included a section of a report from a division of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation to a French immersion committee. That report declared the value of being bilingual:

> At this time in the history of the human race when the expression "global village" accurately describes our situation in the world community, and when we find vast numbers of people rapidly moving from one continent to another, the practical value of being multi-lingual and trans-cultural can hardly be denied. Added to this is the obvious pressure within our own country which threatens to tear apart the fabric of national unity so that the virtue of assisting in the development of bilingual students, and in the long run, therefore bilingual citizens of a multicultural nation, seems above question. (pp. 11-12)

For many Canadians, acquiring French through second language (FSL) instruction, and particularly French immersion instruction, seemed a partial solution.

Despite attempts by the federal government to promote the country's language duality the French speaking population in Canada appears to be, for the most part, concentrated in Québec and in New Brunswick. For a time in the 1970s and 1980s, non-Franco Canadians demonstrated a renewed interest in the acquisition of French as a second language. But in many respects, the language remained under siege in Canada. Jean-Paul Marchand and other supporters of

Francophone rights in Canada recognized this. When Marchand said "Quand les Lalumière becomes des Light!" (1997, p.63) he pointed out an example of the loss of the French language through assimilation. He claimed that young French children become anglicized by necessity, by loss of their belief in the future of French in Canada. He stated, "It isn't correct to be francophone in English Canada. French is out, we have to belong" (p.64).

Many of Canada's francophones struggled to retain their language even though they felt that French had taken a second place in Canada. At the same time, many non-franco Canadians felt that the knowledge of a second language would prove advantageous.

The Official Languages Act of 1969, which made French equal with English throughout the federal government, required that a significant number of existing and newly hired employees be bilingual. Many parents believed that the knowledge of French might provide better job opportunities for their children in the future. Although some parents enrolled their children in French immersion programs for utilitarian purpose, others were motivated by the belief that mastery of a second language was an important part of education (McEachern, 1980; Olson & Burns, 1981). Regardless of the reasons, Canada's school boards soon had to deal with the French immersion phenomenon by providing programs to accommodate the growing demand across the country.

*Growth of the French Immersion Phenomenon*

Possibly the most visible evidence of Canada's new emphasis on bilingualism has been seen in educational change in recent decades. Enrolment in French immersion across the nation increased dramatically, rising by more than 82%, from 1,763 in 233 schools to 102,168 in 633 schools during the six-year period between 1976-77 and 1982-83 (Figures from Language and Society, 1984, p. 7; see also Magnet, 1995, p. 229). This rapid expansion of the program across

the country reflected a positive attitude among parents to the acquisition of the French language. A source in the *Saskatoon Star Phoenix* in 1986 optimistically forecast:

> Nearly 2,800 students will be enrolled in French immersion programs next
>
> fall, among 7,200 in the province. And that is just the tiniest tip of the
>
> iceberg. The numbers of kindergarten children in immersion show that it will
>
> be like the baby boom. (*Star Phoenix*, April 26, 1986)

In Prince Edward Island the Charlottetown *Guardian* reported that many parents stayed up through the night or took the day off work without pay to line up to start their children in French immersion:

> Almost 200 determined parents waited in early morning hours to ensure
>
> their children would be registered this morning for the 1985-86 grade one
>
> French immersion courses…(with one parent stating) waiting since 11:30
>
> Thursday morning and staying awake all night was worth it…if your child's
>
> education is at stake. (Moeller, 1986, p. 5)

> Elsewhere in St. John, New Brunswick, parents staged sit-ins because of lack of space in

French immersion classes (Olson & Burns, 1983, p. 2). The phenomenon repeated itself throughout the country. In 1976, French immersion was offered in 233 schools with 156 of these being in Ontario. By 1983, this number had nearly tripled to 633 schools. Table 1.3 presents statistics provided by Statistics Canada about the initial growth of French immersion enrolment in all provinces except Québec and Alberta. Alberta is excluded because it makes no distinction between programs designed for francophones and French immersion programs for non-francophones.

Table 1.3

Expansion of French immersion in Canada

| | Enrolment and (# of schools) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Province | 1976-1977 | 1978-1979 | 1980-1981 | 1982-1983 |
| Newfoundland | 56 (1) | 193 (5) | 392 (5) | 819 (10) |
| Prince Edward Isl. | 304 (6) | 820 (13) | 1280 (14) | 1644 (16) |
| Nova Scotia | 46 (2) | 363 (10) | 590 (12) | 869 (15) |
| New Brunswick | 2504 (32) | 3763 (35) | 5532 (47) | 8759 (81) |
| Ontario | 12363 (156) | 15042 (160) | 17119 (180) | 53982 (359) |
| Manitoba | 1290 (14) | 2521 (21) | 4286 (32) | 7580 (50) |
| Saskatchewan | 338 (2) | 1208 (13) | 1603 (14) | 3287 (30) |
| British Columbia | 862 (10) | 2094 (24) | 4368 (45) | 7756 (72) |
| Total enrolment | 17763 | 26004 | 53170 | 102168 |
| Total # of Schools | 233 | 281 | 335 | 633 |

*Source: Language and Society (1984:7)*

Early successes followed the rapid implementation of the Canadian French immersion model. Numerous studies demonstrated that Canadian students in French immersion programs achieved a superior level of competence in the French language in comparison to other methods of French Second Language (FSL) instruction where success had been limited. The Canadian French immersion model proved to be a valuable model of foreign language education for use in teaching languages internationally as well as various heritage languages in Canada. Immersion programs with direct influence from the Canadian model can be seen at work in the United States, Finland, Estonia, and Germany. A Canadian French immersion connection can also found in Wales, the Basque region of Spain, Catalonia, and Japan. The Canadian Parents for French (CPF) 2003 report included this strong affirmation of the Canadian French immersion model from the Estonian Minister of Education:

After careful and intensive examination of a variety of language learning

models, Estonia opted to work with Canada to develop its own immersion

approach….'French immersion has proven itself to be an indisputable

Canadian success story…'. As a result of this success, the Canadian model has

been adopted by many countries across the globe. (CPF p. 29, Tõnis Lukas,

Estonian Minister of Education, 2001)

*Enrolment Plateau in the French Immersion Program*

The rapid rise in French immersion enrolment did eventually taper off. More recent

enrolment figures were provided in the Canadian Parents for French (CPF) 2004 publication.

These figures reflect a much less significant growth of approximately 3.5% over a four-year

period from 283,544 in 1999-2000 to 293,698 in 2002-03 (CPF, 2004). Approximately 7.2% of

the total of eligible students in Canada were enrolled in French immersion programs. Statistics

identified that French immersion enrolments still continued to increase slightly, although at a

greatly reduced rate than previously reported in 1986, signifying that the French immersion

phenomenon had leveled off. Figure 1.4 (p. 21) taken from charts provided by CPF (2003, 2004),

demonstrating a slight increase in enrolment, indicates that French immersion growth appeared

stable.

However, despite a slight continued growth in the program, every province, except Nova

Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island, has experienced a major dropout rate at the

secondary level. Enrolment figures at the kindergarten-grade one level are nearly double those at

the grade twelve level (Magnet, 1995) indicating that. attrition rates reach up to 60% or more in

some instances. For example in the school year 2000-2001 a total of 28,175 Canadian students

(9.9% of the total FI enrolment for that year) registered in grade one FI programs and only

10,317 students (3.6% of the total FI population for that year) were still enrolled in FI across

Canada at a grade twelve or thirteen level (CPF, 2004). These figures remain fairly consistent from year to year indicating that across the country far more students begin the program than complete it (Campbell, 1992; Halsall, 1994; Keep, 1993; Lewis & Shapson, 1989; Mannavarayan, 2002; Stern, 1991).

Figure 1.4

French immersion enrolment by province and territory

| Province | 1999-2000 | 2000-01 | 2001-02 | 2002-03 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| British Columbia | 29979 | 30423 | 31136 | 31990 |
| Yukon | 355 | 358 | 334 | 369 |
| Alberta | 26782 | 26966 | 27715 | 28320 |
| Saskatchewan | 9184 | 8990 | 8737 | 9150 |
| Manitoba | 17373 | 17213 | 17160 | 17174 |
| Ontario | 116787 | 117985 | 115155 | 115652 |
| Quebec | 41283 | 40592 | 43940 | 45598 |
| New Brunswick | 22109 | 22664 | 22703 | 22639 |
| Nova Scotia | 10503 | 11463 | 12308 | 13154 |
| Prince Edward Isl. | 3800 | 3781 | 3795 | 3972 |
| Newfoundland | 4783 | 4956 | 5395 | 5680 |
| Total | 283544 | 286014 | 288968 | 293698 |

*Source: CPF(2003:66-67; 2004:71)*

One example of the attrition rate was from British Columbia. Statistics from the British Columbia government FI enrolment reports indicated a decline of 16.9% between 2000-01 and 2004-2005 for a kindergarten cohort moving through to grade four. This attrition rate was consistent over the five-year period for subsequent cohort groups in grade one to five. There was a significant increase of over 50% in enrolment at the grade six level, with an influx of students into the late immersion program. However, a steady decline again began at the grade seven level.

Attrition reached a rate of 37.5% at the grade ten level and more than 43% at the grade twelve level (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2005).

In addition, enrolment statistics from 1986-87 to 1998-99, tracking students from their entry in the program in kindergarten through to their graduation in grade twelve, provided by the Official Minority Language Office (OMLO) of the Government of Saskatchewan, demonstrated similar attrition rates. In the 1986-87 school year, 1,848 students started kindergarten in French immersion programs. In the 1998-99 school year, only 547 of these 1,848 students remained in the grade twelve French immersion program. These figures indicated that more than 70% of the students entering the kindergarten French immersion program in 1986 in Saskatchewan were no longer in the program when they reached grade twelve (OMLO, Government of Saskatchewan, 2005). Further statistics indicated that attrition rates varied from 46% for a cohort group starting kindergarten in 1980 and finishing grade 12 in 1994, to 70% for all cohort groups starting French immersion for several years between 1985 and 1990. These figures remained fairly constant in Saskatchewan over the years. Although enrolment figures consistently showed a slight overall growth in the program, attrition rates remained very high. Intake numbers at the kindergarten level were sufficiently high to conceal the alarming rate of attrition within the program. Table 1.5 tracks the cohort group of students starting French immersion Kindergarten in 1986 through to grade twelve in 1998 in Saskatchewan.

Table 1.5

Tracking one group of Saskatchewan FI students from Kindergarten to Grade twelve

| School Yr | Grade level | Enrolment | + or - from previous yr | % inc. or dec. from previous yr |
|-----------|-------------|-----------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1986-87 | Kindergarten | 1848 | | |
| 1987-988 | Gr 1 | 1741 | -107 | -5.79% |
| 1988-89 | Gr 2 | 1537 | -204 | -11.71% |
| 1989-90 | Gr 3 | 1342 | -195 | -12.68% |

| 1990-91 | Gr 4 | 1281 | -61 | -4.54% |
|---------|------|------|-----|--------|
| 1999-92 | Gr 5 | 1186 | -95 | -7.41% |
| 1992-93 | Gr 6 | 1200 | +14 | +1.18% |
| 1993-94 | Gr 7 | 1094 | -106 | -8.83% |
| 1994-95 | Gr 8 | 929 | -165 | -15.08% |
| 1995-96 | Gr 9 | 696 | -233 | -25.08% |
| 1996-97 | Gr 10 | 620 | -76 | -10.92% |
| 1997-98 | Gr 11 | 551 | -69 | -11.13% |
| 1998-99 | Gr 12 | 547 | -4 | -0.72% |
| Total attrition for K to 12 with same student cohort | | | -1301 | -70.4% |

*Source: OMLO: Regina (2005), Tableau des effectifs pour les écoles d'immersion*

The tables provided by CPF (2003) also indicated that a similar trend existed throughout Canada for the period between 1999 and 2002 except in the Maritime Provinces.

Many researchers have studied the high incidence of dropout from the French immersion program (Adiv, 1979; Halsall, 1989; Hayden, 1988; Lewis, 1986; Obadia & Thériault, 1997; Parkin, Morrison, & Watkin, 1987). They discovered that reasons for leaving the French immersion program were varied. Parkin et al. cited reasons for leaving the program at the elementary level. Those reasons included academic difficulties such as understanding, reading, or speaking French and/or English; emotional or behavioral problems; negative relationships with the teacher; and lack of remedial help within the program. Similarities existed between the reasons for attrition from the elementary program and those reasons at the secondary level.

However, Halsall (1991) pointed out that middle and high school students' decisions to leave the program were influenced more by social and pedagogical factors than by difficulties with the acquisition of the language. Halsall reported that factors influencing middle or high school students' decisions to leave the French immersion program included:

lack of variety of courses and heavy workload…forced to choose between

continuing in immersion or enrolling in other programs of choice…a strong

belief …that better grades would be obtained by studying in English…not

able to practice speaking French both in class and outside of class….

Satisfied with their attainment in French…bored with the program…quality

of immersion teachers and the program they provided…unwilling to change

schools in order to enroll in immersion. (p.2)

Lewis and Shapson's (1989) study yielded much the same information. They compared 84 secondary immersion transfer students with 128 secondary immersion students from nine schools in British Columbia, which had been the first to graduate students from secondary immersion programs. These researchers sought to determine the rate of transfer, as well as the attitudes and opinions of students who transferred out of the French immersion program. They also compared the attitudes and opinions of the transfer students with those who remained in the program.

The top five reasons cited by Lewis and Shapson (1989) for students transferring from the program included dissatisfaction with the quality of the program, the feeling that better grades could be obtained in English, a dislike of the content of the courses, difficulty with the work, and finding a teacher's expectations too high (p. 543). The results demonstrated that the attitudes and opinions of both groups were similar, in that all who participated valued bilingual education because it would provide them with better job opportunities in the future (p. 544).

Obadia and Thériault (1997) investigated the perceptions of French coordinators, teachers, and principals in British Columbia about the rate of student attrition and the reasons they thought students chose to transfer out of a French immersion program. Three major reasons

emerged: academic difficulty, social and emotional problems, and the quality of the teaching and the programs.

These reasons were not unlike those reported in the 2002 Atlantic provinces' study of grade 11 students choosing to leave the core French program. Cashman's (2002) report cited the following reasons identified by students as instrumental in their decision to leave the core French program:

1. Students became disillusioned with their lack of progress and their inability to express themselves in French.

2. Students found the work difficult and achieved low marks resulting in lower grade point averages.

3. Teachers gave priority to the linguistic aspects of the language (for example verb conjugations, grammar, irrelevant vocabulary lists) resulting in boring, repetitious, and irrelevant work.

4. Teachers provided poor explanations and not enough help.

5. Large class sizes with impatient teachers who expected too much, were difficult to understand, picked on and embarrassed students, talked too fast, spoke too much English, and did not want to teach core French. (pp.13, 15)

Although students who left a core French program gave these reasons they are similar to the reasons provided by students choosing to transfer out of the French immersion program. The most common explanations given for leaving the immersion program included dissatisfaction with their progress, the quality of the program and the teachers, and their inability to speak French.

The French immersion story has received many accolades for its success as a method for teaching French. Many parents across the country have enrolled their children in French immersion programs; yet, many parents have, for various reasons, removed their children from the program over the years. However, high attrition rates indicate that more students begin and leave the program than those students who complete it. Although many students did well in the French immersion program "others appeared to languish, agonize, and suffer" (Mannavarayan, 2002, p. 9).

Overview of the Study

In the first chapter I provided an historical framework of the language issues in Canada, discussed the expansion of French as a Second Language education in Canada, provided statistical information about the FSL program's success, and outlined the purpose and importance of the study. I provided a general review of the literature on the subject of French immersion in Chapter II. With this review I further corroborated the importance of the study. I explained the methods used, the procedures followed, and the decisions made in Chapter III. I included a description of the participants, the context of the study, and the stories collected in the interviews in Chapter IV providing descriptions of both the students positive and negative recollections of their unsuccessful French immersion experiences. The evocative descriptions that I wrote will lead to a greater understanding of the affective impact resulting from the students' sustained enrolment in the French immersion program. I discussed the analysis and synthesis of the themes emerging from the interviews in Chapter V along with concluding comments and considerations for future directions for French immersion programs.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE RELEVANT LITERATURE

Organization of This Chapter

This literature review is divided into three sections addressing the following areas: In the first section, on French Second Language instruction, I described and assessed some of the programs used to teach French in Canada. I discussed core French, Intensive French, the Accelerative Integrated Method, and French Immersion. I described and evaluated variations in methodology, in goals, and outcomes for each program.

In the second section I presented the multiple voices of those engaged in French immersion research. I included a review of the research supporting French immersion as a program suitable for most children as well as a discussion of the research literature that questions this claim.

In section three I provided a summary and discussed the implications arising from the findings in the literature for the current study. The focus of this section was to stress how this current study and its potential contribution differ from previous research.

French Second Language Instruction

French second language (FSL) school programs in Canada are accessible to most students. They are designed for majority language students who speak English (Day & Shapson, 1996, p. 1). It is clear that by choosing to enroll their children in FSL programs, parents value the knowledge of French and recognize that this knowledge can be advantageous for their children. The popularity of these programs in Canada is evident in the numbers of students who enroll in them. The Canadian Parents for French (CPF) 2004 report indicated that in 2002-03 FSL enrolment in Canada was nearly two million (pp. 71-72). Parents who enroll their children in FSL programs generally can choose one of two types of programs. These choices are for the core

French program or the French immersion program. Some school divisions offer variants of the core French program such as the Intensive French and the Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM); however, not all regions in the country have adopted these methods.

*Core French*

Core French is the most commonly used method for teaching French. Prior to the introduction of French immersion in 1965 the core French was the vehicle of instruction for French to non-franco Canadians. This traditional method of teaching French has proven ineffective in imparting adequate French language skills to students or in providing an increased tolerance of the French culture in English Canada (Calman & Daniel, 1998; Lewis, 1998; Massey, 1994; Netten, 1993). Core French instruction tries to teach the rudiments of the language with the purpose of teaching the students to communicate orally and, to a lesser degree, to read and write the language. "Traditionally, the program has emphasized the learning of French as an object of study….Students tend to analyze the language, learn grammar rules, and attempt to apply them" (Netten & Germain, 2004, p. 276).

In effect, core French is taught as another school subject. Model conversations are provided where a student is asked to use limited structures and vocabulary with little or no contact with the francophone community. Grammatical components of the language are stressed and taught repetitively. Students tend to develop "declarative knowledge about how the language works but do not develop procedural, or intuitive, knowledge so that they can use the language" (Netten & Germain, 2004, p. 276). Over the years, core French has been shown to be ineffective as a program that teaches students to speak French satisfactorily (Peters, MacFarlane, & Wesche, 2004; Netten & Germain, 2004).

In 1985, Dr. H.H. Stern, led the four year National Core French Study [NCFS] (Rehorick & Edwards, 1990) proposing a multidimensional curriculum as a possible solution to the perceived weaknesses in the core French programs across Canada. Stern recognized that, for effective change, collaboration between the independently operating provincial educational systems across the country was important. Modeled in part on the Modern Languages Project of the Council of Europe, this initiative brought together dozens of teachers, researchers, and governmental representatives to work together to identify current practices across Canada and to develop a multidimensional approach to teaching a second language. It was "perhaps the most wide-scale national project to be undertaken in Canadian education" (Poyen, 1990, p. 20). The integration of the content of the four components of language education, communicative/ experiential education, culture, and general language education was determined as the key to the success of the project (LeBlanc, 1990, p. 39).

The project focused on these four components in separate task forces. The language syllabus task force, while recognizing the importance of the formal aspects of language instruction, emphasized the message and the communicative setting. This task force "had to effect the selection of language forms which would enable students to communicate in authentic situations, to provide for the organization and progression of the selected content and to suggest an appropriate pedagogical method" (Rehorick & Edwards, 1990, p.13).

The committee for the Communicative/Experiential syllabus investigated new ways of teaching and learning a second language. It proposed to "Consider the classroom as a rich and authentic environment where the student is invited to live a variety of experiences based on contents other than language. Language is seen as the vehicle for realizing the experience" (Rehorick & Edwards 1990, p. 13). As such, the experiences would provide an opportunity for

students to develop the ability to communicate information that was relevant to them. Through concrete activities related to the life of the student, learning is geared to the five large categories that are part of the students' environment.  In doing so student learning is placed within a context that considers the physical, social, civic, leisure, and intellectual dimensions (Duplantie & Tremblay, 1990, pp. 43-53).

The Culture Task Group report focused on "contemporary culture with a view to enabling students to communicate effectively and comfortably with French Canadians first and foremost but with other francophones as well" (Rehorick & Edwards, 1990, p. 15). Effective communication in a second language requires that one has a good understanding of the culture. This cultural knowledge allows for the implicit inclusion of the beliefs and attitudes of the culture in the interpretation of the messages conveyed in a conversation. The task force set out to develop a conceptual framework of the cultural phenomena that could be adapted by each province to suit its needs and circumstances (LeBlanc & Courtel, 1990).

The NCFS (1990) general language education syllabus task force identified its goals as two-fold: To enhance the global education of the learner by permitting him/her to "broaden his/her horizons with appropriate awareness; and to provide the learner with the necessary assistance for the creation of optimal learning conditions" (Hébert, 1990, p. 67). Students must develop a linguistic, sociocultural, and strategic consciousness. This approach would allow them to take control of their learning and development and enable them to be more efficient and better-informed learners. The syllabus further identified the role of pedagogical practices in achieving this student awareness. Included in the report was discussion of the need for exploring new directions in teacher education and supplementary professional development

in teaching second languages. It also recommended formative student evaluation (Painchaud, 1990).

Overall, this massive project produced valuable information and material for those involved in the teaching of French as a second language. Educators sought to implement its recommendations. Yet a number of years later, Netten and Germain (2004) maintained that the program still had not become successful at teaching students to speak French, claiming:

> Students in the core French program develop minimal abilities to
>
> communicate in French….They are able to create short sentences, but they do
>
> not have sufficient competence in aural comprehension or oral production to
>
> communicate effectively in an authentic situation…the inability of this (core
>
> French) program to produce large numbers of students possessing both
>
> communicative competence and communicative confidence. (p. 276)

Implementation of the NCFS curricula proved to be more of a challenge than was expected, particularly in addressing the communicative-experiential and cultural syllabi (Calman & Daniel, 1998; Massey, 1994). Massey reported student dissatisfaction with the learning environment and teaching methods that emphasized grammatical accuracy and written tests. This observation demonstrated that teachers were relying on methods previously employed in core French classrooms rather than on recommendations of the NCFS. Cashman's (2002) analysis of the Atlantic provinces' study of grade eleven students who elected to leave the core French program further supported this view. The students expressed dissatisfaction with the very aspects of the program that the NCFS had targeted for change in the 1990 report. Cashman wrote:

Survey respondents recommend improved methods of teaching where the emphasis would be on speaking. They want to see more relevant themes and vocabulary, more improved hands-on fun activities, group work, projects and the like. This "in class" work would be supplemented with trips (e.g., Québec) to meet and practice what they have learned in class with francophones. To paraphrase one respondent, if French was "interesting, relevant, and geared to success" there would never be a problem of recruitment and retention. (p. 15)

In spite of the NCFS project and its influence, core French students generally do not have the ability to communicate with ease in French. The primary factor cited is the lack of instructional time (Calman & Daniel, 1998; Collins, Stead, & Woolfrey, 2004; Maxwell, 2001; Netten & Germain, 2004; Peters, Macfarlane, & Wesche, 2004). Instruction is spread over a long period of time with short instructional periods. These time restrictions do not allow teachers to undertake any sustained language activity. Consequently, students tend not to remember what they studied, in turn necessitating review before another lesson can start. This review further shortens the time available. Students become discouraged by their perceived inability to learn and become unmotivated, which in turn makes the situation more difficult for teachers. Netten and Germain (2004) concluded that:

These findings appeared to indicate that in order to improve the results of the core French program, the integration of an intensive period of exposure to French, in which French was used as the language of communication, would be necessary. (p. 279)

In spite of this core French remains the French program of choice for the

majority of non-franco Canadians. With over 1,600,000 students enrolled in the program across Canada it becomes critical to address the deficiencies within the program in order to increase its effectiveness as a method of FSL instruction.

*Intensive French*

Intensive French is an FSL program that seeks to address some of the shortcomings of the traditional core French method. In an attempt to find an alternative method of teaching French as a second language, Netten and Germain (2004) undertook a study of the intensive teaching of second languages. They examined intensive English, used extensively in Québec to teach English; bain linguistique (a program offered sporadically over a five-year period in one Ottawa school's core French program and modeled after the intensive English program in Québec); and block scheduling. From this study emerged factors essential to a program that sought to teach accurate and fluent communication in a second language. Netten and Germain (2004) developed a specific model of intensive FSL that incorporated the following factors:

1. Amount of time devoted to learning French greater than approximately 100 hours per school year.

2. Concentration of the time devoted to learning French in the academic year.

3. Focus on the learning of the language, not on other subjects.

4. Focus on communication, not on language study.

5. Focus on the development of both fluency and accuracy.

6. An ideal program for learning to communicate in French should be open to all students, whatever their personal characteristics. (pp. 282-283)

This model of French instruction emphasized the communicative approach between students and the teacher and among students. Modification of the curriculum is necessary in

order to devote more time to intensive French. Mathematics, music, physical education and other specialized areas go unchanged. However, major modifications occur in English language arts. The language arts curriculum is compacted (as much as 50%) and time allotments in social studies, health and science are also greatly reduced. The skills and cognitive processes that are common to these subjects are developed during the time spent in intensive French. Once developed, these skills and processes, which are not language specific, are readily transferred to the regular curriculum. Following the five-month intensive French period, study of the compacted subjects is achieved more quickly. Consequently, all learning outcomes for the grade are maintained despite the compacting of the curriculum (Germain, Lightbown, Netten & Spada, 2004).

This model of FSL is currently used in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador as an alternative to the traditional core French program. As well, four other provinces—New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan and Alberta—have implemented pilot classes using the intensive French model.

S. Gareau, the Director of French Curriculum Development for the Government of Saskatchewan (personal communication, March 9, 2005) indicated that Saskatchewan has three classes in two schools with a total of 80 students in the intensive French program at the present time. Both schools are located in the same school division. As well, one other school division in Saskatchewan opened at least one classroom in the fall of 2005. Also, three school divisions in other major centres are in the process of exploring possibilities for piloting the program. In Saskatchewan, it appears that the program is taking root and gradually expanding.

Furthermore, school officials in Wales have adopted Netten and Germain's (2000b) model of intensive language education to teach Welsh. Netten and Germain have developed an

alternative method of teaching French that may prove more successful than the traditional core French program. They maintained:

> While the program is conceived to be interesting to students, it is not just a 'fun' program. Developing knowledge about the world, language skills, and cognitive processes are all encouraged in the program. It is indeed a different way of learning French. Because it is a way of learning that takes their experiences into account, students find it interesting and enjoyable. It develops in students a motivation for learning French that is not always present in the regular core French program. (p. 307)

*Accelerative Integrated Method*

Another option currently used for teaching French in a core program is Wendy Maxwell's Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM) (Maxwell, 2001). The primary goal of the AIM is to provide language rich opportunities for students to accelerate fluency levels, which in turn promote motivation and success in a L2 learning environment.

Maxwell rejected the thematic approach of traditional core French methods because of its inability to engage students in meaningful communication or to produce an acceptable level of fluency in her students in Toronto. She stressed the need to move away from analytic methods of instruction that focus on the structure of the language. The AIM approach is a more holistic approach that incorporates transmission, transaction, and transformation through dramatic, musical, and kinesthetic strands.

The AIM favours an approach based on story to replicate the "drama of existence" (Maxwell, 2001, p. 59). Students are actively involved in building stories that reflect emotion and experience, allowing them to manipulate vocabulary in a variety of ways. This experience

proves to be much more satisfying than talking about "things in a disconnected, detached manner" (Maxwell, 2001, p. 59). L2 learning then becomes contextually meaningful. Maxwell's premise is that if the goal is to acquire a functional use of the language, theme is irrelevant.

As Maxwell (2005) stated, the program was "created initially through action research and a process of experimentation with both novel and established approaches in L2 teaching, as well as language and literacy techniques used in first language (L1) English classes" (Maxwell, 2005, ¶5). Maxwell's teaching approach maximizes the learning process by using Pared Down Language (PDL) or target vocabulary that emphasizes verbs. Maxwell's ten years in a traditional core French classroom in Toronto gave her opportunity to monitor interaction that contributed to the development of the PDL. As well, previous research such as L1 acquisition studies, *Le français fondamental*, and L2 research, such as the Threshold Level studies, all contributed to the design of a vocabulary that, both in theory and in practice, appears to be the most essential for beginning fluency of young learners of FSL. (Maxwell, 2005, ¶ 10)

Furthermore, the AIM teaches the target vocabulary kinesthetically, visually, and auditorially, with a strong emotional hook. As such, students see the word, hear the word, and feel the word. Words are introduced and taught using a *Gesture Approach* (GA). Each word has a unique iconic gesture, which is the most natural one possible associated with it, making it quickly and easily understood.  Maxwell stresses the importance of the GA stating that if one cannot use a gesture with a word, the word should not be introduced. The use of the GA accelerates the acquisition of PDL that is contextualized through integrated story/theatre/ drama/music and creative storytelling activities (Maxwell, 2001).

Maxwell (2001) studied two groups of young FSL learners in Toronto who had 200 hours of instruction in French. One group had been instructed using the AIM and a comparison group

had been instructed using a traditional core French approach. She determined the ability of the students to understand and respond to general interest questions. Maxwell found that the comparison group's fluency levels were quite low, while the group exposed to the AIM attained comprehension and fluency levels that surpassed those of the comparison group.

There are currently more than 700 schools in Canada using the AIM method for teaching FSL. Maxwell has presented workshops to French teachers throughout Canada and the United States. AIM is being used to teach in both core and immersion classrooms with positive results. Teachers using the method report that students are highly motivated, and gain a high level of fluency in a very short time.

AIM is not a traditional teaching method. It is a program that requires a teacher to approach teaching FSL in a new way. Maxwell has developed a complete kit that explains the process in detail through the use of teacher guides, reproducible materials, teacher and student DVDs, songs, and implementation helps. S. Duckworth, a core French teacher using the program, called it a *radical* approach to FSL instruction (Maxwell, 2005, p. 10). For this teacher AIM has transformed core FSL instruction from a painful exercise where students acquired very little communicative competence into a more enjoyable experience that helped both students and teacher achieve higher levels of success than seen previously. Duckworth volunteered this information about her AIM teaching experience:

> I had reservations whether I could keep them focused and under control. I
> could not have been more mistaken. My students are more focused,
> interactive, and motivated about learning French than ever before. Their
> French skills have improved dramatically.…They are learning French by
> leaps and bounds. As a teacher, nothing could be more exciting to watch.

(Maxwell, 2005, p.10)

*French Immersion*

The French immersion program grew out of a national social and political situation in Canada. The Official Languages Act in 1969 afforded public recognition of the economic, social, and political benefits for those who were bilingual in the country's two official languages.  Even prior to this enactment, some English parents, in Montreal, were frustrated that their children were not achieving a high level of skill in the French language through instruction in a core French program (Day & Shapson, 1996). These twelve parents persuaded their school board to establish an alternative to core French (Hammerly, 1989, p. 6). In 1965, the first publicly funded French immersion program began as an experiment, led by Wallace Lambert, at the St. Lambert elementary school in St. Lambert, Québec.

Involved parents felt that proficiency in the French language would provide their children with greater job opportunities (Clift, 1987; Dubé, 1993; Hart, Lapkin & Swain, 1998, Obadia, 1995; Olson & Burns, 1983) and ultimately that "future economic survival there [in the Canadian province of Québec] would require high levels of proficiency in French" (Swain, 1997, p. 261; see Bruck, 1978). These parents hoped to accomplish this goal by equipping their children with proficiency in a second language.

French immersion methodology differs substantially from that of the core French program. A French immersion class is not a formal language class. French immersion refers to a program where curricular instruction, most often beginning in kindergarten, is taught in French. "It is a class in which subjects other than French, such as mathematics, history, art, or physical education, are presented in French. French immersion is teaching *in* French, not teaching *of* French. The intent is that the new language is learnt by use while learning something else and not

by formal language instruction" (Stern, 1984, p. 4. See also Day & Shapson, 1996; Hammerly, 1989). Various forms of immersion programs exist with various grade levels of entry, and where the percentage of instructional time spent in the target language differs, as does the number of years spent in the immersion language program. The primary goal of French immersion programs is to provide the students with functional competence in both written and spoken aspects of French. A parent information handbook prepared by the government of Saskatchewan outlines the goal of the French immersion programs as:

> to become functionally bilingual. Students completing the program are able
>
> to communicate easily in French and English, take post-secondary
>
> education/training in both French and English, undertake employment in
>
> French and English (and) understand and appreciate attitudes and customs
>
> other than their own. (Saskatchewan Education, retrieved Jan. 2005)
>
> Because French immersion enjoyed success, expansion of the program took place. The

positive reviews by academics of French immersion programs, (Genesee, 1976; Lambert & Tucker, 1972; Stern, 1978) and the ready acceptance by parents

(Gibson, 1984; Magnet, 1995; McGillivray, 1984; Obadia, 1984) contributed to its rapid growth. Furthermore, political enthusiasts who were eager to promote understanding between the two dominant cultures (Calvé, 1988; Clift, 1984) and the concern about broadening the country's socio-economic horizons both strengthened the case for French immersion. Swain (1997) wrote:

> By the late 1960s, the rest of Canada was becoming aware of the value a
>
> knowledge of French might have economically, politically and socially. Much of
>
> this growing awareness can be attributed to actions taken by the Canada's Federal
>
> Government which, for example, appointed a Royal Commission on Bilingualism

and Biculturalism, passed the Official Languages Act, appointed a Commissioner

of Official Languages, and provided funds for the evaluation of French

immersion programs and for dissemination of information about their outcomes.

(p. 262)

Educators made commitments of time and energy promoting the French immersion

program widely (McGillivray, 1984; Obadia, 1984). French immersion then became a national

undertaking, touted as a contribution to unity within the country and to national bilingualism

(Turnbull, Lapkin, Hart, & Swain, 1998). A study by Olson and Burns (1981) reported that in

making a choice about French immersion many parents indicated that "Canada's future depends

upon bilingual citizens" (p. 8) was an important consideration in their decision.

From a political perspective and on the international scene, the French immersion

program gave the country the appearance of being on the cutting edge of innovative methods.

The nation's image became one of a society with dual languages that equipped its citizens to deal

with the global economy (Clift, 1984; Safty, 1992). Canadian citizens were provided with an

opportunity to access the French language, which promoted an increased awareness and

acceptance of French Canadian society. As well, increased access to global markets by bilingual

Canadian citizens provided added benefits. The Canadian federal government emphasized the

benefits of Canada's official languages policy for the country and its citizens:

Enormous practical and economic benefits flow from Canada's official

languages policy. It helps ensure that the goods and services we produce have access to

the entire Canadian market…education in the minority language, is an important factor in

encouraging the mobility of population, and helps strengthen the Canadian common

market. 1) …Having two world-class languages is an important advantage in an era of

global competition…From an economic point of view, it is easy to see that our two

languages give us a head start in opening new markets for Canadian products. (Canadian

Heritage, Government of Canada, 1999, ¶ 2, 3)

This approach placed Canada in step with other areas of the world. These pluralistic

attitudes have long been sought and encouraged in Western Europe. Ketteman (1997) expressed

the Western European goal for bilingualism as:

Teaching some measure of communicative ability in a second language to a large

proportion of the European population is important in order to facilitate free

movement of people and ideas, to intensify cooperation in all sectors of society,

to improve and widen access to information, to overcome prejudice and national

(auto- and hetero-) stereotypes, to lay the linguistic foundations for a European

citizenship and the preservation of cultural diversity. (p. 175)

French immersion enjoyed rapid expansion throughout Canada. This program is now well

established throughout the provinces and territories in Canada. No limits are set on enrolment

into the French immersion program, and transportation is provided for students who live out of

the school district where the program is offered. The 2004 CPF fifth annual assessment of FSL

programs in Canada reported recent French immersion enrolments from available statistics

provided by the Provincial and Territorial Ministries of Education at 293,698 students. This

figure demonstrates that 7.1% of the total eligible students in the nation are enrolled in French

immersion. CPF identified that the eligible population (EP) excludes those students whose first

language is French. These enrolment figures, when compared to earlier figures, demonstrate a

stable French immersion population with a slight increase in all provinces (CPF, 2004, pp. 61-

71).

Table 2.1 indicates the enrolment in French immersion in Canada out of total eligible population with percentage growth for each year over a three year period from 2000/03

Table 2.1

Immersion enrolment by province

| Province | 2000-01 | 2001-02 | 2002-03 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Br Columbia | 30,423 of 632,024 EP or 4.8% | 31,136 of 632,024 EP or 4.9% | 31,190 of 620,044 EP or 5% |
| Yukon | 365 of 5,782 EP or 6.3% | 343 of 5,467 EP or 6.27% | 369 of 5,472 EP or 6.74% |
| Alberta | 26,966 of 577,127 EP or 4.67% | 27,715 of 576,728 EP or 4.8% | 28,320 of 579,309 EP or 4.88% |
| Saskatchewan | 8,990 of 183,461 EP or 4.9% | 8,737 of 180,055 EP or 4.85% | 9,150 of 176,551 EP or 5.18% |
| Manitoba | 17,195 of 186,932 EP or 9.19% | 17,159 of 185,793 EP or 9.23% | 17,174 of 183,943 EP or 0.33% |
| Ontario | 117,985 of 2,076,060 EP or 5.68% | 115,155 of 2,070,270 EP or 5.56% | 115.652 of 2,072,589 EP or 5.58% |
| Québec | 40,592 of 119,353 EP or 34% | 43,940 of 121,243 EP or 36.24% | 45,598 of 122,494 EP or 37.22% |
| New Brunswick | 22,664 of 86,555EP or 26.18% | 22,831 of 85,689 EP or 26.64% | 22,639 of 84,575 EP or 26.76% |
| Nova Scotia | 11,463 of 151,764 EP or 7.55% | 12,308 of 149,421 EP or 8.23% | 13,154 of 146,540 EP or 8.97% |
| PEI | 3,781 EP n/a | 3,795 EP n/a | 3,972 of 22,275 EP or 17.83% |
| Newfoundland | 4,956 of 89,911 EP or 5.51% | 5,395 of 86,650 EP or 6.22% | 5,680 of 84,038 EP or 6.75% |
| Total | 286,003 | 289,104 | 293,698 |

*Source: CPF (2004:61-68)*

For many students, the French immersion method of instruction has proven to be an effective means of acquiring proficiency in the French language. Students enrolled in fFI programs speak French quite confidently and with an adequate degree of accuracy. This achievement is due in large part that French is the language of communication in the classroom. Furthermore, students communicate in French for the greater part of the school day. However, most FI students' receptive skills of listening and understanding surpass their productive skills of speaking and writing (Lapkin & Swain, 1990). Their spoken French is the language of the

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classroom and does not reflect the variants of the language spoken by native francophones outside the classroom (Bibeau, 1984; Parkin & Morrison, & Watkin, 1987; Rehner & Mougeon, 2003; Singh, 1986). Because their French is acquired in the classroom, they speak with ease with the teacher and with fellow students. However, the French immersion student learns language in an academic context. This classroom language is more complex than conversational language and does not lend itself well to social situations (Netten & Germain, 2004).

Despite limitations, French immersion has been a most successful school program for developing skills in communicating in French. Students rate their French abilities quite highly (Day & Shapson, 1986; Wesche, Morrison, Pawley, & Ready, 1986). Moreover, students and parents generally express satisfaction with the outcomes of the program.

Support for FSL Programs

The federal government has played a primary role in establishing and maintaining FSL programs in Canada. However, FSL programs enjoy success in Canada due in part to the dedicated efforts of interested parents. Parental involvement in FSL programs is encouraged through the Canadian Parents for French (CPF) organization. CPF is a strong national parent advocacy group in existence since March 1977. The initial 35 dedicated parents who formed the organization have now been joined by thousands of other parents and have established local chapters throughout the country. Although CPF does not involve itself in L2 teaching methodology the organization works in cooperation with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages (OCOL), Canadian Heritage (PCH), and the Privy Council Office (PCO) to support and improve second-language learning opportunities to provide the benefits that bilingualism can offer. Tucker (1999) wrote:

The cumulative evidence from research conducted over the last three decades

at sites around the world demonstrates conclusively that cognitive, social,

personal, and economic benefits accrue to the individual who has an

opportunity to develop a high degree of bilingual proficiency when compared

with a monolingual counterpart". (¶ 9)

The federal government's *2003 Action Plan for Official Languages,* with a commitment

of providing an additional $137 million over a five-year period to French second language

education, confirmed Canada's ongoing commitment to linguistic duality. Funds for second-

language instruction are targeted to achieve two key goals. These goals address both the core and

French immersion programs, with the aim to improve the core French programs by encouraging

innovative new approaches to teaching French.

The Government also sought to revitalize French immersion programs by providing more

qualified teachers, additional high quality teaching materials, and diverse opportunities for

students to improve and use their FSL skills (CPF, 2004, p. 5). The Action Plan recognized

French language learning as an aspect of the Canadian heritage as well as the major challenge for

the next decade (Canadian Heritage, Government of Canada, 2004). Ottawa's goal is to double

the numbers of secondary school graduates who have a functional knowledge of French,

acquired through one of the FSL programs, by the year 2013 (CPF, 2003). In light of these new

incentives, CPF has identified public accountability, shortages of qualified teachers, student

enrolment and attrition, and evidence of student achievement as issues that will continue to be

front and centre for those involved in promoting FSL programs (CPF, 2004, p. 2).

Safty (1992) stated "the term bilingual identifies the French immersion program closely

with Canada's official policy of bilingualism and its symbols of national identity" (p. 390). For

most individual Canadians, however, the motivation for acquiring the second language is

instrumental rather than integrative (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; McLaughlin, 1978, 1982; Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994). The student whose motivation is integrative learns the language to become like a native speaker of the target language, whereas the student with an instrumental motivation is learning the language for practical reasons such as passing an examination or for employment purposes. Most students in French immersion programs consider French immersion to be an avenue for securing better employment opportunities in the future.

Summary

FSL programs are fully integrated into the main curriculum and fall under the jurisdiction of the provincial or territorial governments. As such, provincial or territorial governments use current FSL research to set policies and guidelines, and establish written goals for student language achievement to ensure the quality of the program. This governmental involvement includes designating the number of hours of instruction and consistent entry points into the program. Systems are in place to monitor student achievement, and school divisions submit annual reports to the education ministry on how program guidelines are being met. However, the methodology for delivering and evaluating the programs, whether core or immersion, differ from province to province.

It is evident from enrolment statistics that FSL programs are a major consideration on the Canadian educational scene. Also those professionals involved in research contributions, at the funding and policy levels, in the delivery of the program, as well as parents, maintain a genuine interest in providing a quality program that will meet the needs of the students involved.

Multiple Voices

> Unfortunately, after an extensive and rather disconcerting review of this [French immersion] literature, I felt as if I were trapped in a maze of incomplete and often contradictory evidence, endless debates and an unresolved enigma. The literature review only emphasized the gaps and tensions that exist between the different points of view. (Mannavarayan, 2002:23)

*Introduction*

In spite of agreement between levels of government in Canada, people charged with designing and implementing the FSL programs, not unlike other areas of education, have a long history of dissension or disagreement about various important issues. In large part the literature reflects and influences the multiple streams of FSL that exist in Canada. I summarize those debates and issues in this literature review.  As well, I provide the perspectives of both those who promote the French immersion program and those who question various aspects of it.

In this section, it will become apparent that the voices of those *in* the French immersion program—the students, is missing from the literature. Ayers (1990) stressed the importance of hearing the voices of the children:

What is missing in the research literature is the experience of crisis: the insider's

view [scholars must] work with children to convey their lives as they present

them, to portray the world with immediacy as they see it, to create a monograph

on meaning in which these youngsters are conscious collaborators. (p. 271)

Sinclair (2000) wrote that despite the trend to meet the requirement in Article 12 of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to allow a child to express his or her own views and to listen and consider those views when making decisions pertaining to a child, the premise that adults do know best what is in a child's best interest still exists. Parents and teachers, those in

charge of making decisions, rarely consult children about educational matters as they pertain to the children (Goodlad, 1984).

<center>Positive Voices, Expert Voices</center>

Since the inception of French immersion in 1965, as an alternative FSL educational method in Canada, numerous researchers have supported its use. Some advocates of the program have claimed its suitability for all children (Cummins, 1984; Genesee, 1986; Swain & Lapkin, 1982). Various studies in psycholinguistics have supported this group and their claim that French immersion programs work well for all students – even those with learning problems (Bruck, 1978; Cummins & Swain, 1986; Genesee, 1976, 1992). Bruck (1978) reported, "children with language disabilities can benefit from and learn in French immersion programs" (p. 70). She found that for the language-disabled child the French immersion program provided "a more suitable and natural environment for these children to learn French…(and) appears to be contributing to that ability…. [With remedial measures] the child with problems has a place *in* rather than out of these classes" (pp. 70, 72).

Bruck's research reflects the findings of a study of students living in Québec, where French is the majority language, and where "In order to live in Québec society such children are going to have to become proficient in French" (p. 70). It is not clear whether these benefits would extend to students with language disabilities who reside elsewhere than Québec, where French is not the majority language, and whose survival in society is not dependent on French language proficiency.

French immersion instruction in Canada is no longer as contentious an issue as it once was.  Much of the research about French immersion has shown it to be a successful, viable, educational alternative to traditional English public school education for some Canadian students

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(Clift, 1987; Cummins, 1984; Genesee, 1986; Harley, Hart & Lapkin, 1986; Krashen, 1987, 1996; Swain & Lapkin, 1982; Wesche, 1987).  Parents and others still express concerns about the program, wondering about the possible negative impact on a child's acquisition of English language skills, about how proficient their child's French would be, and whether their child's academic achievement would suffer from learning subject matter through a second language (Stern, Swain, McLean, Friedman, Harley & Lapkin 1976).

Cummins and Swain (1986) addressed the question of interference of French on the development of first language skills saying "students instructed through a minority language for all or part of the school day perform over time as well or better in the majority language (English) as students instructed exclusively through the majority language" (p. xv). Independent teams of researchers reported findings that consistently and clearly demonstrated that students suffered no detrimental effects to their English language development as a result of French instruction (Dank & McEachern, 1979; Gaudet & Pelletier, 1993; Laing, 1988; Lambert & Tucker, 1972; Obadia, 1995; Safty, 1988; Tremaine, 1975).

Other research generally indicated positive effects of a bilingual education with no negative effects on cognitive development or academic achievement (Bialystok & Cummins, 1991; Lambert, 1977; McLaughlin, 1978).  However, other researchers, some more recent, stated that these data were not necessarily reflective of children with various linguistic and socioeconomic backgrounds (Bibeau, 1987; Dubé, 1993; Keep, 1993;  Mannavarayan, 2002; McLaughlin, 1989; Rosenberg, 1982; Stern, 1991).

These former studies also supported the notion that French immersion students do as well or better than their counterparts in English programs. Proponents of French immersion programs pointed to a variety of benefits to students. Some research results maintained that not only do

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French immersion programs produce students who are proficient in speaking French but they also serve to enhance first-language skills (Cummins & Swain, 1986; Harley, Hart & Lapkin, 1986; Lapkin & Swain 1987) and provide advantages in cognitive abilities (Diaz & Klingler, 1991). Cummins and Swain (1986) stated:

> There is substantial evidence that children in early total immersion programs, although initially behind their English-educated comparison groups in literacy-related skills, catch up and even surpass their comparison groups once English is introduced into the curriculum. (p. 43)

The findings suggested that students achieved equally well or better than their English peers, they suffered no set-backs in the development of their first language, they experienced no negative effects on their cognitive development or academic achievement. Such findings have been generalized to include all students in French immersion programs, but failed to consider those who are not successful in the program. Despite the glowing program reviews, the academic recommendations for FI, and the reliable research data, educators have referred students from French immersion programs to school psychologists for assessment of learning difficulties (Keep, 1993; Mannavarayan, 2002; Trites, 1976; Wiss, 1987). The increasing enrollment of a more representative cross-section of the general population into French immersion programs (Halsall, 1989) than had occurred previously may partially account for these increased referrals. However, this reason does not fully explain the failure of some French immersion students to succeed.

Initially, students in French immersion programs tended to come from families with above-average incomes and parents with above-average education (Hart & Lapkin, 1998; Lapkin, Swain, & Shapson, 1990; Obadia, 1995; Olson, 1983; Olson & Burns, 1981). Generally,

these students began school with the advantage of high literacy skills. These skills, coupled with a high level of parental support, acted as a determinant of student success. Krashen (1996) listed the advantages that a higher socio-economic status (SES) provided a student in successfully acquiring a second language and how each factor was of additional help to the student. He wrote that some factors included:

…more and better education in their primary language,…caregivers who

are more educated….greater affluence means their parents can provide

tutoring in the primary  language….they live in a more print-rich

environment….more likely to have access to a library….[and] a quiet place to

read and study at home….Greater first language literacy, resulting from

living in a print-rich environment.…parental help, and tutoring in the

primary language are of additional help….SES is not causative. Rather,

factors typically associated with high SES are causative. (pp. 38-39)

Most initial immersion studies were conducted with children of privileged majority groups thereby producing positive evaluation results (Bibeau, 1984; Stern, 1993).

Hart and Lapkin's (1998) extensive review of studies conducted by the Modern Language Centre, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, between 1986 and 1994 provided information about the social-class background of immersion students. The report considered three large-scale research studies from several school boards, as well as a series of single-board evaluation studies of French immersion programs in Central Canada, the Maritime region, the Prairies, and the Western region. These authors found that in French immersion programs:

At the elementary level, there is a disproportionate number of students from

relatively high SES home backgrounds. At the senior secondary level, the

contrast between the socio-economic composition of students from immersion

and non-immersion, but academic-stream students, that is, those taking core

French (OACs), is much less pronounced. In general, immersion programs are

better characterized as a form of streaming, than as a vehicle of 'elite' education

akin to the upper-tier private schools. (p. 346)

Hart and Lapkin further concluded that no evidence existed to indicate that a greater

number students of lower SES left the program than did students of higher SES, or that reasons

given for leaving the program were any different for one group from another. Cummins and

Swain (1986) cited a study by Wells (1985) that indicated "many low SES students experience

initial difficulties in school in comparison to middle-class students because they come to school

less prepared to handle context-reduced academic tasks as a result of less exposure to literacy-

related activities prior to school" (p. 159). However, Cummins and Swain (1986) added that

these factors need not become deficits in academic achievement, given appropriate instruction.

Krashen (1996) supported Cummins' view that a disparity between student language

skills may be reduced at the school level. He presented information from studies that consider

student SES. A high SES generally predisposes students to succeed. Highly educated parents are

more likely to provide enrichment or help to their children. High SES children generally are

exposed to linguistic interaction in their primary language, providing them with greater literacy

skills. Exposure to print in their homes is abundant. These factors associated with SES contribute

to student reading achievement. Yet, Krashen maintained that schools could eliminate the effect

of these factors by providing a print rich environment and an excellent education, thereby

dispelling the SES factor:

Thus, high SES is not the only way to provide these advantages. Low SES

children have succeeded, as several scholars have pointed out (Cummins, 1984)

(and some high SES children have not). What is crucial is that we can improve

the achievement of LEP children by providing these factors in school. (p. 39)

Although Krashen's work did not deal specifically with French immersion instruction, it

included valuable information that supported Cummins and Swain's (1986) notion of providing

equal opportunities for all students in FI programs to provide a successful learning experience.

Hakuta and Gould (1987) addressed the issue of children who do not have adequate first

language literacy skills when entering school. The authors wrote "such children are at serious

risk for failure to learn to read.  This risk is compounded if the problem of reading is presented in

a language they control poorly" (p. 42). Children who enter a bilingual program with weak

literacy skills enter at a disadvantage and must be provided with the opportunity to master those

skills in their home language in order to experience success in the second language program.

The key questions then become: Has Standard English been identified as what counts as

adequate first language skills? Has the French immersion language program, that is dependent on

verbal and aural messages, been adapted for children with less than adequate first language

literacy skills and for the child who speaks another dialect of English? Has background

knowledge and literacy in the first language been supplied to ensure that instruction in French

will be comprehensible? Have those aspects of a high SES environment been replicated in

schools to make the best learning opportunities available to all students regardless of SES?

Researchers reported findings showing no significant differences in achievement between

student groups from middle-class or working class families (Genesee, 1987; Lapkin, Swain, &

Shapson, 1990, Stern, 1991). However, Genesee reported that none of the research "comes from

truly low socioeconomic communities" (pp. 94-95).  Unlike the early days of the FI program,

and in part due to the recommendations of researchers who said that French immersion is an appropriate choice for all, today's enrollment includes students from truly low socioeconomic communities and underprivileged language groups. Dicks' (1995) established a second cohort in an attempt to counter the lead cohort's characteristics that were somewhat "atypical in comparison with the rest of the population (for example more intelligent, more highly motivated, higher level of socio-economic status)" (p. 67). The researchers might assume that children with poorly developed literacy skills would be at a disadvantage in a second language program that emphasizes listening and speaking in comparison to those children with highly developed literacy skills.

*Factors Influencing Language Acquisition.*

Some literature addresses language acquisition as it relates to the learning of French in Canada. Certain factors that influence success lie within the student, while others come from the learning environment. In spite of differences in terminology and emphasis, most researchers have dealt with these internal and external factors.

Many researchers agreed (Cummins, 1991; Gardner, 1985, 1997; McLaughlin, 1987; Skehan, 1989) that the factors central to the acquisition of a second language (L2) are a combination of cognitive resources, motivation, and contextual factors that determine the amount and type of exposure to the second language. Gardner (1985) wrote that second language acquisition involves "a multi-faceted construct that involves effort (motivational intensity), cognitions (desire) and affect (attitudes)…it is the total configuration that will eventuate in second language achievement" (p. 169).

As well, Cummins (1991) stated that attribute-based and input-based factors or aspects influence proficiency. Attribute-based aspects refer to stable characteristics of the language

learner such as cognitive and personality variables. These aspects contribute to proficiency in areas where consistent cross lingual relationships exist between aspects of the first and second languages. Input-based aspects refer to the quality and quantity of second language exposure from the environment, and contribute to proficiency in areas that are unrelated across the two languages but dependent on quantity and quality of exposure. Cummins spoke of the interdependence of attribute-based and input-based aspects on the development of proficiency: "individual learner attributes will be involved in most aspects of L2 learning to a greater or lesser extent and appropriate input is clearly essential for development of all aspects of proficiency" (p. 85).

McLaughlin (1987) and Skehan (1989) looked at the learner. They stated that language aptitude, motivation, and cognitive style establish the similarities existing among learners. Both researchers stressed the importance of considering alternative research directions to study the differences among learners. Skehan (1989) maintained that although these factors play important roles in second language acquisition, each factor is not a "monolithic, undifferentiated construct" (p. 34), but should be considered as having multi-components, providing a framework for the study of learner strengths and weaknesses.

Other academics expressed similar views (Gardner, 1997; Trites, 1976). Trites recommended considering whether any of the following factors exist: an aptitude for second language learning; a language mismatch between the home and the school; and/or congenital/familial reading difficulties. Trites also suggested that other important considerations should include the age of introduction to a second language-learning program, and the recognition that hyperactivity presents a high risk due to inattentiveness and restlessness.

Gardner (1997) addressed individual difference variables that are implicated in language learning. In discussing the affective variables he wrote: "It is clear, for example, that the variables discussed here, language aptitude, attitudes and motivation, anxiety, and language learning strategies, are all implicated in language learning, but none of them operates in isolation" (p. 40). Gardner (1985) also suggested that several factors have an impact on achievement in second language learning. The four factors are intelligence, student motivation, language aptitude, and situational anxiety. As well, Gardner proposed that the characteristics of the social milieu influence the role that these variables play in the acquistion of a second language.

Colletta, Clément, and Edwards (1983) addressed the importance of the social milieu factors. They suggested that a political climate within a community that supported bilingualism would serve to foster positive attitudes towards learning a second language, as compared to a community that did not value or was ambivalent to the target language and culture. Furthermore, these authors maintained that the natural and inevitable interlinguistic contacts in a bilingual community provide opportunities for informal language acquisition. In contrast, in a unilingual community, where no opportunities for casual contacts exist, and where second language acquisition is dependent on formal language instruction, success is directly related to student effort and motivation (pp.13-15).

Some researchers have focused on the role of anxiety in success or failure in learning French as a second language. The issue of whether anxiety originates in the student or in the environment has sparked some lively debate. Sparks and Ganschow (1991) claimed that first language deficiencies in the phonological, syntactic, and semantic areas rather than the affective dimensions of anxiety and motivation, contributed to difficulties in second language acquisition.

Refuting Sparks and Ganschow's claim that affective differences such as anxiety are probably a result of a student's difficulties, MacIntyre (1995) suggested that anxiety was a cause rather than a consequence of failure in language learning:

> A demand to answer a question in a second language class may cause a student to become anxious; anxiety leads to worry and rumination. Cognitive performance is diminished because of the divided attention and therefore performance suffers, leading to negative self-evaluations and more self-deprecating cognition which further impairs performance and so on. For some students, this is a frequent course of events, and anxiety becomes reliably associated with any situation involving the second language. (p. 92)

This suggestion is consistent with Eysenck (1979) who concluded that anxiety and worry produce task-irrelevant information that competes with the task-relevant information and puts the highly anxious student in a divided attention situation. In contrast, non-anxious students process primarily task-relevant information (p. 364).

Furthermore, MacIntyre (1995) suggested that anxiety influences second language activities such as listening, learning, and comprehension. "Anxious students may worry about misunderstanding linguistic structures or worry about inferring meaning from context because of the potential for embarrassing errors" (p. 93). The student who experiences anxiety during the learning process will learn less because of the divided attention.

MacIntyre and Gardner (1991a, 1991b) found "that anxiety may be more strongly aroused by speaking than by learning" (p. 96). As a result, anxiety will impede a student's ability to demonstrate orally what he or she does know. "Anxious students are caught in a double bind; they have learned less and may not be able to demonstrate the information that they have

learned. Further, the cyclical relation between anxiety and task performance suggests that as students experience more failure, their anxiety level may increase even more" (p. 97). This suggestion is supported by Hilleson (1996), Tsui (1996), and Tobias (1986), the latter who wrote that "anxious students may have impaired ability to take in information, process it, and to retrieve it when necessary" (p. 35).

The factors of anxiety, social milieu, and individual difference variables may bear significantly on individual performance and student success. The suggestions of Gardner (1985), MacIntyre (1991a, 1991b), and Colletta et al. (1983) are important because they focused on the individual learner and the immediate learning needs rather than on the program, and allowed for differences in performance dependent on each individual.

Still other researchers considered that a connection existed between first and second language acquisition. Rosenberg (1982) stressed the importance, when speaking of second language acquisition, of considering the variables that influence first language development:

Information on representation of mature linguistic knowledge, the course the

first language development, the strategies and processes by which the first

language is acquired, the impact of nonlinguistic cognitive development on

first language development, the nature and role of the linguistic input to young language-

learning children, general-purpose information-processing

capacities and operations, and the development and significance of

metalinguistic awareness. (p. 12)

This connection supported Cummins' (1976a, 1976b) threshold hypothesis that minimal levels of competence in L1 are necessary to avoid the interference of SLA on cognitive growth.

Bruck (1982) mentioned the positive results of numerous evaluations of French immersion programs. However, she identified that minority culture children in L2 programs suffered a wide range of problems including academic failure, lowered self-esteem, social and emotional problems, and low levels of mastery of L2. These problems were attributed to low levels of L1 development prior to commencing school and to the nature of the L2 program— subtractive rather than additive (Cummins, 1979). The subtractive L2 program gradually replaced the L1 with a more prestigious L2. On the other hand, the additive bilingual program was one that added another socially relevant language at no cost to L1 competence.

Bruck (1982) reported a study of majority language students in Montreal with low levels of L1 skills in a French immersion program in an attempt to determine whether Cummins' threshold hypothesis was valid in that situation. She examined the performance of majority students having low levels of L1 competence and entering an additive French immersion program. More than 100 middle-class kindergarten students in one English school district were involved in the study. This study sought to determine the feasibility of FI for the child with less developed first language skills and looked at whether these students could be expected to do as well as others in the program who had adequate or superior L1 language skills.

Their performance and progress were compared to three other groups, both within the FI program and in the English program. Results indicated that students experiencing difficulties in primary French immersion did not progress any more slowly than their peers experiencing difficulties in a regular English program. Levels of accomplishment for both groups remained the same, indicating that Cummins' threshold hypothesis was invalid for majority students in a second language program with less than the minimal level of proficiency in L1.Therefore, Bruck wrote:

Because both groups of problem children acquired skills to the same level of

proficiency there is no evidence to support the threshold hypothesis or the

psycholinguistic position that posits that language education for children

with low levels of first language competence (such as the language impaired

child) will result in poor levels of first and second language development as

well as poor scholastic achievement. (p. 58)

Bruck maintained that language impaired students in a second language program will develop

some proficiency in the second language while developing their first language skills. However, it

will take them longer to achieve the same level of proficiency. Therefore their exclusion from

French immersion programs was not justified.

Turnbull, Hart, and Lapkin's (2003) studies of Ontario grade 6 student achievement and

performance corroborated studies done twenty years earlier. The results of this recent research

demonstrated that students in French immersion programs suffer no negative effects from their

instruction in French. Results from these studies indicated:

At Grade 6 in contrast to Grade 3, students in immersion clearly outperformed

those in the regular program on EQAO [Education Quality and Accountability

Office] tests …Differences were notable even in comparison with the

performance of the highly selected English program enrichment group. (p. 20)

The authors further documented lags in achievement in French immersion students in

comparison to their English counterparts at the grade 3 level. However, the results of

achievement tests indicated that the French immersion students at the grade 6 level outperformed

the students in an English only program. Although the authors indicated that these results could

be attributed to one of two things, they acknowledged that they had little support from their test results for either explanation.

The first explanation offered was the selection explanation where the results might be due to attrition in the French immersion program, leaving a group that is academically stronger because the students experiencing difficulty choose to leave the early immersion program. The second possibility was the extended lag explanation where "test results at grade 3 did not really reflect the greater academic strengths of immersion students" (p. 20). French immersion students, progressing through the program, accumulate further hours of instruction in English thereby surpassing their English counterparts. Further study of the selection and the extended lag explanations is required to determine whether either of these factors bears significantly on the enhanced performance of grade 6 FI students when compared to their English peers.

Although test results from these studies provided no support for either the extended lag or selection explanations, attrition in the French immersion program may be a natural process as it is in the English program where students naturally remove themselves from the more academic stream to suit their interests and or abilities. (Turnbull et al., 2003, p. 16). The natural attrition of the less academically inclined from the French immersion program diminishes the claim of the suitability of French immersion for all students.

It is widely accepted that second language acquisition is dependent on cognitive resources, motivation, and contextual factors. Some of these factors are controlled by the environment while others are unique to the individual. It is important to remember that within these factors are the independent variables that further contribute or interfere with second language acquisition.

*Language Proficiency*

Various researchers have addressed the issue of language proficiency. Again their studies deal largely with French immersion situations. Cummins (1984, 1991)**,** Crandall (1997), and Hamayan (1997) maintained that conversational skills are only slightly related to cognitive/academic skills in first language learning. Cummins (1984) stressed that minority students learning English acquire conversational fluency more easily than grade-norm verbal academic skills. Crandall (1997) wrote about minority students who receive instruction in a second language program: "they are seemingly fluent in informal, social uses of the language but lack the academic language proficiency required for reading academic texts and performing academic tasks" (p. 79).

Cummins (1984) made the distinction between the two levels of abilities as basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). He further elaborated that BICS involved knowledge or remembering something previously learned, a grasp of a basic meaning, and an ability to apply knowledge in particular situations. On the other hand, CALP refers to the ability to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the information.   This conversational fluency applies not only to minority students in a second language program, but also to French immersion students, who demonstrate a high level of conversational fluency that does not translate into academic skills of an equal level. Cummins (1991) explained "that acquisition of L2 syntax may be considerably more dependent on cognitive attributes in formal classroom contexts than in naturalistic settings, where quantity and quality of input are primary determinants of acquisition" (p. 85).

Shohamy (1997), Day and Shapson (1996), and Hakuta and Gould (1987) maintained that the nature of language proficiency is a complex configuration of abilities. Cummins (1991) oted

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that children become conversationally fluent before they develop the ability to use language in academic situations. A student's ability to function adequately in an informal classroom situation does not mean that the child possesses the skills necessary to understand instructions from a teacher or read from a textbook. These early basic interpersonal communication skills are later formalized in the manipulation of the language in academic situations.

Studies by Swain and Lapkin (1982) and Genesee (1976) provide evidence for this point of view. They stated that students in French immersion programs generally require up to six years of instruction to perform as well in French reading proficiency as native francophone students. Parents and educators often equate language proficiency with academic achievement. This linkage, in turn, may result in the over-estimation of a students' academic/cognitive ability where difficulties are downplayed because the student appears to be making adequate progress in the program. It then becomes increasingly difficult for teachers to understand student failure and make the recommendation that a student either remain in the French immersion program or move into an English program.

This extended period of exposure is consistent with findings from a review conducted in 1994 for the World Bank that examined the use of first and second languages in education in three different types of countries. Countries with various linguistic heterogeneity were involved to provide a comprehensive review. Countries examined included those with no or few mother tongue speakers (e.g., Haiti, Nigeria, and the Philippines), some mother tongue speakers (e.g., Guatemala), and many mother tongue speakers (e.g., Canada, New Zealand, and the United States) of the language of wider communication. It was concluded that from four to seven years of formal instruction were required to develop cognitive/academic language (Tucker, 1999, ¶ 3).

Still other researchers reported that much longer periods of instruction in a second language do not always yield satisfactory results. Obondo (1997) discussed the colonial political context of second language learning in Africa stating that all former French and Belgian colonies have French, all former British colonies have English, former Portuguese colonies have Portuguese, and so on. She reported that in second language programs with maximum or total exposure and often in isolation of the first language:

> that nine years after the introduction of the English medium in Zambia's
>
> schools, there was still no evidence that learning has been made easier
>
> …similarly…the negative role that Portuguese as the only medium of
>
> instruction in primary [Mozambican] schools may have played in bringing
>
> about the poor reading and writing skills of the pupils studied. (p. 27)

If the claim of these studies (Genesee, 1976; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981; Swain & Lapkin, 1982; Tucker, 1999) that a six-year span is required to allow a student to arrive at near native-like proficiency in the second language is accepted, what of the student who, after this length of time, still struggles with the second language?

Rehner and Mougeon (1999) explored the variations of the spoken French of grade 9 and grade 12 French immersion high school students in Ontario. They were interested in determining how FI students use the same and the differing linguistic variants from those used by native speakers of French. As well, their study considered the internal and external factors that influence the selection of linguistic alternatives. Rehner and Mougeon concluded that, although they observed some variation in the spoken French of these students, "our students' clear dependence on classroom exposure for developing a range of linguistic variants raises the

question of how immersion education can lift these students' to higher levels of sociolinguistic proficiency" (p. 148).

Tarone and Swain (1995) suggested that the lack of mastery of accepted linguistic variants prevents FI students from developing the confidence they require to interact informally in French. Rehner and Mougeon (2003) concurred with these authors adding:

The FI students' educational input, from both the FI teachers and the teaching materials, fails to provide the students with opportunities to become familiar with the most frequent variant in the speech of native speakers of Québec French, namely *(ça) fait que.* This renders a disservice to the FI students who, thus, may have difficulty identifying, internalizing, and eventually producing this variant in the appropriate registers of spoken French. (pp. 276-277)

Van der Keilen (1995) explored the extent of contacts established by FI students with the francophone culture outside school. This study of 300 **g**rade 5 to grade 8 students from the Sudbury School District in Ontario, Canada, determined that in French immersion, students "actual interaction patterns with members of the other linguistic community basically remain unchanged" (p. 301).

French immersion students lack familiarity with the lived language of the francophone people. Because their French is dependent on the classroom context the result is that they "speak immersion" (Lyster, 1987, p. 703). When opportunities for meaningful conversation with native speakers do arise, interaction is limited.

Bakhtin's (1986) concept of a "heteroglossic society" explains the multiplicity of discourses that vary in purpose and style. Different discourses exist in society, between members

of the same social group as well as between different social groups. Successful second language acquisition consists, not in knowing the rules of the language, but rather in knowing the usage of the language in fluid situations. The use of different linguistic features will vary with circumstances of the discourse.  referred to these as "speech genres". His premise was that language is not static, bounded by grammar and form; rather it was a collaborative construction of meaning:

> freer and more creative genres of oral speech have existed and still exist:
> intimate conversations genres of salon conversations….genres of table
> conversation, intimate conversations among friends….with the family and so
> on….Many people who have an excellent command of a language often feel
> quite helpless in certain spheres of communication precisely because they do
> not have a practical command of the generic forms used in the given spheres.
> (p. 80)

This level of language mastery requires that a French immersion student be cognizant of the accepted social dialects that move the language out of the classroom and into the arena of the real world.

Bialystok and Hakuta (1994) agreed, stating that gaining proficiency in a language is what learners need to aim for: that success will vary according to the situation. Academic proficiency will vary from social proficiency. A good language learner is one who will find the right skills to achieve a particular proficiency. This description is further supported by the Romney, Romney, and Menzies' (1995) study that recommended adding, "more time and effort to the acquisition by the children of a wide vocabulary unrelated to school subjects and activities so as to equip them better to face situations encountered in books as well as in everyday life" (p.

488). It appears that obtaining an "A" on a grammar test does not equate to language proficiency because that form of testing does not provide a reliable gauge of a learner's overall ability to succeed in real-life situations. Traditional evaluation is narrow and restricted by the context of the classroom. Learners who are highly successful in one context could well reveal limitations in situations requiring a different set of skills. SLA involves a unique situation shaped by particular individuals, languages, and possibilities constructed from a mixture of language, personal traits, and culture.

Earlier research (Bruck, 1978, 1982, 1985; Cummins, 1984; Genesee, 1989, 1992) maintained that the available data provided no evidence that French immersion programs were inappropriate for children with learning difficulties. Studies (Bruck, 1978, 1982; Genesee, 1976) indicated that such students would have experienced similar difficulties if educated only in their native language, what Cummins (1984) called *differential success or failure* (p. 161). Bruck's and Genesee's studies further suggested, that as a bonus, the students acquired linguistic skills their peers in English did not possess. Others disagreed with this belief. Keep (1993) used a definition of learning disabilities, taken from the National Joint Committee on Disabilities, to express some concern with this view stating:

> It could be assumed that LD (learning disabled) students who demonstrate receptive language problems might experience considerable difficulty in FI since academic success is dependent upon verbal inferential skills….Although English and FI curriculum requirements are similar with respect to academic and cognitive goals, the heightened FI reliance on verbal inferential skills would conceivably pose a greater challenge for students who experience difficulty in this area. (p. 40)

Wiss (1987) and Cummins (1984) discussed the difficulty of diagnosing learning disabilities "because we do not really know what constitutes a 'learning disability', all measures designed to identify learning disabilities have serious validity problems" (p. 85). Wiss (1987) maintained that efforts are further complicated in assessments of French immersion students because the relationship between first language skills and the skills of the language of academic instruction is not fully understood. She wrote, "it is not known for certain that a child with learning disabilities in English will exhibit the same type of problem in French or that the results of a psychoeducational assessment in English are applicable to the French learning situation" (p. 303). Additionally, unlike English programs that had an established, widely used set of assessment instruments, there appeared to be a lack of appropriate instruments to assess the abilities of students in French immersion (Bruck, 1982; Cummins, 1984; Noonan, Colleaux, & Yackulic, 1997; Tetrault, 1984).

Day and Shapson (1996) recognized and discussed in detail the increasing need for developing effective evaluation methods for the assessment of the L2 program. They sought to improve an already positively accredited program and to provide French immersion educators with valid curricular interventions to increase students' oral and written grammatical skills using a functional-analytic approach:

> Research results show that immersion students have highly developed
> communicative abilities in French but lag behind in grammar, many
> immersion educators identify improving students' grammatical competence
> as a major priority….[W]e present an experimental study….based on second
> language curriculum theory, which seeks to combine less formal, experiential
> teaching, involving the natural, unanalyzed use of language with more

formal language teaching based on analysis and practice of the linguistic

code. (p. 3)

However, the authors stressed the importance of certain considerations in developing

language-learning curricula. One of these concerns was the need to recognize the evaluation of

communicative competence. Using the performance of native speakers of French as a benchmark

for evaluation will identify areas of strengths and weaknesses of French immersion students in

comparison to native French-speaking students. Generally French immersion students

demonstrate weaknesses in grammatical and sociolinguistic competence. Knowledge of these

strengths and weaknesses may provide valuable diagnostic information for improving the

program to ameliorate these deficiencies. However, these evaluations provide only part of the

information. Day and Shapson (1996) recommended the:

 need to examine the actual performance levels of immersion students in all

areas of communicative competence. Otherwise, we may skew the

curriculum in favor of those areas found deficient and overlook other

important areas….We may also fail to consider the need for instruction which

attends to the full range of student abilities found on the measures used to

evaluate students' French language skills. (pp. 92-93)

Day and Shapson further cautioned against basing the standard of performance of French

immersion students on an outside group (native French speakers) because different standards of

communicative competence may exist from those of the reference group. The point made by Day

and Shapson appears logical and reasonable when one considers that students of French

immersion have limited if any contact with the francophone community. My experience in

French immersion education confirms that interaction with native speakers of French, although

occurring in extracurricular situations, remains minimal.  The authors reported the difficulty in

assessing oral language proficiency of French immersion students, confirming Cummins' (1984)

views. Bialystok and Hakuta (1994) also agreed with these views and questioned the validity of

testing because learning outcomes do not always match test results:

> The result of individual differences in learners is completely confounded with the
>
> question of differences in outcomes….Accordingly, proficiency, or success
>
> in learning a new language, has many facets….Language is far too complex a
>
> system to reveal itself through a single skill, a single experience, or a single test.
>
> (p. 158)

Evaluation is an important aspect to determine the success of students in FI programs.

Evaluating FI student language proficiency involves not only looking at how the language is

spoken in comparison to native speakers, but the multi-dimensional aspects of language

proficiency. Assessment of student competence needs to address the common language goals set

by the program as well as to reflect each individual student's abilities and accomplishments.

Provincial governments and others are aware of the need for improved methods of

evaluation (Day & Shapson, 1996). In response to a request by the Maritime Provinces

Education Foundation (MPEF) to address an identified need to improve classroom practice,

Rehorick and Dicks (1998) developed the Maritime Oral Communicative Assessment Portfolio

(MOCAP). A recognition of the existence of commonalities in education that could be addressed

most efficiently through a collaborative effort brought together representatives from Nova

Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island.  The goal of the project was to provide items

for oral interaction tests and a standardized method of evaluating these tests.

The guiding principles for development were that the tests could be administered and scored by classroom teachers; that public accountability needs would be satisfied; and that the aims and goals of the program would be reflected in classroom practices (pp. 263-264). The assessment instrument was designed "not as a quick-fix solution but rather a long-term and continuous systemic change process" (p. 275). As the use of MOCAP became more widespread and teachers became more familiar with it, it was expected that teachers, students, and their parents would reflect the effects of its use. Rehorick and Dicks (1998) suggested that "the need for interprovincial collaboration reflects a countrywide trend in education" (p. 258).

As a result of events that occurred in the development of Canada as a nation, education in Canada falls under provincial jurisdiction with each province assuming control of all aspects of education within the province. The federal government accepts fiscal responsibility for Aboriginal education as well as for FSL programs. However, throughout the country common educational concerns emerge. These issues, coupled with dwindling resources (Lazaruk, 1994; Lewington, 1994), warrant a collaborative effort, such as the one initiated by MPEF, to address the educational needs within the country.

*Reading Instruction and Language Learning*

Controversy exists over the language used, whether English or French, when reading instruction is introduced in early French immersion. Numerous studies have investigated this issue (Geva & Clifton, 1994; Krashen, 1996; Malicky, Fagan & Norman, 1988; Noonan, Colleaux & Yackulic, 1997; Segalowitz, 1995; Segalowitz & Hébert, 1990). Taken together, these studies help clarify the topic of the acquisition of French language reading skills. Geva and Clifton (1994) compared the reading skills between 20 FI and 20 English-only grade 2 students

in a dual-track FI school.  Their study determined how good and poor readers in FI compared to good and poor readers in the English program.

As well, they examined the emergence of parallel reading skills of good and poor FI students in their English reading and in their French reading. The study results indicated that students taught to read in a second language did not develop fluent reading as readily as students taught in L1. However, these students attained the same level of comprehension and accuracy as their English counterparts.  In addition, this study revealed consistent reading attributes in the FI readers in both their L1 and L2 reading.  For example, students who demonstrated difficulty in comprehension in one language displayed similar difficulty in the second language. Similarly, those who read well in one language also did so in the other language (pp. 663-664).

Noonan, Colleaux, and Yackulic (1997) examined two approaches to teaching initial reading skills. They looked at reading taught in French first, versus reading taught in English first. The study dealt with two groups of 47 grade 3 FI students from both dual-track and single-track FI schools in a mid-sized Western Canadian city. The researchers chose to focus exclusively on FI students to better control the many variables that exist between the two groups of students. Noonan et al. concluded from their study that when all factors are controlled, no significant difference existed in the development of reading skills based on the order of the language first taught. They found strong correlation between the reading skills in the two languages confirmed a transfer effect between the two languages. The study further concluded that students in a second language program would develop reading skills equally well in either language.

Most studies indicated that students in French immersion acquire French with no detrimental effects to their first language. However, some studies found different results.

Segalowitz (1995) reanalyzed a study from 1983 by Favreau and Segalowitz that studied loss of automaticity in the first language due to exposure to L2. The study involved two groups of skilled, English/French bilingual students and provided evidence of costs in speed in L1 processing. One group could read their L2 at the same rate as their L1.  The other group of students read their L2 more slowly than their L1. The same-rate group had spent at least five years studying in the L2 medium whereas the different-rate group had spent fewer than two years doing so.  However the same-rate group, although reading significantly faster in L2, read more slowly than the different-rate group in their L1.  Subsequent studies (Segalowitz & Hébert, 1990) with new groups of same-rate and different-rate subjects found similar patterns indicating that a slower performance in L1 may be linked to the extended exposure to L2.

Krashen (1996) dealt mostly with students of English in the United States and spoke about bilingual education as subtractive, where English is taught to replace the first language, usually Spanish. He maintained that the skills used for reading are transferable from one language to another. The underlying process is similar in different languages, and reading strategies differ little for readers of different languages. This conclusion supported Malicky, Fagan, and Norman (1988) who reported that:

> It appears that children read quite similarly in English and French. The major difference involves *integration* of text-based and knowledge-based processes, with children more able to integrate these in English. Hence transfer of basic reading processes across languages is supported. (p. 287)

It appears that many researchers agree that, once the skills are learned, a student can readily transfer skills for deriving meaning from the written text from language to language. Yet,

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Krashen advised that some strategies are language specific, and that students will tend to use strategies from their first language for interpreting meaning. He wrote:

> In English, for example, the subject is typically the first noun in the sentence,
> that is, English uses a word order strategy….In Dutch morphological cues
> take precedence over word order (McDonald, 1987). In a sentence such as
> "Him saw I," English speakers tend to consider "him" as the subject, while
> Dutch speakers would consider "I" as the subject. (p. 29)

In time, many students will learn the strategies relevant to each language and begin to use these skills effectively. But those students who struggle with language learning may not do so.

Research suggested that reading instruction in FSL suffers when students have not adequately learned their first language. Hakuta and Gould (1987) addressed the issue of children who do not have adequate first language literacy skills when entering school. They wrote, "such children are at serious risk for failure to learn to read.  This risk is compounded if the problem of reading is presented in a language they control poorly" (p. 42). These researchers stressed the importance of nurturing a child's first language to promote development of basic literacy, numeracy, and scientific discourse to the fullest extent to facilitate the transfer of these skills to the second language. Children with weak literacy skills who enter a bilingual program enter at a disadvantage and must be provided with the opportunity to master those skills in their home language to experience success in the second language program.

Sparks, Ganschow, Javorsky, Pohlman and Patton (1992) have provided further evidence of a relationship between the development of first language skills and the acquisition of a second language. Their study involved 65 middle to upper middle-class American high school students enrolled in first semester foreign language (FL) courses (Spanish, German, Latin, French, or

Russian). The study compared low and high-risk students on measures of cognitive, FL, and native language performance to determine if a relationship exists between FL and native language learning problems. The results indicated, "that students with foreign language learning difficulties have subtle but underlying native language learning difficulties, especially in the phonological and syntactic codes of language" (p. 403). To enable high-risk students to succeed at FL learning, the authors recommended a multi-sensory approach to teaching a FL rather than the traditional natural communication approach. Engaging students at the auditory, visual, and tactile-kinesthetic level would increase the forms of input of direct instruction in the new phonology of the FL.

In summary, much research has been conducted regarding reading acquisition in French immersion. Studies indicated that there was no significant difference in the development of reading skills based on the order of the language first taught when all factors were controlled (Noonan, et al., 1997), and that the strong correlation among the reading skills between the two languages facilitated a transfer effect between the two languages (Krashen, 1996; Noonan, et al., (1997). Although students taught in L2 attained levels of comprehension and accuracy equal to those levels in L1 learners, they did not develop fluency as readily as their L1 counterparts, but their acquisition of reading skills was consistent in both their L1 and L2 (Geva & Clifton, 1994). As well, there appeared to be a slight loss of automaticity in L1 from exposure to L2 (Segalowitz, 1995). Also, students who did not have adequate L1 literacy skills were at a disadvantage when learning an L2 (Hakuta & Gould, 1987; Sparks et al., 1992).

*Critical Period Hypothesis*

Researchers have debated whether advantages exist with early introduction of a second language. There is a general assumption, supported by research, that children have advantage

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over adults in language learning (Eubank & Gregg, 1999; Hurford & Kirby, 1999; Weber-Fox & Neville, 1999). The belief is that "there is a limited developmental period during which it is possible to acquire a language, be it the first language (L1) or the second language (L2), to normal, native-like levels.  Once this window of opportunity is passed, however, the ability to learn language declines" (Birdsong, 1999, p. 1). This is known as the critical period hypothesis (CPH).

The CPH considers the theory of universal grammar (UG)—the innately held mastery one has over the formal grammatical similarities among natural languages—as put forth by Chomsky (1966). Chomsky (1998) referred to UG as a common framework of concepts and principles for human languages that was accessible to every human. "The fact that all normal children acquire essentially comparable grammars of great complexity with remarkable rapidity suggests that human beings are somehow specially designed to do this" (Chomsky, 2004, p. 47). Chomsky considered UG to be a "genetically determined language faculty" serving as a "language acquisition device" (p.  16) also referred to as "a form of mental software" by Pinker (1994). Chomsky explained that this language faculty, when in interaction with presented experience, converts the experience into knowledge of one or another language.  UG is a theory of the language faculty, in its initial state prior to exposure to any given language, which yields implicitly gained language knowledge as a result of the interaction with an experience.

There appears to be some agreement about the innateness of the language faculty. However, the nature and extent of the innateness theory have been questioned. Piaget insisted on pursuing an explanation for development of language over time and claimed "the conditions of language are part of a vaster context, a context prepared by the various stages of sensorimotor intelligence" (Piaget & Chomsky, 1980, p. 92). Piaget believed that language acquisition

occurred in successive stages from birth, where each stage is necessary for the acquisition of the following one.

Bruner (1983), although initially excited with the ideas that Chomsky proposed about language acquisition (p. 159), soon concluded that there was more to language acquisition than was presented by Chomsky's theory. Bruner believed that some knowledge of the world and a need to communicate were essential to activate the innate language faculty. He wrote:

> The reason that babies do not speak sooner, better, more appositely is not
>
> just that they lack the requisite performance capabilities with which to
>
> express their innate linguistic competence. Rather, it is that they do not know
>
> enough about the world, about other people, about themselves….You don't
>
> acquire language abstractly: You learn how to use it. (pp. 163-164)

Bialystok and Hakuta (1994) were concerned with second language acquisition. They described Chomsky's view as an "asceptic view of language" (p. 167) devoid of any environmental considerations such as the social and cultural aspects of language use. They discussed the complex nature of language learning as requiring a "full repertoire of our human nature, ranging from our cognitive machinery to our social and communicative needs" (p. viii). Chomsky (1998) recognized that the theory of universal grammar had some limitations saying "if universal grammar has serious defects, as indeed it does from a modern point of view, then these defects lie in the failure to recognize the abstract nature of linguistic structure and to impose sufficiently strong and restrictive conditions on the form of any human language" (p. 12). In so doing, Chomsky acknowledged the divergent views contributing to the debate surrounding his theory indicating the complex nature of language and how much is not understood about language learning.

However, as the originator of this theory, Chomsky made significant contributions to the field of linguistics, laying the foundations for a rationalist approach to the explanation of first language acquisition. The UG theory is widely accepted as the underpinning to the explanation of first language development (Fay & Mermelstein, 1982, Lust & Foley, 2004; McLaughlin, 1987; Quigley & King, 1982; Schachter, 1997). Those academics supporting a CPH maintain that UG becomes unavailable to the language learner with closure of the critical period. However, Eubank and Gregg (1999), Schachter (1997), and SingAaronn (1997) suggested that certain aspects of linguistic competence may be fixed and may be subject to a critical period, while certain other aspects may be variable and not bound by age-effects. Delays in introducing a L2 will have varying degrees of impact on different aspects of language learning.  For example, vocabulary remains relatively unaffected by a late immersion experience but native-like pronunciation and accent are difficult to achieve for most late language learners (Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994, p. 86).

The challenge of accent and the difficulty of adults to overcome them are common in second language learning. Oyama (1976) found that length of exposure to a language did not bear any relationship to accentedness. She found, however, that a strong correlation existed between age of introduction and accentedness. A steady decline in ability to overcome accentedness was noted as age increased.

Other studies (Flege, 1999; Williams, 1980) found that the phonemic structure of the first language served as a model for forming phonological categories for the second language. Flege (1999) suggested that similar sounds from one language to another were more difficult to master in the second language than were sounds that were different. He explained that the sound from the first language guided the learning of the second language. If the sound was identical in both

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languages or if nothing in the native language guided the phonetic learning there was little difficulty. The problems arose when there was enough resemblance between the two to cause an intrusion from the native representation. Flege hypothesized that a younger student would be able to successfully learn both similar and different sounds whereas an older learner would experience difficulty with sounds that were similar between the two languages. His prediction was made on the basis that older learners have a more fully developed L1 phonetic system than do young children (pp. 104-105).

The critical period hypothesis, in which the younger a child starts learning a language the better, has been much debated. Many researchers do not support this view (Bialystok & Hakuta, 1999; Bonagaerts 1999; Flege, 1999; Hakuta & Gould 1987; SingAaronn, 1997). Hakuta and Gould (1987) questioned the critical period hypothesis and the possibility of impairment of successful native-like acquisition of a second language due to maturational changes in the brain. They wrote:

> But the belief that children are fast and effortless second language learners has no
> basis in fact. Teenagers and adults are much more efficient learners than
> elementary school children, and fourth to seventh-graders are faster than first to
> third-graders. (p. 41)

Bialystok and Hakuta (1999) maintained that if one ascribes to the critical period hypothesis for language acquisition, this critical period would naturally extend to everything that individuals learn (music, mathematics, sports) (p. 164).

Bialystok and Hakuta (1999) concluded that the success young language learners experience in second language programs cannot be attributed to age. They claimed there is no proof that their *co-occurrence* is linked causally (p. 178). They further contended that linguistic,

cognitive, and social factors facilitate the acquisition of a second language. An example given by Bialystok and Hakuta (1999) is that of an immigrant family. The child learns a second language at school in a formal situation, father learns rudimentary second language skills at work, mother picks up bits and pieces in the neighborhood. The child picks up the language quickly and typically becomes the family translator. The child appears to be a "linguistic genius" (p. 51). Bialystok and Hakuta maintain that this success cannot be attributed to age, but rather to the concentrated learning experience in addition to the intensity and the length of time of the exposure.

As indicated by several researchers (Eubank & Gregg, 1999; Hakuta & Gould, 1999; Hurford & Kirby; Weber-Fox & Neville, 1999), the critical period hypothesis cannot be embraced wholeheartedly. It is necessary to consider the ease with which some aspects of language (vocabulary, morphology, syntax) are acquired, regardless of age, and those aspects that present greater challenges (accent, native-like pronunciation) and that appear to have age-related effects associated with them. Other factors that influence L2 acquisition include the context for learning a language, whether the purpose is integrative or utilitarian, and the intensity of instruction. Although children appear to acquire languages effortlessly and much more easily than adults do, there are those, who in adult life, acquire a second language to native-like proficiency. This native-like attainment however "seems to be a fairly exceptional phenomenon" (Bonagaerts, 1999, p. 154).

Questioning Voices

Some researchers questioned the suitability of the French immersion program for all children, recognizing that many children do not succeed in the program and that other factors need to be considered (Gardner, 1985; Mannavarayan, 2002; Trites, 1976; Wiss, 1987). Thirty years ago, Trites (1976) disagreed with the premise of the appropriateness of French immersion for all

students. His work tested the hypothesis that students experiencing difficulty in a French immersion program will experience the same difficulty in a regular English program. His work questioned other studies (Bruck, Lambert, & Tucker, 1973; Bruck, 1975; Lambert & Tucker, 1972) that had been conducted to determine the performance of French immersion students and whether the French immersion program was suitable for all students.

Trites argued that the characteristics of children experiencing difficulty in French immersion had not been studied sufficiently. He claimed that most researchers who have studied FI programs have not extensively examined screening procedures to determine which students should or should not participate. Entry into the FI program was and still is voluntary and based solely on parents' desire to have their children educated in two languages. Trites listed several factors to bear in mind when considering children who experienced difficulty in the FI program. Relevant factors included aptitude for second language learning, the age of introduction to a second language learning program, language mismatch between the home and the school, hyperactivity as a high risk to success because of inattentiveness and restlessness, and the presence of any congenital/familial reading difficulties. Trites (1976) determined from his study that:

> there is strong suggestive evidence that some children with bright-normal
>
> learning potential, whose progress through school conceivably would have been
>
> within normal expectation, meet with serious difficulties when placed in primary
>
> French immersion programs as a result of a specific developmental deficit. (p. 206)

Trites and Price (1976) conducted tests to determine if FI children experiencing difficulty in the French program were similar to students who would have been expected to have difficulty in school in any event. Two hundred and sixty-four students from Ottawa schools were selected for the study. Trites and Price (1976) sought to determine, through complex studies, whether primary

French immersion students facing difficulty differed from other students experiencing school problems. The extensive testing included intelligence tests, academic achievement tests, motor and sensory tests, testing of auditory perceptual abilities, and Tactual Performance tests. Tactual Performance tests indicate the functioning of the temporal lobes in the brain. The temporal lobes are important for subserving language, memory, and auditory perceptual functions. Trites et al. postulated that mild maturational deficits affecting the temporal lobes could present difficulties in complex language learning situations. In comparison to the three language control groups in the study, FI students experienced substantial difficulty with the Tactual Performance test.

Trites and Price's results indicated "that the type of learning disability in French immersion students was different from the pattern of deficits seen in more traditional types of learning difficulties such as reading disability or '"minimal brain dysfunction"'" (p. 2). Results revealed that the students in French immersion who were experiencing difficulties in the program were unique in terms of the factors contributing to their learning disability. In spite of above average intelligence and motor and sensory function, these tests indicated that students did not make acceptable progress in the early French immersion program. A maturational lag may have accounted for the lack of progress. Trites and Price concluded that student success was somewhat linked to maturity and suggested that it may be better for these students to begin second language study at a time later than kindergarten. In addition, establishing a screening process prior to enrolment in a French immersion program to determine the appropriateness of the program for any given student was a recommendation that resulted from the study.

Another challenge to the widely accepted view of the suitability of the French immersion program for all students came from Mannavarayan (2002). As a teacher of French immersion, she identified students who experienced great difficulty in the program:

My own personal experience of language teaching has brought to light cases inconsistent with the research findings. I have realized over time that some children are adversely affected by bilingual education; they experience learning difficulties, anxiety and discomfort when confronted with the task of learning a language other than their first language. Eventually, I had to reckon with the emergence of my doubt regarding the validity and veracity of the above statements for all students….Is bilingual education, or French immersion for that matter, suitable for every child? (p. 10)

Mannavarayan discussed the distressing situation that many students find themselves in because of the unsuitability of the program to their specific learning needs. Her experiences suggested that individual variables such as motivation, language aptitude, and first language development influence the capability of a student to succeed in French immersion programming. She cautioned that the lack of success for some students is related to the demands of the second language learning experience on the student. Mannavaryann stressed the consideration of these same variables and the profound influence these demands have on students in a second language program. Mannavarayan advised that rather than claim the suitability of the French immersion program for all students:

Let us remember that the ultimate goal of education is to help in the development

of the self and its potential and not to impose a situation which produces a

"poorness of fit." So instead of insisting that children persist in a direction that

brings much unhappiness, thwarts their educational progress and lowers their

self-esteem, it is those particular skills that permit students to experience

competence and self-efficacy which should be encouraged. (p. 137)

Some voices have cast doubts on the idea that FI programs suit all students. Yet, the volume of literature that addresses the difficulties encountered remains relatively incomplete. Some students do not present early symptoms of learning difficulties. Some students who begin well soon demonstrate signs of falling behind the other students. This is commonly referred to as *fossilization* (Cummins & Swain, 1986; McLaughlin, 1987; Selinker, 1972), a situation where the learner ceases to elaborate the complex relationship between the first language and the target language regardless of exposure, new data, or instruction (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 230). Teachers must take note when frustration replaces the eagerness with which students entered the program, when students display repeated physical symptoms of distress such as headaches, lethargy, or frequent outbursts of tears, when confrontations with their peers and their teachers become more frequent, and when the students experiencing difficulties record more absenteeism than previously. These forms of resistance must be included for consideration in the ongoing evaluation of our students.

## Summary

Many researchers have validated the French immersion program as a well-founded method for teaching French as a second language. Initial parent concerns of interference on the development of first language skills, proficiency levels attained in French, and academic achievement were common. But it was found that for members of the dominant linguistic and cultural majority, first language skills were not affected by curricular instruction in French (Cummins & Swain, 1986; Gaudet & Pelletier, 1993; Lambert & Tucker; Obadia, 1995; Safty, 1988) and that there was no basis for fearing any negative effects on students' English achievement (Bialystok & Cummins, 1991; Harley, Hart, & Lapkin, 1986; Lambert, 1977; McLaughlin, 1978).

However, it was found that the productive second-language skills of French immersion students did not reach native-like levels. Although French immersion students have little difficulty in expressing themselves in French, the way in which they express themselves is clearly different from native speakers of French (Bibeau, 1984; Day & Shapson, 1996; Hart, Lapkin, & Swain, 1998; Lyster, 1987; Rehner & Mougeon, 1999, 2003; Singh, 1986; Tarone & Swain, 1995).

Some research has claimed the suitability of the French immersion program for all students (Bruck, 1978; Cummins, 1984; Genesee, 1986; Swain & Lapkin, 1982), even those with learning disabilities (Bruck, 1978, 1982, 1985; Genesee, 1976, 1992). Other researchers question this claim (Gardner, 1985; Hammerly, 1989; Mannavarayan, 2002; Trites, 1976; Wiss, 1987). Furthermore some researchers state that independent differences, such as anxiety and social milieu, play significant roles in second language acquisition and therefore need to be considered (Colletta, Clément, & Edwards, 1983; Gardner, 1997; Macintyre, 1995; McLaughlin, 1987; Skehan, 1989; Sparks, Ganschow, Javorsky, Pohlman, & Patton, 1992).

It is clear that a controversy exists in regards to the French immersion program. French immersion does produce good results for many students. However, some students who enroll choose to leave the program. The related literature can serve as a starting point for further research devoted specifically to studying students who experience difficulty and leave the French immersion program. The goal of further research in this area is not to denigrate the past accomplishments of FI educators, students, and parents or the success that the French immersion program has enjoyed.

Rather, additional study can provide a better understanding of the affective dimension of students' experience in the French immersion program. Researchers have discussed and studied

the impact that L2 programs have on academic achievement, cognitive development, L1 language development, pedagogical deficiencies, and attrition rates. However, little research has been devoted to understanding the experiences of students who do not succeed in the French immersion program. Children are transferring from the French immersion program at all grade levels.

French immersion students who struggled with and eventually left the program have experiences that are different from those who stayed in the program. This study attempted to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of those French immersion students who left the program during their elementary school years. By listening to children's stories I have developed a deeper, more accurate understanding of their situation and have come to appreciate what the French immersion school experience was like for them.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Theoretical Framework

My belief that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered acknowledges the role

children play in the educational enterprise and in constructing their sense of self.  In recognizing

that reality is personally constructed, I question empiricist and rationalist views that attempt to

define reality. This view has led me to formulate some assumptions about children that in part

have affected how this inquiry emerged. I believe that children are individual but live their lives

within their own "child culture".  Just as adults construct meaning from their experiences in

social, familial, and cultural contexts, so do children. However, children do not necessarily share

the same framework of thought that adults do. Their conceptions of experiences are bounded by

their lived experience. Children have a distinctive worldview that may not be understood through

adult logic. Although children's life experiences are not as extensive as those of adults, children

do make sense of and are able to communicate competent understanding of their lives. The

stories children tell are just as real, just as valid as those of adults. Bruner (1983) wrote "Human

beings, whatever their age, are completed forms of what *they* are….Growing is becoming

different, not better or faster" (p. 131).

Therefore, the need to depict thought and meaning within the "here and now (of the

child's) life situation" (Aoki, 1988, p.  411) is essential in understanding the personal

construction of the French immersion experiences of children. Consequently, I chose to use

qualitative methods that incorporated some aspects of hermeneutical- phenomenology as

presented by Max van Manen (1992) and some elements of Clandinin and Connelly's (2000)

narrative inquiry approach to provide the theoretical framework for my research methodology.

For van Manen (1992), a hermeneutical-phenomenological approach is characterized by three essential qualities: a sensitive desire to understand the lived experience of those in question; an attempt to interpret and derive meaning from the experience under question; and finally, the reflective nature of the writing activity that expresses in textual form the meaning of the lived experience (adapted from van Manen, 1992, pp. 9-13).

One of the central reasons that I undertook this research was to gain an understanding of the lived experience of some students who had not succeeded in French immersion programs. The research goal was not to improve the French immersion program. However, I believe the interpretation of those stories in written form for access by teachers, parents, and others involved in the education of children is crucial if positive change is to occur in the school experience for some French immersion students.

Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative inquiry approach is also focused on trying to understand experience. These authors characterized narrative inquiry as a collaborative way for both the researcher and the participants to understand experience. This understanding happens in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling the stories of the experiences of people's lives (adapted from Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). This process would be no less significant in the lives of children. Clandinin and Connelly's work in narrative inquiry was centered on the notion that experience is not static, that it is influenced by history and challenged by the future. Therefore, narrative tentatively moves "back and forth between the personal and the social, simultaneously thinking about the past, present, future" (p. 3) providing opportunities for reflexive interpretation. Because I believe that children construct meaning in their social, familial, and cultural contexts and that they construct their sense of self out of this context

elements of the narrative approach appeared to be well suited to uncover the stories that these children had to tell about their experiences in French immersion programs.

This study focused on the human perceptions of individual students about their lived experience. Polkinghorne (1988) wrote "Life is not merely a story text: life is lived and the story is told" (p. 154). Qualitative methods provided an appropriate means to focus attention on existence as it was lived, experienced, and interpreted. This approach invited the children to tell their stories, creating meaning through their own figurative language. It offered an opportunity to interconnect the stories told and heard with the lived stories. Children try to solve what they do not know, drawing on what they do know to help them. Sinclair (1994) wrote that it is impossible to reclaim childhood experiences in their original condition: "All memories are reconstructions of the past filtered through what has taken place in our lives in the meantime" (p. 28). The relationship that exists between one and one's memories changes over time, we reconfigure memories to include "our myriad stories" (Stone, 1988, p. 244), to make our own meaning of life. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) cautioned that the current voice expresses childhood experiences through a historical lens. The interpretation of the stories became a complex reconstruction of events influenced by time, place and familial, cultural, and social factors.

<center>Interviewing Children</center>

Many researchers have cautioned about the unique nature of conducting research with children (Aldridge and Wood, 1998; Fine & Sandstrom, 1988; Graue & Walsh, 1998). The very nature of the research relationship with children warrants particular attention. The two main factors present themselves as problematic: the differences of age between the interviewer and the

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interviewee and the authority differential between them. Unless adults acknowledge these differences and are prepared to work around them, research with children may be difficult.

Traditionally, adults are in a position of authority with children, whether it is as parent, teacher, recreational group leader, law enforcement officer, and so on. Relations of power, characteristic of the social order, are always there and cannot be removed by goodwill and good intentions. However, they can be minimized by establishing rapport as a way to ameliorate the effects of relations of social power. Children respond accordingly unless a trusting relationship, where power is minimized, is negotiated between the interviewer and the child (Martin, 1998; Pope, 2002; Powney & Watts, 1987). Furthermore, Fine and Sandstrom (1988) maintained that adults tend to assume that they know and understand children because they were once children: they have lived the life of a child. Children and adults do not share the same world view. Children are not little adults. They are unique individuals living within the culture of children. Adults processing children's talk through adult processes and with an adult view of the world may find it difficult to understand children's meaning. To understand the life world of my participants, I attempted to enter into a research role that allowed for the traditional adult-child relationship to be equalized where age and authority were no longer an issue.

To remove the power differential and the perception of my being a figure of authority, all interviews were conducted in the children's homes with their parents either present for the interview or in an adjoining room. Time was spent prior to the interviews in conversation establishing rapport by sharing information about ourselves, such as the things that we like to do, the foods we like to eat. Atkinson (1998) made note of the difference between an interview and a conversation. Although an interview may appear to be conversational it serves an entirely different purpose. He noted:

an interview should be informal and loose, like a conversation, but in an

interview, the other person is doing the talking. You are the one doing the

listening. Your knowledge and your voice should remain in the

background…interview also permits you to ask questions in greater detail than

you would in a normal conversation. An interview has a mode of its own that

allows for, on the one hand, far greater depth and, on the other, an explanation of

the obvious. (p. 32)

As well, I let the students decide where the interview would take place. Atkinson (1998)

encourages interviewing in a "relaxed, comfortable setting…that the person you are interviewing

is very used to" (p. 30). The kitchen table has always been a gathering place for our family. It is

the place where daily accomplishments are celebrated, where problems are resolved, where fears

are addressed. In short, it is one place where each member of our family can find the support and

security that helps deal with what life presents. It was interesting to me that most of the children

chose to be interviewed at the kitchen table. In one instance, I also found myself on the living

room floor, at once sitting cross legged across from my student, then laying side by side flat on

our backs or facing each other on our stomachs propped by large cushions.

Further barriers include the cultural attitudes toward children that often prevent adults

from listening to children seriously. There is an assumption that children generally are

egocentric, that they are unable to see or understand events from the perspective of others. As a

result, adults generally tend to direct the conversation with children.  Piaget's reference to

egocentrism concerns the young infant, who by the age of one year is at the fullness of

egocentrism. Some researchers claimed that to hold such an assumption is to underestimate the

capabilities of young children (Donaldson, 1978; Gelman, 1979). For example, Bruner (1983)

reported studies with infants as young as six months that questioned this assumption. Tizard and Hughes (1984) reported that although overcoming egocentrism is a long process, it is generally accomplished by the age of seven. They cited studies with four-year old preschoolers that indicated very young children were able to ask intellectually demanding "passage of intellectual search" (p. 114) questions, actively seeking new information to help make sense of things in their world. I found in this study that children found ways to get along in their world, what worked and did not work for them. If I wanted to learn about their world, I needed to hear their story.

In addition to being aware of the effect adults have on research with children I needed to recognize the barriers presented by the children. Bogdan and Bicklin (1982), Breakwell (1995), and Powney and Watts (1987) warned that interviewing children may be problematic, offering several reasons for the warning. One reason included the tendency of children to please, which leads to an acquiescence response (Powney and Watts, 1987, p. 50). In addition, children are more inclined to answer "don't know", become easily distressed, or be overly literal in their interpretations of questions. However, despite these difficulties, Powney and Watts (1987) among others reported that very young preschool children make competent, reliable respondents, and provide accurate descriptions of events and situations (Aldridge & Wood, 1998; David, 1992; Graue & Walsh, 1998; Pope, 2002; Spencer and Flin, 1990; Tizard and Hughes, 1984; Wells, 1985), and that interviewing children is "the best tool for the job" (Eales, 1987, p. 113) using probes and prompts to overcome these barriers. Butler (1998) described the following positive experience with second graders:

When I first asked the question, "What can you tell me about your lives?", I never

expected such a profound set of answers from my second graders….precise in their

thinking, and open with their hearts….These stories reflected such a deep understanding of their lived experiences, an understanding that stemmed from multiple sources and different perspectives. (p. 94)

To be mindful of these suggestions and to try the design and procedures for the research, I conducted a pilot study to determine whether the participants' stories would provide appropriate data to develop an understanding of the experiences of students who have not succeeded in a French immersion program. Furthermore, I wanted to test my interview protocol and my interviewing skills. In the pilot study I directed my interview protocol towards two selected students, one of which was an eight year old boy in grade three, who had been in the English stream for two years after having been in the French immersion program for kindergarten and grade one. The other student was a 12 year old boy in grade six, in the English stream for four years after four years in a French immersion program. The richness of the students' experiences and their ability to report their experiences in the pilot study supported my plan to set a preliminary sample size at six for the full study. The responses from the pilot study also led me to believe my interviewing skills were effective.

Aldridge and Wood (1998) discussed the necessity of giving children various opportunities to provide information through free narrative. The free narrative phase is crucial because it provides a child the opportunity to tell of experiences in his/her own way in response to very open-ended questions. Typically in a free narrative phase the tone and the direction is set by the speaker. However, Aldridge and Wood deemed it essential that adults recognize the problems that exist in collecting data through the free narrative phase with children. When in conversation with adults, children typically respond to specific questions and are therefore unfamiliar with free narrative (Graue & Walsh, 1998). This lack of familiarity leads to some

limitations in their responses. However, failure to provide information does not imply that there is no story to be told. Rather it may indicate one or more of several possibilities that interfere with the telling of the story. Typical problems arising are discussed below and are consistent with areas identified as problematic by Breakwell (1995) and Powney and Watts (1987).

A child "with feelings of low self-worth that may undermine the confidence to speak up" (Aldridge & Wood, p. 76) may be reluctant to volunteer information about experiences that lead to a reduced self-esteem. As a result, free narrative accounts may be short and lack much detail despite young children's memory ability to provide informed accounts of past events. The need for this warning became apparent to me during one interview. Aaron mentioned, but avoided providing detailed information about, his frustration while in the French immersion program. During his free narrative, Aaron said:

> Mmmm, I passed, but there was this one time when I got frustriated, I can't remember why though. Ooooh, really, really, mad. I ripped my book in half. Yeah, I ripped it in half, then I ripped it into another piece. I ripped it into shreds. And then I got into lots of trouble with my teacher. I don't have anything to think about that. My teacher. I know how to say Mrs. in French. In French—Madame. Her name was Madame.

Including an account of the event to speak of his frustration indicated that he remembered the incident. However, he soon was talking about something else. Later, when the opportunity came up I asked him to tell me more about the incident. He readily provided a much more detailed account of the incident. Although in the end, Aaron did talk (becoming increasingly agitated as he spoke) about his frustration and how it escalated, his perception that the incident occurred

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because he was "bad" may have contributed to the withholding of the information in the initial free narrative.

Additionally, Aldridge and Wood (1998) cautioned that the limited language skills of young children often affect the type and quality of information provided. They noted that these language skill deficiencies are most pronounced in children aged less than seven years. As a child ages, the production of and the quality of information increases significantly, but even older children may lack the required language skills to express themselves effectively. (Aaron's comments support this statement "*I remember what Mme._____ looked like and my friend looked like. I don't know how…to…explain any of the people I remember how they looked like*". On the other hand, Aaron was later able to provide evaluative comments about his experiences that provided more detailed information and strengthened the account of the event.

Notwithstanding the problems associated with the free narrative of children, Aldridge and Wood (1998) stressed the importance of this phase and offered suggestions that served to counteract these problematic tendencies. It was evident that to acquire rich descriptions I could not rely solely on a child volunteering information in response to an open-ended grand tour question. I found it necessary to use further questioning to elicit details and evaluative information from the students.

As a result, the original "grand tour" question intended to elicit thick description served only as a starting point and necessitated that I assume a more active role in the process. As well as being an active listener, I became more involved in prompting for elaboration or clarification than I had anticipated. Furthermore, the interviews with the young eight-year old student indicated that maintaining the structure of the three-interview process was difficult as mentioned next in the study overview. It appeared that events still fairly recent in his young life seemed to

run together.  For example Aaron, in talking about his French immersion school, would suddenly relate an event that had recently happened in his present school:

Well, I played outside on recesses -  went on the monkey bars most of the time…and then I wasn't as tough as I am now. I'm just really strong now. Pain doesn't make me cry anymore. I remember one day here when Amy tripped me and I thought she was my friend. I can't believe I fell for that I didn't even know and I fell for it—the trick she played on me.

This is consistent with Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) notion of moving "backward and forward" (p. 50) to consider the past, present, and future of an experience or event.

My attempts to maintain the structure of the interviews in the pilot study, as advised by Seidman (1998), were ineffective. In Aaron's responses, happenings from previous years became intermingled with what was happening in his life at that time.  It appeared that he had not yet separated early childhood events and his French immersion school experience from his present situation. I therefore adapted Seidman's three interview model when I conducted my interviews for the larger study. This adaptation will be explained in further detail later in this chapter. His model served as a guideline for me in starting the conversation to situate the context for each interview. However, because the students' recollections appeared to inexorably contain both the past and present, perhaps because in their short lives there are relatively short periods of time between events, I made minimal effort to keep the children focused on a specific or particular context of the interview.

Lincoln and Guba (1985), who cautioned about the unpredictable nature of the interview process, supported an emergent design:

Because meaning is determined by context to such a great extent; because the

existence of multiple realities constrains the development of a design based on only one (the investigator's) construction; because what will be learned at a site is always dependent on the *interaction* between investigator and context, and the interaction is also not fully predictable; and because the nature of mutual shapings cannot be known until they are witnessed. (p. 208).

Because the success of the narrative depended on hearing the story, it was important that I kept the interview process unstructured. The interviews were semi-structured and interactive because I wanted to give each participant the opportunity to tell his or her story. I asked guiding questions to start the conversation of each in-depth interview. The questions were open-ended and conversational. Seidman (1998) recommended an open-ended question that allows the participant to take any direction he or she wants. The intent is to help the conversation along. When the grand tour question did not generate the anticipated rich description required for the narrative, I engaged in the conversation, asking further questions for clarification and elaboration about what the child brought to the discussion. It was important that I avoided directing the conversation by interrupting or suppressing the story by imposing expectations through the tone or wording of my questions.

Having recognized in my pilot study the particularly unpredictable nature of the interview process with children, I became more involved in the interview process in the larger study by using significantly more open-ended questions and probes and prompts. However, these questions and probes for specificity arose out of the emerging conversation with the participants. For example when Aaron told me that he had to go to the principal's office because "*it's just because I was badder and I ripped my book. I was actually pretty bad back then*" I asked "*Can*

*you tell me more about that so I can understand what happened?"* The interviews became like

conversations between the students and me.

Summary

The purpose of this research was to gain an understanding of the experiences of six

students in French immersion programs who, for various reasons, left the program at some time

in their elementary years. In the previous chapters I demonstrated that despite the general success

of most students in the FI program, significant numbers of students do not enjoy the same

positive achievement and eventually leave the program. Very little work presents this

phenomenon from the point of view of those who are most directly affected by it—the students.

The aim of this study was not to uncover other reasons from those previously cited for leaving

the French immersion program in the elementary years. Researchers (Adiv, 1979; Halsall, 1989,

1991; Hayden, 1988; Lewis, 1986; Obadia & Thériault, 1997; Parkin, Morrison, & Watkin,

1987) have indicated that French immersion dropout students were frustrated, anxious, and

unhappy in the French immersion situation and that these reasons played a part in their eventual

withdrawal from the program. My intent in conducting this study was to gain some

understanding of the meaning six French immersion students, who left the program, made of

their experiences while in a French immersion situation and of their subsequent transition into an

English only program. I then wrote an evocative text that resonated in the life of the reader. Van

Manen (1990) suggested that the essence of lived experience as text is "at once a reflexive re-

living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is

powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience" (p. 36).

My study was a qualitative study incorporating some aspects of narrative inquiry to tell

the lived stories of six students. Stories have always been part of the human experience. Many

researchers emphasize the function of narrative in the way people make meaning of events and how these events relate to their existence. Barthes (1966) made this statement about the fundamental role that narrative plays in people's lives: "the narratives of the world are without number…present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor have been a people without narrative" (p. 251). Through stories, we preserve our history and our culture. Families pass on customs and memories. We use stories to teach and to entertain. We use stories to tell of ourselves. Children grow up with stories. They have an understanding of story structure. Rosen (1987) spoke of how children understand the complex messages contained in stories. Mallan (1992) wrote that in turn stories provide children "with a range of options to consider when it comes to understanding their own motives and actions, as well as those of friends, parents, and significant others in their lives" (p. 12). Jerome Bruner (1987) wrote in *Making Sense: The child's construction of the world*:

> Insofar as we account for our own actions and for the human events that occur
> around us principally in terms of narrative, story, drama, it is conceivable that our
> sensitivity to narrative provides the major link between our sense of self and our
> sense of others in the social world around us. (p. 94)

Children use stories to make sense of the world.

Additionally, MacIntyre (1984), Mallan (1992), Pinnegar and Daynes (2007), and Rosen (1987) have suggested that all human actions are enacted narratives and that it is because we express these events as narratives and derive meaning from the narratives in our own lives that narrative is appropriate for understanding others. Bruner (1987) wrote "our sensitivity to narrative provides the major link between our sense of self and our sense of others in the social world around us" (p. 94). In my view, narrative provided an appropriate vehicle to try to

understand how children who had left the French immersion program made sense of their experience. The story provided the students with opportunities to make sense of the connections between themselves and the world they lived in. It also provided the link to a deeper, richer understanding of the lives of French immersion drop out students.

To uncover the students' stories, I engaged them in three interviews that encouraged them to talk freely about their experiences. The length of the interviews ranged from sixty minutes to seventy-five minutes. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. I had proposed using a three-interview model to provide the context necessary to explore the meaning of the students' experiences prior to, during, and subsequent to their enrolment in a French immersion program. Seidman (1998), Mishler (1986), and Paget (1983a) recommended a three-interview model to reveal the interconnectedness of past experiences with the present. Furthermore, I anticipated that reconstructing past events would establish a context for understanding the present. Seidman (1998) suggested that this interview protocol permitted participants "to clarify the events that led participants to where they are now and describing the concrete details of their present experience establishes conditions for reflecting upon what they are now doing in their lives" (p. 12).

In using Seidman's (1998) model, the first of three student interviews would attempt to set the context of the conversation on a life history to reconstruct early childhood experiences with family, in school, with friends, and in the neighborhood. In the second interview I would elicit details of these experiences, and I would use the third interview to invite reflection—an addressing of the intellectual and emotional connections between the participant's school life and out-of-school life. I would ask the student participants to recall events from their former French

immersion experience to establish their perceptions of how these events have influenced their lives today.

However I found that adherence to Seidman's model became problematic when interviewing children. Because he designed his interview model for adults, I had to adjust it to use with children. My pilot study indicated that children have a general preponderance to move smoothly in and out of the past as though the past and the present were a blend of the here and now reality. Because narrative depends on hearing the story of the participants, some flexibility to the focus of the younger students' interviews was necessary. Therefore, each interview started as conversation with no guided focus beyond the initial opening statement that I made. I did not guide the children's conversations but rather let them speak freely and without interruption or redirection. As the interview progressed, I made note of interesting points in the participants' response. I returned to those phrases at a later time for expansion, framing the phrase into a question. For example, during the first interview, one participant made several references to feeling "caged up". I later took the opportunity to ask him about what that meant at which time he provided greater detail. Seidman's suggestions about interviewing offered me a tentative structure for gathering the information in a manner that was sensitive to and respected the participants' stories.

## Participants

I used purposive sampling to select six participants from a list of names provided by French immersion classroom teachers. To maximize access to the phenomena being studied, I chose "*extreme or deviant cases*" as suggested by Patton (2002), selecting cases where the phenomena were most evident. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) offered that this approach focuses on cases that are rich in information because they are unusual or special in some way, further stating

that unusual or special cases may be particularly troublesome or especially enlightening and therefore are information rich. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) wrote, "In naturalistic investigations, which are tied so intimately to contextual factors, the purpose of sampling will most often be to include as much information as possible, in all of its various ramifications and construction" (p. 201). Because my study relied on the information of only six participants it was vital that the selected participants be able to articulate their story in a manner that evoked rich descriptions.

My participants were chosen specifically because their teachers had identified them as having exhibited symptoms of emotional distress, anxiety, and discomfort as well as learning difficulties in the French immersion program. It was my hope that the meaning the students made of their French immersion experience would help provide an understanding of the emotional aspects that may have contributed to their eventual withdrawal from the French immersion program. Gardner (1985) and Mannavarayan (2002) discussed how the affective dimension plays a part in the educational experience. However, these authors had not dealt specifically with students as young as the students involved in this study. My experience as a teacher of younger children led me to speculate that emotional aspects play as significant a role in younger students' educational experience as they do in the educational experience of older students. Therefore, studying younger children's life experiences in a French immersion situation was a legitimate means of gaining understanding into their life-world.

At the time of the interviews, the children in this study ranged in age from eight to fifteen years of age. Each participant was quite intrigued with the idea of choosing a pseudonym. However, their pseudonyms changed regularly, sometimes two and three times during an interviewing session.

Aaron was in a French immersion program for kindergarten and grade one. He was a very articulate young boy who thought deeply and spoke passionately, almost breathlessly about the things that interested him. He expressed great interest in being able to tell his story. He was in grade three and eight years old at the time of the interviews.

Scott was a sensitive boy who was legally blind. Like any typical pre-teen, Scott placed great value on having things in common with his friends. He loved music and movies and hanging out with his friends. However, he described himself as a home boy who loved to spend time at home and with his family. He was enrolled in a French immersion program from kindergarten through to the latter part of the third grade. He had attended French preschool for two years prior to beginning the French immersion program. He was in grade six and twelve years old at the time of the interviews

Ashley was a precocious girl who wanted to make sure that I had enough information to tell her story. As an only child, her parents and grandparents provided her with a strong support system that helped reaffirm her strengths when she experienced difficulty in school. Although she still struggled with school she felt she was gaining and "almost there". Ashley enrolled in a French immersion program in kindergarten and withdrew from that program after grade two. She had just completed grade five and was ten years old at the time of the interviews.

Jesse and David were charming identical twins. Their genuine love for each other was evident in the playful nature of their interactions during the interviews. I interviewed the boys together because that was their request. The conversation with them moved back and forth between them, with one brother often finishing a thought for the other. It was as though there were two people speaking the same thoughts. Although the similarities between the two boys were overwhelming, some differences in their responses about school emerged in the interviews.

They began kindergarten in a French immersion program and remained in the program until the end of third grade. The boys were in grade ten and fifteen years old at the time of their interviews.

Dylan was the student most recently withdrawing from a French immersion program part way through grade four. His recollections of his experiences were the most recent. He cautiously spoke about himself and his experiences in the French program, gradually gaining the confidence to talk about very emotional experiences at school. He still struggled with his self image and worked hard to forget about his French immersion experience. Dylan was in grade five and eleven years old at the time of the interviews.

The charm and the sincerity of each of the participants made me develop a special fondness for each one of them. Their willingness to share their stories – often difficult stories that made them vulnerable, was evident. Each one was eager to share his or her experience in a French immersion program with me.

Issues of Ethics and Confidentiality

Because all but one of the participants were known to me from a former school relationship in a school where I was a teacher or an administrator, initial contact was made by an outsider, unknown to the families and not involved in the study in any way. This contact allowed the parents to decline the invitation without feeling any pressure from a previous school relationship. The contact person was a colleague who was  familiar with my area of interest but who worked in adult education. Several families, although interested in the study, did not want their children to take part stating that the French immersion experience was all behind them now. Because their child's experience in the French immersion program had not been positive, they preferred to leave it in the past. Once initial contact had been made and verbal consent had been

given to take part I called the families and set a time to meet at their convenience. I met with the parents of the students to explain the study prior to meeting with the children.

All the participants came from white, two-parent families. Five out of twelve of these parents have university education and are practicing professionals, while the other parents' occupations ranged from that of civil servant, small business owner, farmer, to stay-at-home parent. Family incomes ranged from below the poverty line to middle class levels. All the participants attended public schools.

Four of the participants, Dylan, Scott, Aaron, and Ashley, were students whose French immersion experience was relatively recent, anywhere from one to four years previous. Jesse and David, the two other participants, were fifteen years of age. The time that had elapsed since their French immersion experience, seven years, was significantly longer than the younger participants. I knew all but one of the participants from a former school relationship in an elementary school where I was either a teacher or an administrator prior to or subsequent to their withdrawal from the French immersion program. As such, I had knowledge of their academic performance and of their behavioral patterns at school. This prior relationship provided a foundation for developing the trusting relationship that was essential to facilitate the inquiry process. Children generally will provide more richly detailed information when interviewed by someone they already know and trust (MacNaughton, Rolfe, & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) wrote that if given the opportunity, in a familiar setting rich in memories and experiences, with people they know, child respondents become the authority, secure in expressing vivid descriptions of their experiences (p. 42). Additionally, Brooker (2001) stated:

On the whole, researchers agree that the limitations to young children's

competence as respondents are generally the limitations of those who interview them. Well-known studies of young children's language (Tizard and Hughes, 1984; Wells, 1985); confirm the commonsense observation of anyone working with the very young, that children's utterances are better in every way (longer, clearer, more complex, more thoughtful) when the children are in a familiar environment, with familiar adults. (pp. 164-165)

Although the students provided the data for the narrative text, I invited two parents of participating students to participate in the study. Because this study focused on the experiences of the children only two parents were interviewed. I felt that I could gather sufficient information to indicate both significant and subtle changes in their children's behaviour from two parents. Parents are generally the first to notice small changes in their children. They notice subtle changes of mood in their child's interactions with them and other family members. My personal experience has revealed that upon being informed by the teacher of particular concerns at school, a parent will very often acknowledge similar concerns at home. Mannavarayan (2002) noted parents can provide valuable information about the emotional and behavioral changes experienced by a child that may be related to the French immersion experience and their assessments should not be discounted (p. 52).

The parents gave consent for their child's participation, and assent was acquired from the students prior to the commencement of the study. All requirements for ethics procedures, as required by the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Sciences Research, were met.

Data Collection

My aim in conducting this study was to uncover the meaning that the participants have of their French immersion school experiences. Through the narrative inquiry process I created a communicative process whereby both the participants and I became co-authors, drawing on the personal experiences of the participants to create a narrative text for interpretation by the readers (Bailey, 1996; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Polkinghorne, 1988; Van Manen, 1990). From the transcribed interviews I coded any comments that the students had made that could be grouped together. For example, the comments that Aaron made about his little sister were pulled from throughout the transcripts and grouped together in order to enable me to write a more complete and accurate description of Aaron's relationship with her. I followed this process throughout all of the transcripts and made conscious decisions about what to combine for the written texts.

When interviews are conceptualized as joint interactions between a participant and an inquirer, the reconstructed text of the field experience becomes embedded with explicit and implicit information. Its interpretation is shaped by the conscious and unconscious interests of the researcher/participant relationship and by the particular circumstances of the interview. What is told in the story and the meaning that is attributed to it is a result of the participant/researcher interaction. Mishler (1986) wrote, "If we wish to hear respondents' stories, then we must invite them into our work as collaborators, sharing control with them, so that together we try to understand what their stories are about" (p. 249). This statement can also apply to collaboration with the very young as Spencer and Flin (1990) stated:

Although there is evidence that very small children's emotional frame of

reference is egocentric and that their interpretation of cause and effect is

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primarily self-centered, this may not constitute the main problem: the real danger

of egocentrism may be the egocentricity of the adult who is unable to appreciate

fully the child's perspective in an interview. (p. 252)

I audio taped all the interviews and made full written transcripts from the audio taped

sessions, retaining the participants' language. Additionally, I kept two journals for field texts,

one of which included detailed observation notes after each interview, working within the three-

dimensional narrative inquiry space. Here I noted the when, where, and how—the

interconnectedness of the past with the present—of the conversation. As well, I recorded the

reactions of the participants including the non-verbal and paralinguistic features of the

conversation. These post interview field notes, recalling the specifics of the paralingual aspects

of the interviews, and my reflections on the process served to enhance the transcribed material.

Denzin (1997) wrote:

The unsaid, the assumed, and the silences in any discourse provide the flesh and

bone—the backdrop against which meaning is established. Intonation is the

bridge between the speaker, the word, and the listener. The way a word or

utterance is inflected and given bodily and facial expression (surprise,

incomprehension, doubting, affirmation, refutation, or admiration) is critical.

Intonation creates the double voicedness of talk. It mediates and connects a

speaker's meaning with the text of their talk. (p. 38)

Seidman (1998) and Mishler (1986) advised close attention be paid to paralinguistic

features that appear routinely in naturally occurring talk. Although these features are often

omitted from standard written texts, they make significant contributions when the analysis of the

transcript occurs some time after the interviews are conducted. Multiple listening to the tapes and

readings of the transcribed texts supplemented with field notes that considered tone, pitch, pauses, and speaker intonation helped to identify the meaning in the stories. There is much information to be derived from these aspects of the conversations. "A laugh can be a cry of pain, and a silence can be a shout" (Terkel in Seidman, 1998, p. 75). An example taken from my journal after one of the interviews read:

> Aaron had not really shown any change in behaviour prior to these comments. He became quite agitated at this point, stumbling with his words, fidgeting, turning around in his chair, avoiding making eye contact, playing with things on the table and finally repeatedly drumming his fingers on the table. He continued in this fashion, still very agitated until all at once he matter of factly cut the conversation short and regained control of the situation by saying, in a very matter of fact way "I don't remember!

The second journal recorded the details of my thoughts and reflections on the process and formulated questions for future interviews that arose from the previous session. For example these notes were written after a first interview:

> It is interesting that I find myself frustrated after interviews with Aaron. I was expecting more information. I guess I was expecting things to be handed to me on a plate. He did not do that…explicitly. However, when I look more closely, when I stop and think about it, I see he did. I feel badly that I feel I may have left him with the impression that I was not satisfied. I wonder if I did. He wanted to do this. He tried so hard—yet I feel I may have let him down. This is his story. That was what I wanted to hear. I wasn't listening. I was listening for what I wanted to hear. I didn't hear his story.

These notes added to the rich description to the multiple voices (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) of the participants' experiences. Multiple voices result from the three-dimensional inquiry that addresses temporality by looking at the event, its past, and its future. It focuses on personal and social interaction considering internal and existential conditions, and it occurs in specific places or sequences of places. Narrative based on experience is situated in time, context, and person. Three-dimensional inquiry recognizes that we build stories about our lives drawing from our present experiences, weaving in memories and other significant information based on our reflections and constructions of the world. Research within this three-dimensional inquiry space acknowledges the changing nature of the inquiry and the impact of the researcher/participant relationship on the narrative. The field texts that I wrote in conjunction with the interviews attempted to fill in these spaces and identify aspects of the interaction that "fill in the richness, nuance, and complexity of the landscape" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 83).

In addition to considering the question of the meaning and social significance that helped shape the text, repeated readings of the individual stories reflected on "character, place, scene, plot, tension, end point, narrator context, and tone" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 131). Although each participant's story was viewed as unique the common thread connecting the stories was their withdrawal from the French immersion program. Further analysis identified common patterns, themes, threads, and tensions existing across the texts.

The stories the participants told about their experiences in a French immersion situation were their interpretations. These stories represented the students' interpretations of what that experience was like. The significance of the story lies in the importance that each participant attributed to it by choosing to retell it, to relive it (Freeman, 2007, p. 132). The interview process is about getting more than facts; it allows for "a pattern of fabrication" (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p.

120) that assists the search for meaning. Merriam (2002) elaborated "we use childhood memories with the understanding that what is at stake is not the truthfulness of a childhood memory but the meaning the memory has" (p. 306).

However, my responsibility to provide evidence of the trustworthiness of the findings was not removed. Kincheloe (1991) suggested that "credibility of portrayals of constructed realities and anticipatory accommodation" (pp. 136-137) might be used to assess the trustworthiness of research. In using these criteria I sought to ensure that the way the students reshaped or reconstructed their realities, dependent on the unique aspects and the multiple perspectives of the variant contexts, remained plausible. Kvale (1996) referred to the interviewer as:

> a traveler on a journey that leads to a tale to be told upon returning home. The interviewer-traveler wanders through the landscape and explores the many domains of the country, as unknown territory or maps, roaming freely around the country. (p. 4)

It is through interpretation that the meanings unfold to create the narrative. Barone and Eisner (1997) and Van Manen (1992) maintained that the significance of anecdotal narrative is situated in its evocative text and its power to recruit our willing attention, to lead us to reflect, to involve us personally, and to transform us by moving us by the story. The aim in writing narrative text is to capture the tentativeness of the conversation and the emotion of the shared stories of our participants in a manner that will speak to the readers. The narrative must also represent the back and forth shifts in time and place situated in the inquiry.

I ventured into this research as a teacher in search of answers to satisfy questions that arose from the inability of some of my students to progress in the French immersion program.

Much of my knowledge of the students' experiences was based on observations and encounters in the classroom, in the school, from the literature, and from personal reflections on my own teaching experience. These were the "teacher stories" that I had formulated and accumulated over the years from my perceptions of these students in a French immersion program. My role changed from teacher to researcher as I delved into the literature and became informed about what other academics had contributed to the field. My involvement with the students in collecting their stories transformed me from a teacher and researcher to an active participant intent on telling this story. To hear the "student stories" I needed to distance myself from my story, allowing my story to grow and change, incorporating their stories with mine. The craft then became for me to qualitatively reconstruct the story I had been told and to consider the multiplicity of the landscape—the time, place, the personal, and the social dimensions of the story. What was their story became my story—our story, and through the retelling will become the readers' story. We can consider this subjective awareness as a bridge used in overcoming distance between understandings. As Aoki (1992) wrote about interpreting bridges:

> Educators may be tempted to understand it [interpreting bridges] in terms merely
> of the lands, the people who dwell in these lands, and the ways in which people
> have technically overcome distances between them. They will do well to
> remember that any true bridge is more than a merely physical bridge…it is a
> dwelling place for humans who, in their longing to be together, belong together.
> (p. 28)

This story is a new story, not theirs, not mine, but ours.

CHAPTER FOUR: STORIES LIVED and STORIES TOLD

Introduction

The narratives collected through the interviews provide the basis for the stories that follow. The subtle difference between narratives and stories exists in the reconstruction of the story from the spoken description of events collected in the interviews. The stories use the children's own words and retain the unique language that the children brought to the interviews. To arive at the stories that I have written , data reduction was essential because the transcripted interviews were lengthy. Similar content areas were grouped together to give the reader a more complete picture of the whole experience and to provide coherence to the narrative. I omitted many superfluous words such as and, um, but, for ease of reading except where I felt it contributed to the story. Some sections dealing with family, friends, and other memories from the past, not directly related to the French immersion experience, were retained because they provide a richer understanding of who these children are. These sections also represent the back and forth shifts in time and place in keeping with Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) belief that experience is not static, but rather, has a fluidity and is shaped by events from the past, the present, and the future (p. 3). Here are the re-constructed stories.

AARON'S STORY

*"It's a whole different language…"*

On a cold, blustery day in November, I visit Aaron at his home. I have directions to drive "straight down the road, until you see a sign saying 'Kangaroo Crossing', that's my house, you can't miss it". Under normal circumstances the ten kilometer drive off the major highway would have been pleasant but today as I travel along the narrow country road, driving, swirling snow impeding my vision, I am afraid of missing the designated marker. I am concerned with the

remoteness of the area, field after field of barren snow, with no other traffic on the road. Then suddenly I see it, the sign with a kangaroo hopping on it at the end of a narrow, tree-lined lane. A small, unpainted house sits on the right hand side of the lane. Next to it sits a low, grey, weathered building seemingly used as a garage. Across the yard from the house stands a partially completed building. The trees growing in its midst attest to construction started many years ago. There is no sign of activity in the yard.

I am eagerly greeted at the door by Aaron, "We've been waiting for you, my mom and me. Come on in". He has a freshly scrubbed look about him. His rosy cheeks, his hair slicked straight down on his forehead tell me he has prepared for our visit. Aaron leads me through a closed-in porch into the kitchen. I notice, among other things, an old Coca Cola cooler in the corner. Aaron volunteers "We don't actually have Coke in it, my dad just likes the look of it". As we pass through he reaches out and pets the cat curled up comfortably on a chair.

We pass into a clean, warm, and cozy kitchen with walls brightly lined with painted yellow cupboards. In the middle of the room sits a table draped with a clean tablecloth. Aaron offers me a chair and mom offers me a cup of coffee. After informing me that Aaron's little sister is away for the day so we won't be interrupted and making sure that I am comfortable, that my tape recorder is plugged in, mom excuses herself to the living room to watch television. With the muted sounds of the TV in the background we get started.

*My name is Aaron, I'm eight and I'm in grade three. I really like to do stuff. I'm building a car. Well you know the car I'm building I do it by myself and well I like to build that car. My mom said it would take me a few days. I believe that. When it's done my little sister gets the first ride because she's smaller and she's really looking forward to riding that car. I'm going to see if*

*it will steer and stuff. I'll test it first but only not too long and she can go if it works. If it doesn't I'll take it apart and fix it.*

*I like building snow forts. Me and my sister, she built a snow man all by herself, same with my mom and me. I built it as big as my mom's and they were huge. Mine was taller than me. My mom's was as tall as her. It was hard to lift it up so I just reached as high as I can and put that snowball on. We put sticks on for arms and we used coal for eyes and nose and the mouth we used mud. But then they eventually in the spring were like lumps. They started breaking and then finally we built a little snow fort out of them and then that melted.*

*My mom's name is June. She broke up with my real dad. His name is Robert but my two cousins call him uncle Cookie. I think that's kind of funny cause I call him my dad. I like my dad a lot. My mom has eyes on the back of her head. She knows what I'm doing even if she's not looking at me.*

*Well, my little sister. She is a little annoying sometimes and she always sings out words but sometimes she speaks normal. She is almost five and she is going to go into kindergarten this year with me. I feel pretty ……happy about that. She already knows the kindergarten stuff. She's very smart, just like me. Yeah my mom says she's going to catch up really fast cause she has - I can't remember but sight…I don't remember what it's called but she is a fast learner and she wishes she was me. I say "No you wouldn't wish to be me cause you don't know what kinds of pains I've been through"[1]. I broke my head open because I fell off a grain auger, off the wheel. I was spinning around and around and then I lost my balance and fell off but I don't cry or scream or yell when I get hurt like that.*

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[1] This is the first mention that Aaron makes of having suffered. He mentions an instance where he suffered a physical injury and alludes to the great suffering he has experienced. He does not elaborate further but intimates that he does not want his little sister to live through what he has.

*My step-dad is Thomas. He works a lot and he pays me for working and helping. I've got twenty-seven dollars in my bank account and I have a dollar in my piggy bank and I think when I ...all together I have twenty eight dollars. I've got five steers. A young bull came and visited them and its white. It's from next door. It's our neighbor's. He's still down on their farm. Pretty soon my steers are going to go and there is going to be $6000. Me and my sister get half of that. We are both going to end up with $3000. Then I'm going to get some pigs, well, my mom and my step-dad are going to buy them for me and no one else gets the money but me.*

*I don't have any pets any more because Stripes ran away, that cat out there on the steps is wild. She's in heat I think. Stripes ran away but now she had a kitten. Her name is Squeakers and she's pretty tame. She's like our cat. She's in the house at my mama and papas. She's training herself to be a house cat.*

*Mama and papa - well they are very nice people and they both like to work a lot even though they are old. Mama goes and feeds Andy. Andy is a calf. He's getting pretty big and he comes to humans, he's not scared of them like most other calves. That's because he had a twin and the mother didn't really think that he was her calf so we feed him. He's a pretty nice calf. He really comes, when he sees a bottle he just comes running right to it. Before he just didn't move very much and you had to go up to him to give him the bottle but now that he's eaten so much he runs around. He takes a daily walk out and goes out on the road. We once saw him on the road. I put him back.*

*Papa's a ......pretty good fella he works a lot and he's usually out in the tractor doing fields. When he's in the loader he's pretty good. Want to know something else about my sister? Well she works a lot. She knows how to drive all the tractors and she's not even five. I know how*

*too but I don't really do it cause I usually do the harder work hauling things. I can haul a two by ten but not too long because it pulls me straight down flat on the ground.*

*When I went to French immersion it was very exciting. I felt like ooh, I wonder what kind of stuff I might learn. I thought I might have a really great time cause Melissa was there. My cousin Melissa was in the grade one with me until half of the year. She moved into the English room right beside us. Melissa and James are my best cousins. And then I learned to count to ten. Can I tell you how to count to ten in French? Un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, six, sept, huit, neuf, dix. In ten days we learned about all of the numbers. Yeah, ten of the numbers in ten days. One every day.*

*Mmm, the best thing about French immersion was I passed, but there was this one time when I got frustriated,, I can't remember why though. Oooh, I got really, really mad. I ripped my book in half. I don't have anything to think of about why². Yeah I ripped it in half, then I ripped it into another piece. I ripped it into shreds. And then I got into lots of trouble with my teacher.*

*I know how to say Mrs. In French – Madame. Her name was Madame. And we mostly had to speak French. I know, well, beauticycle would be motorbike. Bucycle would be bicycle or buke would be bike. I had to learn how in French. I didn't speak barely even very much English unless I was outside.*

*Her name was Mme. And ahhh … well … ummm sometimes I thought she was really mean but I don't think so. Like, like, well it's more of my behaviour. I used to think she was mean cause I thought one time she said "Do that right!" I didn't know that I did something wrong. I thought: "What! There's nothing wrong with it". I thought I was writing. I know, it was I was*

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² The inability to remember when questioned for clarification or detail became a common strategy for Aaron, particularly when he was recounting negative or highly emotional memories. However, he usually returned to the subject of his own accord later in the interview and provided in depth details. I believe this was his way of regaining some degree of control over his emotions.

*supposed to be writing b's but I was doing d's. That's what I was doing...I guess. Well... I guess.... I was pretty bad then. Like I didn't do things right sometimes... like that and then I ripped my book up and that's what I think I was bad for. And then I didn't even know about God. Until now, I didn't have, know anything about the church then. (whispers) There was only a temple that sometimes I'd go to when I was on my, on my summer...summer break. I have lots of fun with my dad and them. I really miss them, I bet Melissa and James also they miss me. I did things wrong on that one where she said do it right. That's all I thought I just think I was bad for doing that stuff wrong and then ripping my book.*

*Did you know since I got here this year I made up my own language? Well I don't really have a name for it yet. Ummm...it's weird...Why...do...you want to know about it? (hesitant). OK I just, I'll just say something. I'll say hi. HRRRRo. No, Hrro you have the RR (made a guttural sound) sound to it. Hrro, Hrro (insistent)[3]. Ahhh. I don't really feel like speaking any other words any more. I don't speak it to anyone I just like speaking it to myself. I'll show you what the printing looks like if you get me a...something to write on... It looks like scribbling. Ohhh...it says my name. My first name and my last name. That's what it says[4]. I got the idea for my language in my mind. I usually like to keep it to myself. I don't like anyone to know and when I don't want to know what people are saying I speak like it (incomprehensible and laughs). Yeah I would say...what are you saying? Tell me what you are saying. Tell me what it means. (quite emphatic here). I didn't even think of it in French immersion. Ummm well...I don't know what they were saying until I learned. Ahhhh well I don't want that language any more. No I just mess*

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[3] I tried duplicating the sound that he had made. Aaron quickly corrected me, again repeating the sound over and over again in an attempt to have me get it right. He finally became exasperated with me and changed the subject.

[4] Here, Aaron made scribbling motions on the paper writing his name in his secret language.

*it up. I don't like it any more it's stupid because I don't even know what it means.[5] (sighs, points to chocolate on table). Well, what is that chocolate doing up there? Yummm that looks good.*

*Well, I.....know ...how to say something like 'Aaron parler in Anglish'...that means Aaron spoke in English...I...I can't remember who said that to the teacher. They said that cause I was speaking in English (laughs)... I remember that. I can't remember what the teacher said. I can't remember, I mmmm said 'Non, I, I parler in Francais' I thought I said I, I, I, I, I, I, I, I thought it was, it was He didn't speak in English and I said, I said 'non' I thought I, I would say no I spoke, I didn't speak in French (still very agitated)[6]. I don't remember! (matter of factly). It doesn't bother me. Hmmmm I can't remember what the words say. I can't remember much of them, Ummm... do you know French. I can't remember what eleven and twelve are though. Onze, douze, troize, quatoze, quinze.....seize, quinze, seize.*

*It was about when I started here that I started to read. But I'm actually pretty good at reading. I read a novel and its called Vacation under Mount Venus. Mount Venus is a volcano and its one of the Magic Treehouse books. I read the whole novel already. It didn't take me very many days. They're easy to read, now I gotta do a book report on it but I haven't started it yet. Today I just finished it. I can't remember if I learned to read in French but I'm a good reader now. I can help other people even though they're in grade three they aren't as good as me at*

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**5** Although he never used the language around others he appeared to take comfort in the fact that others would be unable to understand his language. However, he became quite insistent and emphatic. I wonder if this was his attempt at gaining control of the language situation that he experienced in the French immersion classroom.

**6** Aaron appeared proud of his ability to remember some of what he had learned while in the French immersion program. Unfortunately the experience that was connected to the memory was very painful for him and he became visibly upset. Aaron had not shown any significant change in behavior prior to these comments. He became quite agitated at this point, stumbling more with his words, fidgeting, turning in his chair, playing with things on the table and finally drumming his fingers incessantly on the table. When I asked him if he got in trouble for not speaking French he quickly replied, very matter of factly that he did not remember. Still fidgeting and incomprehensible, drumming on the table there was an 18 second pause interspersed with ummmm's before he changed the subject.

*reading. I'm helpful when I help them with what they are trying to say but that's only some*

*people when I see they have a problem with reading.*

*My favourite thing about French was Melissa and learning French… that I learned to*

*speak a different language. Oui is for yes and naw is for no.*

*The worst thing about French was tearing my book up. I got into so much trouble I had to*

*go to the office. I can't remember. I remember what Mme looked like and Donald looked like. I*

*don't know how…to…explain any of the people I remember how they looked like. Well, in the*

*class of French immersion well, there's…there's…I, ummm…I'm …learned how to speak French*

*like…and, well….I know how to say hat – chapeau. I don't remember anything about ripping my*

*book. I had to work out there cause I did something bad before. In the hallway. I can't remember*

*though why. It would take me a long time to remember that cause I don't got too good of a*

*memory. That's when I ripped my book up. There was only one time when I did that though. I*

*went like this, then this, then this. It was really upsetting. Well, it's like this (grunting and ripping*

*noises and motions) when I ripped it up there were lots of pieces in my book all over (laughs*

*then sighs). And then I had to do it a-l-l o-v-e-r again. I don't remember if I felt better after*

*(sigh).*

*That's the only time it happened. I remember that at French, ummm, well I had to do this*

*paper that's where I learned how to say beauticycle, that's motorcycle. And I can't remember*

*the other things. And I had chapeau on it. Those were the only things that I can remember that*

*were on it.*

*I would write…my alphabet. It's not a different kind of marking. It's the same as ours.*

*There were lots of times when we would write things. We write lots of things in our books for*

*French immersion…about French immersion. We didn't read in grade one…we went to the*

*library and listened to stories but they were not French though. There is a speech class we sometimes went to. We learned more speech, like speech and stuff in English. Just a group of four went like you get to learn more. It was a comfortable place. Nice and small…we do things and stuff but, it just feels comfortable there. We went every day. My favorite thing about school was speech class. It was in English.*

*I don't have any friends any more. They all ….umm don't play with me. I'm usually by myself at school because they don't really like to play with me. So I just sit down, run around…I'm usually left alone. I'm fine with it. It just makes me feel like I'm caged up. Probably if I had more friends I'd fix it and that's why I'm not focusing maybe that's ok. It bothers me a little but I'm starting to get used to it.*

*I don't…I feel like I'm caged up. I don't feel, I don't feel like I'm free in this school. I don't have very much, I don't feel like I belong here very good. I got a few friends but not lots. I thought I would still have lots of friends until I found out I don't. I don't know why people who aren't my friends don't like me. It feels like there's nowhere to move and I feel like I'm in bars and they have to move with me.*

*If Melissa and James went here I'd probably not be like getting homework. I would have them also to play the full game of the adventures of Aaron, Melissa and James. I can't remember any friends but I remember one – Ryan. He was a good friend. Well I played outside on recesses - went on the monkey bars most of the time…and then I wasn't as tough as I am now. I'm just really strong now. Pain doesn't make me cry anymore. I used to cry easily. I don't remember why I cried and I was crying lots.*

*Well I feel free with my cousin Melissa. James makes me feel really free. Same with my dad…and my uncle Ben. He's like, he's a psychic but he doesn't really use his psychicness any*

*more. And he is also a good fighter; sometimes we play wrestle with him. He's always getting us on the ground. We try to get him but it's really hard to get him on the ground. We've never done that before.*

*I remember one person I didn't like in kindergarten. Gino. He was brown but he was stinky, very stinky. It wasn't that he was dirty he just farted lots. It didn't matter where, he'd fart. He just did I don't know if he thought it was funny but I still liked him a little bit but not too much because he was so stinky*

*Ummm having friends there that was the only good day I had was kindergarten and then French immersion, not too many friends but a little. I couldn't speak French very well. I couldn't understand the teacher. Not all the time, sometimes I forgot to listen. Umm then I said what does that mean? I don't remember if she told me but well (sigh) I remember one time I asked her how to say bridge in French and I don't remember how to say that. I wish I did. (I told him that a bridge is un pont). Un pont? Un pont. So a bridge is a pont? Cool.*

*I remember a really bad day in French immersion. Ahhh when one of my friends he was ummm he had blond hair but he was fighting the other kids. He taught me how to run fast by putting your hands straight out and bending a little bit then running and moving your arms as fast as you can. That will make you speed up pretty much a lot. That's how we like, got to the other side of playing Octopus at that school without even getting touched. We learned how to write words in French I still know some French things. I know how to say hello aure, no bonjour, aurevoir means bye.[7]*

*I thought Mme. was mean, but she wasn't because I was always bad. I was mostly bad. See I ripped my book because I didn't want to work and all that did was make me have to work a lot*

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[7] Throughout the interview Aaron moves in and out, back and forth often changing the direction and pace of the conversation dependent on whether the content relates positive or negative memories.

*more. When I was out there I ripped it once then I ripped it all into bits and pieces and I also broke my pencil. I had to go to the principal's office. Well we had a long talk but I can't remember what. It was just because I was badder and ripped my book. Well I was actually pretty bad back then. I was crazy, crazier than Melissa is now. We were about as crazy as each other though. I got all mad and ripped my book. I thought I had an evil teacher in that grade. Evil. Cause she said 'You did that wrong' cause it was supposed to be an s and I wrote it backwards. I said 'No, that is not' and I yelled at her. I was usually pretty bad and once I didn't work so I had to sit outside and work in a corner cause I was talking to my friend, that blond guy we were talking and she said 'Start working' and we didn't. She put us outside when it was recess time.*[8]

*Most of the time we had to talk in French. Well we only were supposed to talk what we knew. We didn't talk too much cause we didn't really know anything. I know what red is and what orange is – rouge and orange. That was just the problem that I didn't want to work. I didn't really think anything about school. I just thought my teacher was mean. That's all.*

*I don't remember other teachers or friends from then. Other than recess my favorite thing was ripping my book. Mmmm, I guess it was a good thing to me then and it created a pretty big problem.*

*Oh well, I remember that when I was ummm when my mom separated I waved goodbye then I was looking at the time we were going and then I woke up and then I was in Regina. That wasn't when I left the French immersion that was when I was going toward it and I didn't know the future was always going to be in French immersion. Once I got in I was pretty excited. Then I won't say it was always that… but I passed. But the only part that wasn't good was that I was a*

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[8] Aaron's narrative takes me into another dimension of his sense of responsibility for his failure in the French immersion program. He equated his difficulty with being bad and assumed full responsibility for his actions. I wonder if this belief has developed in the context of discussions with his family or has resulted from his own attempts to make sense of the experience.

*pretty bad kid. That's how I was then. NO, really I was different than I am now. I was a pretty mean kid, I fighted back then. Plus there's some bullies there I could beat them up. But I don't really like the fact that I usually fighted there a lot. That's why most of the people didn't want to fight me because I was pretty tough.*

*If my mom wanted to put my sister in French immersion I would say 'Don't do that. She might not like it'. But there is no French immersion program. Because it would be too hard. It was even way too hard for me, so hard I could hardly do stuff there. It's a whole different language but it's got some same words. It's way harder, harder to learn to read. I never learned to read very good cause I never learned very much words. Well, I did learn quite a lot of them but I don't remember it. French is like trying to break a rock with your fist and then English is like trying to pull a little piece of paper apart.*

ASHLEY'S STORY

*"I don't belong here"*

As I drive toward town for my interview with Ashley, I recollect a little girl in kindergarten. A little girl with pigtails sticking straight like brushes out the side of her head above her ears. With an impish grin beneath big twinkling blue eyes, she wanders into the library where I am the teacher- librarian. "C'mon, Madame, there's no one in here, you could read this book to me". Her charming manner more often than not saw me take leave from whatever the task at hand was to either read her a story or just visit with her. I wonder what has become of her. Does she still exude the confidence that she once did? What has happened to her in the last six years?

I near her home, driving down suburban streets, well-tended lawns before each middle-class home. The sun is golden hot. Two neighbours are in casual conversation watching the children playing noisily in a yard. Life appears to be unfolding at a leisurely pace.

A petite eleven year old answers the door. The pigtails are gone, in their place is a stylish short haircut. I notice a slight touch of lip gloss on her lips. Unsure that she remembers me I introduce myself. She answers very formally that she knows who I am and that I haven't changed much. After informing her mother and father that I have arrived, she leads me through the kitchen into the living room. It is a very comfortable room. Two large sofas face each other. The lamps are lit and shed subdued lighting that provide a sense of calm in the room. At the end of the room the wall is almost completely covered with bookshelves with all manner of books crammed into it. Several large cushions are placed on the floor. Once the tape recorders are set up Ashley grabs a cushion and sprawls on the floor with it. She tentatively offers me one and asks me to join her.

*Hi. My name is Ashley and I'm eleven years old. There's three people in my family. Me, my mom and my dad. My dad is such a computer whiz he helps me with all, most of my homework along with my mom. My mom is the best chocolate chip cookie maker and is good at keeping secrets. I struggle in math[9]. I like biking and hide and go seek sometimes and grounders. Grounders is a game where you have your eyes closed and you turn and you have to find people only with grounders. One girl hurt her nose on the monkey bars.*

*I've had three pets, three hamsters named Chelsea, Princess and Angele. I had one until a couple of weeks ago. It drowned in the sewer. It fell in the sewer while we were at family camp and then we had it at somebody else's house. It drowned in the sewage pipe. I cried when I found out but they're going to buy me another hamster when I'm ready. In a couple of days.*

*I like to read, watch movies, eat popcorn and chips with my family. We read Christian books. We're on a book right now <u>William the Creep</u>. It's about this girl who's in school and this guy keeps bugging her. I'm on the first chapter. I read with my mom. I get a dollar for reading and I get points for just one chapter. I like reading but in the summer time I don't read as much so my mom pays me to do it. With math and spelling too. I read mostly every day. I've been doing spelling to help me get there but I'm just not there yet. And math too.[10]*

*I like to bike and eat ice cream with my friends. I've only tried some ice cream because I'm lactose intolerant but I do a special kind of ice cream called Raspberry Swirl. It just doesn't have lactose in it and it doesn't have something in it that my dad can't have. He's not lactose intolerant. He just can't have milk or soya milk. He's allergic to soya. Soya makes me a bit sick.*

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[9] Ashley describes her parents by sharing the positive qualities which she admires in both her mother and father. However, she begins her own self-description by matter-of-factly stating that she struggles with math. This brief reference to her academic struggles precedes all the other information she provides about herself.

[10] Ashley is quick to bring up the subject of her difficulty in school and makes easy and numerous references to it.

*It just makes my stomach feel a little (screws her face up)...dairy products make me (makes a growling noise).*

*When we play hide and go seek on our bikes, you bike ride and you stick with your bike. You have to be riding and they have to come and find you. You can't run, you can't bike after they found you. You have to stand there. My friends, we like to talk and make earrings like these. I have some earring making kit. I make these with my friend and she got me into that. I got myself the kit. I don't know how many I can make I just started. Here, you can have these.*

*When my friends aren't around I like to play on the computer and watch TV. I watch anything that's good – that my parents approve of. I used to make pot holders, I bought this kit, but it broke, kind of one thing broke. I have these little bands about that big and I stretch them. It's kind of like weaving.*

*In kindergarten, Madame had this game, a matching game and it was very fun. The second day was kind of chaos but the third day was pretty good. All the kids didn't know the rules so they were running around and doing stuff they shouldn't, like running around, jumping on other kids, some kids bugged some crayons, my crayons to be precise. I thought (makes a strangling noise ) "My crayons! my valuable crayons!".  I don't want to think about it. Well, we were just running around having fun. I joined in after and I played with the toys. The teacher raised up her hand and said everybody to their seats in English. I always liked school but I like, thought, maybe I should go to a different classroom.  The rules were in English or in French. We just started speaking French so she told them to us in English. We started speaking French. I could understand it a bit so if you didn't understand it, raise your hand and ask in English. That wasn't a problem. Not all the kids did. No, not all the kids because some of the kids just snapped on.*

*Ever since preschool I loved it! Exploring firemen, like we got to go to the fire station and they showed us a movie. It was neat. In grade one, in grade one, well…it wasn't the same. Nope. We were, thinking we are so big we don't need rules. There were the same rules mostly. We were expected to speak French. Well, when she was talking about words, I'm like...help! I did that often. The other kids, some did and some didn't understand. Well other kids didn't really understand so…… so it wasn't a big problem[11].*

*The French immersion program was a bit hard in reading cause I really didn't, really understand it. I learned to read in grade one in French, but I was having so much problems. I…was stuck at a lower reading level in French so. I knew that yes. The kids were at a higher grade so I'm like I don't really fit in here. It mad me feel weird. Well, just weird because I was trying really hard but it didn't really work out. My friends could read in French.*

*I had a friend named Elizabeth and Laurie. They were very fun and hilarious. Sometimes Elizabeth and Laurie pretended they were sisters at school. So it was kind of funny. The teacher didn't mind and sometimes we were quiet and she'd say ok. If we weren't we were in trouble. She'd just make us do all of our work, just a little bit more and she'd ask us some questions in French.*

*In grade two I had Mme. again and I couldn't do it. It was, I was just struggling so hard. I was slowing down. I didn't read as much and I was struggling in work, in everything, mostly everything. It was just weird. Ummm, I didn't really fit in. All the kids were understanding it, really and I wasn't. So I was just lost mainly. Mainly I just felt weird. Just plain weird. It was, it made me feel like I didn't belong and that I should just go[12]. I told my parents and they tested me*

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[11] Ashley compares herself to her peers and acknowledges an early awareness of her difficulty in the classroom. However, she volunteers that it is not a big problem.

[12] Ashley's uncertainty about the French program increases as she recognizes that she is struggling in everything at school. Once again in comparison to her classmates, she concludes that she does not fit in and should leave.

*and they found I had dyslexia, yes. So that was the main reason I left. I would have stuck to it but I needed to go to a different place and learn some English. I got a little bit of help in grade two from the teachers but it wasn't really helping. Like mmm we read a bit and we did some math in English. I got a bit for handwriting and that was it. Somebody outside the school did the testing.*

*My parents didn't decide to move me. They didn't decide. I did cause I didn't really want to go there cause I wanted to move to a different school. I don't know why I just wanted to get out of there. I felt different from the other kids mainly. Mme. would always be bugging me about my handwriting so I decided I would go to a different school. Handwriting is very important in the higher grades. The teachers need to be able to read it, I guess.*

*Ok, I don't know how good this is, my report card from kindergarten. I demonstrate responsibility, Term 1 – D, Term 2 – D, Term 3 – I. D is for developing and I is for independent. Displays self-confidence I, I and I. I'm still self-confident. That's one of the rules, you have to be self-confident to do Tai Kwan Do. So, takes care of personal belongings, D, D, I. Dresses independently, I, I, I. Accepts guidance, D, I, I. Demonstrates self control, D, D, I. Follows class routines, D, I, I. Follows, ok, asks, begins tasks independently I, I, I. First and last names, I, I, I. Telephone number, I still don't know my address. Shows respect to others, D, I, I. All of them are Ds except up to number five, cooperates with others and the rest are I. I did fairly well in English, I, I, I. Shows interest in stories and books, I, I, I. That's because my mom is partly a librarian. Demonstrates understanding of left and right. Left, right. And we mostly didn't cover most of these. Names the days of the week. Lundi, I have a friend named Lundi. I forgot the days except Lundi. Large muscles, small muscles (laughs) No, I'm not very athletic still. I'm not very good at running nowadays.----So that's my kindergarten and here is appreciation day. (shows a picture of a tree). We'll put it back in the kindergarten slot. I'll just keep it.*

*Here we are in grade one. Ok here's my report card. You can just read it if you want to while I talk about grade two[13]. Here's some of my writing, my journal and here's a picture. Grade one wasn't my favorite one. It was just I was still struggling a lot. Well I still have trouble.*

*They say music helps you. I took the piano lessons for a while and I wrote a song. I wrote a song. (Hums the melody) I forgot most of it cause it was a few years ago. These are my music books. This was for the first year. The first year is mainly pictures. Laurie was my teacher. First year. And those are all the practices. The end is full of stickers. I don't play exactly any more cause I was having some hard times with my fingers with the numbers. I'll show you how good I am. Ok do you want me to play (plays a bit) that's called Smoky Water. It wasn't for piano. This guy played it on guitar and I just learned it. I can't play my song. I forget it. This is grade two. It was harder work.  I played lots. I was a star. I did one recital, actually two. It was a little scary. I got a sticker every week. You keep time with these. Laurie kept time while I played. Sometimes we just did it for fun. Do you want to play. Just follow my lead. To play Smoke on the Water you need three keys, one, two, three. Duh duh duh, duh duh duh, duh, duh duh duh,duh duh. Yeah you got it. Smoke on the water. Hey do you want to try it? After, do you want to try it after?[14]*

*This was a diary I made at my new school. Yeah, we had ducks at school and we didn't always concentrate on the teacher ' Ah, look at the ducks'. We were more interested in the ducks than in the teacher. Go ahead read my diary.*

Dear diary, At last the ducklings are in our class. I love you little guys. They are two days old. One fell down and got up. Lucky, Rascal and Webster are all here. I like the peep sound.

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[13] After spending much time perusing her kindergarten progress report, Ashley is willing to skip over any information about her year in grade one indicating that grade one was not her favorite year.

[14] Piano seemed to have been a positive experience as in this segment she says things like "just follow my lead.." and "it got harder, but I was a star". Through this Ashley demonstrates a sign of efficacy and hope.

Hello duckling, I hope you guys had a fun swim. I hope you guys didn't get too water logged. Boy, you did. You're preening and you're oiling.

*They were swimming in a little swimming pool outside.*

Hello Lucky, Rascal and Webster. Here is your lunch box. Have a happy day today. I hope you have a nice teacher.

Today is the last day to have the ducks. Some of us ….It was hard to say goodbye. Bye Lucky, Rascal and Webster. I miss you already. I remember last time at my old school we had ducks. Good luck.

We just got back from Memorial Gardens. We released the ducks today. I had fun[15].

*My best friend, I don't really have a best friend. If you have a best friend your old friends will get jealous so I'll tell you about my friends. My friends! Emily she's snotty sometimes to everybody. She steals from me sometimes. She has an annoying little brother. And she is very rich. Her dad is an RCMP person. She has an RCMP dog at their house that goes crazy around people. But she's always nice to me. And then there's some other people that's not my friend. Some of the other girls think I'm a weirdo. I don't know why they just do. I just want to give them a knuckle sandwich sometimes. But I don't. Well I invited them to my birthday and they all made up stuff like I have to go shopping and stuff like that. Like, isn't a person more important than shopping? And then my party… 'I can't come cause I have a soccer tournament. It's the last one'. I feel weird. I just want to tell them if you just don't want to come you don't have to make up excuses. Just be honest. They don't really like me, period. Just cause I'm different. I just am and they think so. Everybody is different but they just treat me like I'm dirt. They walk all over me. They say when we're playing games, they say no feet but the other girls do. They are bullies. I only had six at my party. Six out of 13.*

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[15] These are excerpts taken directly as they were written in Ashley's diary.

*My friends from French immersion school were Laurie and Kellie. Well there's a non-stop talking person! Laurie is hilarious. We pretended we're sisters and Kellie is just the wonderful best friend. Yeah, I probably haven't seen Kellie for a few months. I think I've seen Laurie for a while cause she's my best, best friend but I don't see her very often. I miss her.*

*My French immersion teachers were Mme Smith . and Mme Jones  Mme. Smith,  I had her twice, ummm is very nice but Mme Jones, ummm she's allergic to chalk so now she has a white board. Grade one was fun, entertaining kinda, it was a lot of things. It was just that I was having problems with reading and stuff so I couldn't really get it. I knew I was having trouble. I felt different like I was really different and the other kids wouldn't want to be around me. Well the other kids progressed up to the next reading level and I didn't. It made me feel like I don't belong here. I felt weird. Weird to me is just different. Like you don't belong. I felt kinda sick inside. Sick like, like umm you're going to throw up or something. I felt that way every day mostly but I just lived with it.*

*It was really hard cause I hardly knew anything and the teacher just was like do this and this and this. It was just hard. I was having trouble spelling and everybody thought I was dumb. Mostly that's what they thought. They didn't say that but it was just their expressions. Once I found out I couldn't fit in it just made me feel worse. So to catch up, tutoring during the summer. All the kids were outside having fun and I was inside working, it just made me feel… ahhh let them go, let them have fun I'll just be working ahead. For a few months I thought I was ahead really, but I wasn't I was way behind. I did a lot of work to catch up. (Sigh) Everybody was way ahead of me and I was just way behind.*

*I sometimes confused the French with the English. I told you about Oh Canada. I sang it half French and half English. It was just really hard. I did the same thing with reading. I used*

*the French sounds sometimes. I wrote it in French, in spelling we were supposed to write a sentence out and I wrote it in French. It was embarrassing. They called me to the front and I had to read it and I read it like no problem and all of a sudden 'Can anybody, can anybody know what she said'. There's a boy I talk to about French immersion. He doesn't really care, he's a boy.*

*I only like to read English. Yeah my mom read to me when I was little. I learned how to read Green eggs and Ham. I memorized Green Eggs and Ham and said 'Mom, I can read Green Eggs and Ham'. My mom read it to me so many times I just memorized it. 'Sam I am, Sam I am, would you like green eggs and ham? No I do not like green eggs and ham. Sam I am, Sam I am. I like green eggs and ham. Thank you Sam I am'.*

*After school every day we'd do the same old thing, like 'How was your day?' 'Good'. I'd say good even though it wasn't the best. I didn't tell them cause I just don't. Yeah I'd say good or good with a different tone pretty much what happened today. When I went to school in French immersion I was happy to go. Pretty much happy but happy, happy to come home.*

*Sometimes I came home angry like some kids were just picking on me so I'd just hide. In kindergarten I had the same shoes as this other girl and she got mad at me so. Her name was Kaitlin. She was happy when I wore a bandana cause I looked like them. Usually they all wore bandanas. Toe socks **and** toe socks.*

*I didn't know many kids went I went to the English program, just two and that's it. It was kinda hard to move to a new school. I didn't really know anybody. Oh, and I knew Erin too. It kinda took me a while to get comfortable. At first people were just being so nice to me and who was going to show me what playground equipment I could go on. So it was hilarious but it made me feel welcome.*

*I kinda wish I was still in French. I wonder what they are doing right now? They're talking French instead of English. When I started kindergarten in French I just learned it, like in handwriting if you don't know you had to learn it. So you go with the flow. Well you just go O--- K and then she'll just say "Does anybody have any questions" and all hands went up so…but I just went with the flow. Yeah I just went along with the flow.*

*In grade one and two I had to read in French. I read slowly and hard cause it just ummm, I was just umm ah, uh, ah, uh ,ah, ummm. She'd say 'Ok are you too nervous'. Uh huh. No, I just got really nervous. I just got nervous speaking in front of a whole bunch of people. Well, it was* **French**. *I tried but I felt like 'Oh my God!' (*doing silent scream*). I'd be going like (*moaning and groaning as though she was going to be sick*). It felt like, like I was going to pop over and die. But I had worse things done, like I had worse things happen (*shows me scar on leg*). I fell off my bike and lost my skin. It's the same as falling off my bike and having to go splat right in the middle of the intersection.*

*Reading, kind of reading, that was mostly bad but I was having trouble so that was going to go (*grabs throat*) it was just like it was going to reach up and choke me. I felt that way mostly when I had to read in French. English is fun, yeah.*

*Like I wasn't doing very well and it was just hard to keep up with all the classes so I'd have homework, homework and homework, homework. That's the main thing. I had to spend all summer catching up. It made me feel like I was still in school. I just wanted to tell everyone 'It's summer, now can you just get out of the way so I can go play with my friends'. Like it just totally made me feel like I needed to get out some place. I'm being gypped out of a holiday cause my mom makes me read and do math most days of the summer. But now it's optional. But now I get paid and it is a good deal.*

*I was kind of relieved when I left French but I had lots and lots of homework. In French it felt just like they were going to wring my neck out. One kid even made the motions of wringing somebody's neck out. It was somebody that I really didn't appreciate being there but he could have been doing it to somebody else. It didn't bother me that I had to get help from the teacher, but I thought the other kids minded. Like I thought one kid was going to wring my neck out for five years without letting go. And that really scared me so. One kid could wring my neck out in five minutes.*

*On the playground I did speak it [French]. I learned it and I knew it so it worked that way. It was the reading and the writing it that was a problem. Well… its sorta like, just a bad day is just hard, like the worst nightmare. Mostly all days were like nightmares.*
*So this is the last day. Do you think you have enough for my story?*

# DYLAN'S STORY

*"I hated that I did not get a darn thing."*

It is late afternoon. The air is crisp and cold. The sky and the snow blend seamlessly together making it difficult to differentiate between the two. I turn off the highway into an old established residential area and drive down a street lined with massive maple trees. The once stately homes, now in varying states of disrepair, standing along the river bank tell of a more prosperous time. As I move away from the river road the homes become smaller. Low, one-storey structures, with small windows, set in large yards surrounded by wire fences are the norm. Finding my destination, I quickly gather what I need for the interview and make my way to the house. The house is a relatively new one set at the end of the street on the edge of the old development. It is neatly painted grey with white trim. It too has a fence although this one is painted white. The front yard, now deserted, strewn with tricycles, toy trucks, soccer balls, and other toys shows evidence of an active play area.  I enter into the kitchen to a house full of activity. Mom is telling two young boys to stop running, the TV is on, the telephone rings, a gentle, rather large Bassett hound barks his hello, sniffing me a welcome. Introductions are made and after shooing a slumbering cat from the table top and clearing away a spot, I settle at the kitchen table with a steaming cup of coffee. I feel comfortable surrounded by the bustle of this warm and accepting family.

*My name is Dylan. I'm in grade five now and things are going well now. I like to play hockey. I don't play on a team but I might. I play ministicks sometime. I'm a mean pizza fiend. I make pizza in the microwave. The little ones, cheese and pepperoni. I have a brother, Mark. He's seven almost eight and he's annoying because he likes to squeal. And Andrew he's six, my dad and him like to play a lot. My dad likes the computer and he likes Pepsi. My mom doesn't make*

*cookies very often. My dad makes a lot of cookies. My mom, that's a hard one. She works here (*at home*). She's a web-designer and obviously she likes computers. She likes it when I take pictures of where I go - like skiing. I don't ski very much but I'm a very good skier. I like downhill skiing I tried kidding around once, my skis fell off. First I tried snowboarding then skiing but I like skiing better. It's easier to control.*

*I have pets. I count my old pets too. Bugs #1 was furry, skinny, smart. He was a hamster and he'd always sneak out of his cage. He never got caught by anything, he died when we went to the lake, I think of old age. We had him for a long time. Bugs #2, another hamster, he died, it was only half a year. He died when I left for my friends for a sleepover. Everybody else thinks he died of a heart attack. He bit me. He bit me but it doesn't hurt. My first one bit really hard. My cat Murphy is a fat cat. He can't jump over that fence but he can get on my loft bed. I got him when I was little. I wasn't able to count yet. Scooby is another cat. I think I was six when we got her. She's a good destroyer. She likes to kill other animals who are smaller. Then we have T-Bone. I think we've had T-Bone like two years. He's a Basset Hound. He's really active, gets startled like if he's very happy you can make him like crazy and he'll just bark and bark, bark, bark.*

*We go camping mostly every year. We go to the same place. I get to see my friends. I get to go swimming and jump off the dock. I'm a good fisherman. I caught my four pound jackfish. You know those little things you stick in the gills? I was being really retarded I stomped on it and it went through my foot but not like right through. I couldn't get it in so I stomped on it twice and it hurt. It hurt so much, I still have a mark from that . Sometimes I fish from the boat or dock. I take my friends fishing, I have the best luck at the creek. It's just a little bridge and there are sides and it's the best place to fish. You can't go on the bridge because there are cars. I caught one. It*

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*was my first fish and it just flew right off. We walked with the fish, it took a very long time to get there.*

*You know those little floaty noodles? Me and Steven, we always grab them and whack each other. We like to challenge each other. Steven is my other friend. He's about fourteenish. I started playing with him when we started going to my dad's friend's campsite. He doesn't live close. I don't know where he lives, I haven't gone. He's actually coming to town. I don't see him often, I only see him in the summertime.*

*Sometimes we go on picnics and we have movie night together. If I like the movie usually my dad likes it and maybe my mom. Sometimes she falls asleep in the middle of it. My brothers are usually asleep. My dad and I have the same taste in movies and the same taste in spices. I think I like spices too much. My other friend says, "You're a spice monster or something." I like hot like those new chips buffalo popcorn jalapeno. I put spices on my corn dogs, like on my pizza. I even mixed my spices with ketchup.*

*My best friend I knew him for a long time. He comes here once in a while. He invites me to his place a lot. We both like Star Wars and well any adventure show. His name is Tyson. He likes spicy things too. We go into the forest a lot. We have a little fort there. There's this big tree that fell over and we used it for a little fort. I fell off the end. The very end of the tree is like five feet in the air and I fell. I jumped off to another part and that broke too. I was standing on little branches. It's a good place, it's safe. Its fun we go there often. Sometimes I take my brothers there but I don't like it when they go wandering off into the forest by themselves. I know a lot about forests. Well, I know that if there is a tree on another tree I don't go anywhere near that because its possible for it to fall like couldn't tell when it fell. I don't go around trees that are like fifty feet tall or more because they could fall and I'd have to be quite a far distance. There*

*are trees with little pokey branches. I don't like going in there because once I got in there I caught one in my hand and I couldn't get it out for a long time and it really hurt.*

*I really have one best friend at school too. He's nice, sometimes he bothers me. He twitches too much. He knows it bugs me so he does that. His name is Justin. We used to swing together, well except he doesn't like the same things I do because he's too scared I'll hurt him. He's older but I'm stronger and once I accidentally hurt him. I do tricks on the swing. I do a 360 backflip. I almost landed on him. Usually I do that on the little kid's side. I hurt my ankle but I still did it. When Justin comes over sometimes we play on the computer or I will play on my X-box. We usually, well sometimes I show him all sorts of my new games or we'll read comics.*

*When I'm all by myself and I've got nothing else to do I go crazy. I fill my puny body with spices. On the week-end I like to sleep in, stay up as long as possible and watch my shows I'm just crazy for <inaudible>. Well it's a futures show. It's where people can launch energy blasts out of their hands. My mom downloads them for me now. I like listening to all sorts of music. All sorts, my dad finds me all my favorites. I used to have this little program where I could download my music but then my computer, well I got a new one. I got three right now, four. Well my brothers have one, my dad has one, my mom has one and I've got my own. I usually use my computer just to play with friends like. Sometimes I use it for homework, Social Studies, sometimes Math, Science, Math is my weakest subject. I haven't learned that much Math in French, that's the only thing. My favorite subject is gym.*

*Before I started school I would have sleepovers at my grandmas or friends. I learned how to ride my bike, a two-wheeler. I wanted to ride a two-wheeler so bad, Ahhhh. It didn't take me long to learn. I just kept trying.*

*The first day I started school like in kindergarten I used to play a lot. I was scared about going to school. I was frightened, shy. I didn't know who would like me or not[16].*

*I can remember a couple of kids that I went to school with. Craig, Joseph, Jon, Nigel, Morgan, Brayden, that's all I can remember. Well, they weren't all my friends, well not really I'm just saying like all the kids that I remember.*

*If we're talking about friends in first grade, Brayden, and he's nice, funny. And mmmm Morgan. He acts weird every year he acts funny one year and then he acts normal another. I don't see my friends from French immersion any more.*

*I only remember some of my teachers. Mme Brown, Mme Black, and Mme White. I don't remember my fourth grade teacher, I wasn't there long enough. I liked Mme White. She's from Quebec. She speaks mostly French. She drives a purple car. I don't remember that much about my other teachers. Well I forget about my other two teachers. I only had three teachers.*

*When I started school I didn't speak French so I didn't understand much. I looked at other people and did what they did. It bothered me that I didn't understand. I could understand a bit more in grade one. It was kinda hard to speak French but we didn't really have to speak out in front of the class. Well, it was kinda hard like we didn't learn very much math. Then like in grade three we did French and English, just confusing. That confused me, yeah like when we were doing the vowels I did not know what a vowel was. In French, like we were doing it when I was in French but we had English periods. When I didn't get things I'd ask how cause I didn't get it or try. I got extra help only for writing like because I wasn't that neat. I got help from the tutor and he helped me mostly just with printing. We wrote things mostly. He didn't help me with*

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[16] Although Dylan is eager too talk it takes him a long time to bring the conversation around to school.

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*other work. I went to see another teacher Mme D. too but I kinda forget. It's been a while[17]. I didn't like going to her for help, not that much. Not many kids went to her. I thought it was a waste of time because I usually had homework. I don't remember what she helped me with, that's what I don't remember. I thought it was a waste of time, it didn't help, not that much. I didn't like going there much. Whenever I came back to class I usually had homework so I was behind. I would go there for help and then I would come back and have to do catch-up. That made me upset but I never told her that. Sometimes I told my teacher about getting behind but I don't remember what she said. I don't know if it helped. Sometimes I was able to do the work in class, sometimes yes and sometimes no. Well either I'd just sit there and stare, that's what I'd usually do. And my teacher would tell me to start working. Then I'd ask for help. Well, usually I still don't get it. Yeah it was math. We didn't do much math but it was confusing because some words I don't really understand. Like umm, like when I had French tests, like French spelling tests my mom and my dad didn't know much French. Only thing they probably knew was "chat" and "poubelle". The other kids, my friends, didn't have trouble[18].*

*I didn't do anything to get out of class (laughs) except every (pause), trying to make myself bleed. I don't know if I don't get it and then I couldn't get very much information about it. I'd make myself bleed so I could get out of class and probably go to the washroom for a while. Well, I at least tried. Ummm I tried hitting myself (embarrassed laugh) ummm. I do get frustrated[19]. Ummm like, I didn't do that often because we had like gym mostly every day so gym was in*

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[17] It is interesting that Dylan, who has been the most recent student in this study to withdraw from the French immersion program, says he has forgotten because "it's been a while".

[18] When Dylan volunteered this information his attitude was one of indignation. He resented leaving the classroom to go for extra help only to come back and be farther behind.

[19] I found it very disconcerting that Dylan would attempt to physically hurt himself in order to remove himself from the frustration of the classroom situation.

*English. That was the best part of the day for me, gym, because it was in English and I'd get anything and I'm really good at gym.*

*I didn't talk to my mom and dad about it that much because I didn't want to get any more help. Well I didn't want any help because it was wasting most of my time. It made me upset to go for help because most people that had a bit of trouble didn't (have to go) probably as much as I did. Like probably in math they had problems, they didn't have to go anywhere but I did and I had to go somewhere. I don't know maybe it was my spelling but it's their math. I didn't think that was really fair that I had to go and they didn't. And it never helped. Not that much.*

*Sometimes I had to get up in front of the class and talk in French. Well, I wasn't used to going up in front of people, like I would have felt embarrassed. I was embarrassed because I had to go up and talk. I got mostly upset, kinda frozenish, kinda frozen. I just, I'd keep my hand down. But if she told me to I'd always go up, I'd have to. I do not know what would have happened if I didn't. I never tried that, I didn't dare. I was afraid to say no.*

*Mmm people bullied me. More than other kids, well it was mostly me. I was like in grade one and grade sixes were bullying me, calling me names. The English kids. I kept on telling but they kept on calling me names. It made me mad. I didn't believe them, besides I know I am a kid. That just bugs me. I have a name I told them I had a name but they just kept on calling me kid. Well, I think they were kinda tempted to hurt me once. I told the teacher. Well, I don't really know what she did but they didn't bug me for a while.*

*I don't remember when I learned to read but it was in French. I hardly remember. I was a good reader in French. I remember a bit. I remember 'animal, es-tu bien?'*
*The best thing about French immersion was (long pause) I do not know. Actually I do know the worst thing about French was I hardly got anything. Well I hardly knew that much French. My*

*parents hardly knew French. The other kids learned it but I wasn't. That made me really upset. I felt I didn't fit in, like I was a green apple but they were red apples. I didn't think I was very smart. Half a period for reading and a bit of writing.*

*We've been reading really hard books now and I'm reading a really easy book. I like reading. I always read at night, I finished two books and my Star Wars book. I don't remember what my report cards were like. I got fifteen Ds. (I explained to him that a D actually means developing a skill rather than a D as in A, B, C, or D). Oh! (relief). You can look at them. I got terrible marks. (Reads) 'Dylan is working on communicating with his words instead of with his hands and feet'. She means like ummm instead of punching or kicking, yes, I was punching and kicking because people got me mad by calling me names. Not in the class, well ok mostly I got into grade three and I liked to try skipping class by kicking desks and going out of class. Because I hardly got anything. I got out of class by kicking the desk, upsetting the desk. I'd go outside, they'd send me like out in the hall.*

*So it says (from report card) 'he is working on telling the truth and accepting responsibility for his actions'. I couldn't understand and people made me angry. I had terrible marks, look at all those twos. In grade two it says 'Dylan lets his attention wander instead of concentrating on his work'. It started getting boring. Usually my mom always gets mad at me for my report cards so I hide them, even from this years report card. I don't remember what it was like but my mom would. Here's my this years one. I just got this c, b ,b, those are good marks 85% in band. I didn't go on the band trip. I'm only in junior band and here is something from band. I got pretty good in band. My band report card. I don't practice every day but I'm like almost at the head of the classroom right now.*

*I'd try to leave the class because, well it was really confusing. Well, ummm we had to do, we had to get words for how many beans and I did not get a bean. But now its just easy. Because it was all in French, this is English and I can understand it. Well, I didn't get into much trouble, I'd just get mad. I got mad that I got sent out but still not as mad.*

*Other kids didn't get sent out. They don't do that, most of them umm understand and don't do that. I tried explaining to the teacher that I didn't understand. Well, she'd try to help me a little bit.*

*I was in grade four I think for like a month or two. I was upset that I had to leave all my friends when I went to the English program. Well, at the very start it was still confusing and hard but I was, well, then I started to know how to read English finally. Well I still get a little help for reading. I don't feel bad about it, actually, some others get help for reading too. I don't go for that much extra help. In French immersion sometimes, I don't know but he was in a bigger grade than me, he'd go ha ha, you need help. Once again…mad and I'd yell at him.*

*I don't try to get out of class anymore. I don't need to. Well, I may try to get out of class in music cause I have to do this monologue thing and I don't like it. But I never get mad like I did before because I got upset in the French program. When I got mad I'd be angry at home. I'd yell, torture anybody I'd see, pull their legs. It didn't make me feel any better, not much. Well if I got hurt or someone was bullying me I'd take most of my anger out on something. I'd take it out on my brothers. I'd hurt them. Scratching them I think. I think I bullied. I believe I punched them, kicked them, threw them, tripped them. I usually just picked on them.*

*My parents couldn't understand the French program and they couldn't help me. I thought I was going to have a lot of trouble in English. I had a little bit. I'd make myself bleed or something cause I hated class. I hated that I did not get a darn thing. I think my teacher knew*

*that but I still didn't understand. It always worked, I got to leave the class. I didn't talk to my teacher about it. Or my mom. I felt like if I told my mom she'd probably kill me. I don't know if it was important to her. I don't know if it was. I thought she would be disappointed in me. Its kind of the main reason why I hated school that I didn't get a darn thing. It made me upset. I thought 'Why can't I do this?' I thought 'I'm stupid'.*

SCOTT'S STORY

*"All that time I felt like a loser."*

  I have known Scott since he was in grade two. When Scott looks at you he tilts his head sideways and peers at you, almost as though he is peering around the corner. It is his way of getting you in his line of vision and focusing on you. You see, Scott is legally blind. Although his vision is severely impaired Scott still has some peripheral vision and he has learned to compensate although his vision continues to diminish as he gets older. He is a handsome boy with curly blond hair and a winning smile, described by his mother as a "home boy" who likes to spend time with his family, Scott has developed his interest in playing drums and has become a skilled drummer. He spends countless hours in the family recreation room perfecting his skills. Here is where I find him when I come to interview him. Before we begin with the interview though, he plays for me - the latest song that he has learned – *"Wipe Out"* by The Safaris.

  *I got a brother, mom, dad, dog and then there's me Scotty. I'm twelve and in grade six. My brother is a daredevil. I'll say that cause he'll try anything, like at the lake a while ago there's a leech and he wanted to touch it and he likes touching stuff. He'll do anything. He's seven. My brother's the biggest daredevil. I'm the comedian of the family. Umm, my mom is obsessed with fitness and that's all I know, she's obsessed with is fitness, whereas my dad really likes the army and mostly does flooring during the summer and stuff. They're both teachers. Yeah, weird family, it's like no one has the same interests. My brother is more like the adventurous daredevil, doesn't ever run out of juice, just goes full every day. He's golfing with my dad, up at the lake with my uncle and aunty. I don't like doing golf no I'm not like, on really hot days like this I hate golfing. I only like golfing when it's kinda chilly out. I wouldn't want to go anyway cause me and*

*my mom are going to a movie tonight so, while they're up at the lake. My dog is eight years old, it's a golden retriever and she's big. Her name is Powder.*

*I deliver forty papers, no now I'm limited. I'm down like thirty some. In the summer everyone's quitting. I had forty two now I'm getting something like thirty some. I get a hundred bucks a month. I have to save it for holidays. But my brother gets half of it. That sucks. I wish it was all my money. We split it fifty-fifty. We drive down there, there's two apartments, old folks home things, we deliver in those two and then we deliver to six houses and that's it. Yeah and I collect from three people and I deliver flyers from about fifteen people. It's work but its good money though.*

*I want to buy a Hummer or a Ferrari or a big gas guzzling SUV. I wish my mom's was an SUV, it's a 4Runner. I wish it was an SUV, that would be awesome, screens in the vehicle like dvd screens that would be awesome. Nah, I'm going to buy myself clothes and video games right now, more my stuff.*

*I like to skateboard, bike, swim, hang out with friends, that kind of stuff. Jump on the trampoline. With my family I like to go to the movies, especially go to the movies, go go-carting, go to the lakes that kind of stuff. I like more action, like more action, war kind of movies. Real violent. The more violent the better[20].*

*When I'm all by myself I like to play my play station, watch tv, go on computer, that's it. And play with my dog. I just throw the ball, pet her that kind of stuff, just let her run around. I like swimming, I've been swimming for maybe a couple years since I was maybe five. I can dive too. I'm not very good at it though. On the last day of swimming we get to play games like water polo. That's the best part.*

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[20] The statement about violent movies takes me by surprise. The impression that I have of Scott is that he is a very gentle, non-violent young man. I surmise that the statement was made in bravado to invoke an imaginary persona.

*When I was little I liked cartoons but now I watch more talking ones like more, I don't know how to say it, more adult ones. Probably my favorite shows are Radio Free Roscoe and Boy Meets World. Those are funny. It's on family channel. Boy Meets World. It's just a funny comedy one about a kid. There's episodes where he grows up and so I never know how old he is. He's stupid like he doesn't make the right, like the right, he doesn't do the right thing. He never does[21]. He makes dumb choices, like this one episode his best friend liked two girls and both of the girls liked him so he told Corey, he's the main guy, he told Corey to babysit one of the girls while he dates the other one and then if she dumped him he would have the other one. He was a two-timing guy. Maybe I would do that. (laughs). But I don't have a girlfriend. Not yet.*

*Before I started school, ummm, it was easy cause you didn't have to worry about like work and friends and stuff. It was real easy. The best part about it was staying home. When I started school it was a little bit different cause I wasn't home every day so like I went to school and did work and met new people and stuff. I was umm nervous and scared. When you go there, like you don't know who's gonna be your teacher and is she going to be nice, like if you're gonna have friends or not, yeah. It was good. I had friends and stuff. You know there's this one time I was, I think, bike riding with my friends and I got, this kid fell and I helped him out and then he became my friend and at least, that was my best friend, so. That was at school, I think his name was Brent. Yeah I think. I don't quite remember.*

*I was in French. I thought it would just be easy like English. It was hard, like I couldn't understand French and stuff. When I got started I'm like just thought to myself "this is not really easy, this is hard". It was hard and like our teacher would speak in French and I wouldn't understand. So, I would just ask like, when the person that was beside me ask him what they*

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[21] Scott's depiction of the boy as 'stupid' in the tv show and his explanation for his thinking is the first of many references to the need for making the best of a situation.

*meant or something. Usually they didn't know. So I guessed. Like for questions that were in French I just guessed them. I felt like I kinda cheated or something, like I didn't do that good. I felt like a cheater cause guessing is not really good so, and I wanted to try my hardest so. I talked to my mom and dad about French immersion and then they tried to help me and it didn't work and then so they pulled me into English again. I think I was in French until the end of grade three. Like I felt weird like I couldn't...like it'd just feel really weird. It felt like I didn't belong and stuff in French. Yeah.*

*We'd get to school and we'd read. Our teacher would read in French. I could understand some words cause she sometimes read in French and sometimes didn't so yeah and usually if I didn't understand I just asked and then she'd just explain it to me in English so that would be easier, yeah. We'd do like French work and then like story times and stuff, basically all French. It was hard then. Sometimes I'd usually just walk up to the desk and ask like what does this question mean and for her to put it in English for me and stuff. Really hard. It made me feel kinda like I wasn't that good at school. That bothered me a little bit. My marks were, let's see...ummm, sometimes in the 70s and 60s and 80s. Yeah now I have 100 and 90s. It's way easier, like English is so easier and stuff is, yeah, easier to read, yeah. Probably my favorite thing to do at school was play soccer at recess and then in class probably read, cause the books were written in French just when she read to us it was. I'd just read the English books in the classroom. She reading to us in French was the worst cause I'd just sit there and be bored and not understand it, so. I once fell asleep though. I just dozed off and the teacher tapped, tapped me on the head when she was done reading and then I just woke up. Going to school when I was in French was okay, it wasn't the best. When I switched it was way better, oh yeah. Now get to school, read for fifteen minutes, do LA, math, science, yeah, basically work. And then sometimes*

*if we're good like say we'll have a jar and we get them filled up with marbles we'll get a movie or party. Yup, sometimes everyday if we're good  our teacher'll put in like two marbles and, yeah, if we get the marble jar filled up we'll have a movie or a party. I think I left the French immersion program cause it was really hard like I couldn't understand anything and so for me to just keep on going in French I wouldn't get anywhere. I felt good when I left like finally I could understand and I was getting better marks and stuff. Yeah, I got way better marks than like in French I got 60s and 50s and 70s and then when I got there like 80s and 90s and 100s. It was a little hard to leave the French cause I had good friends in French. Some friends did change cause some were just like all just going to French school and stuff. Like some are new and some are old.*

*When I couldn't understand stuff I felt kinda lazy and stuff…and like…bored like I didn't know what to do and stuff. Like I didn't know if I was going to walk up there what people would think about me if I kept on walking up there and asking. I was a little embarrassed about it. That's basically what I knew about French. English is way better. Yeah I can understand and I can go up to the teacher no more and stuff. But still English can be hard. When I had to ask all the time I felt that the teacher wasn't, the teacher felt that I wasn't getting anywhere and, like, I needed really serious help and stuff. I thought that she was thinking I'm not, she's like I'm a real failure, failure, so, yeah. But my mom finally told me that's not what she thinks. She (*the teacher*) worked really hard with me trying to get me there.*

*My grade two teacher was my best teacher. Like all the rest made me feel that way [a failure] but she didn't.  Cause she, like, she really helped me out, so, oh yeah favorite teacher, still is. Kindergarten to grade three was like hard or stuff, like the years went by real slow. Every day seemed like it was never going to end. Sometimes I wanted to go to school and sometimes no*

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*like…sometimes like sometimes we would have certain days where we would just do English all day rather than French, Those days I wanted to but not the French.*

*I think I went for extra help. I think she kinda tutored me on French. I kinda felt good cause I was getting more help and I finally thought I was going to get it. But I didn't, so, yeah. Now I feel that I try my best, yeah. The French program was not for me. It just sucked for me. I would say that people who are English and doing really well in English should just stay there cause if they go in French they'll know just a little progress. I didn't learn any French. Well I think like a few words in French but I forget them all. So I want to leave all that behind cause I didn't want to know anything about French. I think it's just evil. Whoever made it was so evil, like wanted to conquer the earth, like that kind of evil. I thought it was just stupid. I just want to get on with English yeah.*

*There was one kid named David or Ian, one of them I think they were having real trouble just like me and acted cool just like me[22] so I didn't feel I was the only one that was struggling, yeah. So I just got lazy. I just decided to be lazy so my mom would pull me out of it yeah. Kinda just lazy, not doing my homework and stuff, kinda failing so bad…so I could get out of it…and those days paid off. I remember sometimes like if when I was being lazy and my work wasn't done I'd have to miss gym[23] and stuff and that's the only part of the day that wasn't French and that got me mad. I'd just be so mad that I'd just sit in my desk and just stare at the roof. Just be so mad when the teacher came in and just ignore her* (laugh*). So mad. I hated things. It made me feel like I wasn't belonging…in French. I just wanted to move out of French, yeah. It was a real good decision.*

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[22] Scott recognized that others were experiencing difficulty and that certain behaviours "acting cool" established a connection between them conceivably alleviating some of the pressure presented by his struggles in the program.

[23] Scott's mother volunteered that gym was his least favourite subject in school. In contrast, Scott tells of becoming very upset when he was not allowed to go to his gym class in order to finish incomplete work. However, he does explain that gym was 'the only part of the day that wasn't French'.

*I think under my bed I still got some stuff, some of my homework from French. I think I kept that. Its just stuff that I brought home so I don't know cause I didn't want to throw it out in the garbage cause my parents wanted to see it, what kind of stuff I did, so I brought it home. I was planning to throw it away, I just didn't get the chance to, yeah. It's weird like now sometimes I can understand it but only a little. I just wish in French I had somebody to translate it.[24]*

*I used to have a tutor. Oh he was fun, a funny guy. He was French. He was the one that helped me with French. He was my real tutor with French, so yeah. Like he'd sit beside me sometimes when we were doing a French subject and then she [the teacher]spoke French he would tell me what it means in English. There were lots of kids, like he helped basically everybody in the class so I didn't feel like it was just me. If it had been just me I wouldn't want the tutor but I sucked at French, so. Sometimes in classes he's sit with me and if I didn't get something I'd just go like this, I'd just ask him and he'd translate it and try and get me to fit the two together so that if she said it that way I can understand it. Sometimes that was helpful. But I didn't want to ask all the time cause I didn't think that's what a tutor's for. I thought it was for, they're, like they're not just supposed to give it away. They're supposed to try to make you remember it, make you work. I didn't want to work though cause I was lazy. Every subject except for gym like math, umm science was hard cause you just talk about in French all the time and they give you like a project you have to make something. I wouldn't know what to make because I didn't understand. So yeah.*

*We had to speak in French. I didn't want to speak in French cause I only knew one word. So I was very quiet (laugh). Now since I'm in English I can say stuff like I don't have to talk in French, yeah. My friend Jeremy, he's in French right now. Like he's real good. When a little*

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[24] Although Scott referred to the French program as 'evil' and 'stupid' the fact that he has kept 'stuff' even though his intention was to 'throw it out in the garbage' but 'I just didn't get the chance yet' provides evidence of nostalgia about his time spent in the program.

*while ago I was at his house all they did was speak French, but not to me. He would speak English to me but his mom and dad speak French. They speak French…He's real good, he'd probably beat me at anything but not in English. Like well, I have more friends now and sometimes in French, my friends would just talk in French the whole time so I wouldn't understand them. Now they just talk in English, all my friends here, so way easier to understand.*

*Now I take more risks because I understand it. In French when she wrote a question on the board in French I'd be so scared to go up there. Yeah, but now in English if I go up there and make a mistake who cares. I was afraid that everyone would start laughing at me and stuff like if…say it was in French and I had to go up there and write in French like write the answer in French and I wrote the wrong one, people would start laughing at me and I didn't know it. They didn't do it but I was worried about it. Yeah we worked in French, real hard. Harder than now, especially me cause I didn't understand it. Now I can just be lazy cause I can understand everything.*

*When I started French I thought it would be easy like English. But it was hard. Like when I got started I'm like, just thought to myself this is not really easy. It was hard. I felt like I kinda sucked at it like I wasn't that good. I guessed for questions and thought like I was cheating in like…well not really cheating. Kinda like stupid, I have to guess its kinda like being stupid. Yeah it was weird. Like I couldn't, it felt like everything in my mind was just gone like I couldn't think good and stuff.  If the teacher asked me a question I felt scared and like not wanting to say and stuff. I would not put my hand up. Like sometimes she would ask people if their hands weren't up. But mostly the hands were up. I didn't put my hand up. Once she asked me anyway. So, I don't know I kinda said I have to go to the bathroom. And I just ditched. I felt like 'Oh no, she asked me. I'm doomed. Like I'm done for, this is the end, like that kind of feeling. Like I wanted*

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*to just rip my hair out. So I decided I'd just be like 'I gotta go to the bathroom, it's an*

*emergency'. So I just ditched. My other teachers, they'd never ask me cause I told them I don't*

*know French that good so they just never asked me.*

*I felt like I'm not learning anything. Like what's the point of school if you're not learning*

*anything? I thought this is so stupid. Like this stuff is crazy. Like this work was really stupid, like*

*I didn't want to do it. I just thought to myself 'why do they make this kind of stuff'? I felt okay*

*about my marks cause I was young then, so even when I was yeah young, I thought when I get*

*older I'll just get better marks. I feel really good about my marks now. I feel like I'm smart. But*

*when it comes to my brother, he can just beat me in math any day. Then he makes me feel stupid,*

*so.*

*In French, the people they were kinda mean and the teachers weren't that smart. Sometimes*

*when I was walking to school I'd see my friend and they might be pushing each other around and*

*stuff and calling each other names and stuff. They're just bullies, like I saw one little*

*kindergarten and they were just picking on him and stuff. I don't know maybe the French like*

*changes the kids, the way they act and stuff. I don't know. I was in French from kindergarten to*

*grade three, almost grade four. The days went by, they were really long. All that time I felt like a*

*loser. It was French's fault. I tried to get out of French cause I didn't want to be a loser any*

*more. It was a really long time before I could switch. It felt good when I switched. It felt like*

*finally I'm going to get some good grades and stuff. I knew English was really easy before I*

*started school. My mom made me stay back in grade three so I can catch up in English. I had*

*lots of tutor help in English. I think my tutor, she helped me lots. I would go like every day for an*

*hour and a half or something. When I was in French I felt why am I doing this? Like lazy, I felt*

*like I just want to sit here and sleep all day cause I knew I wouldn't get it anyway, so why try. I*

*thought the teacher wasn't getting anywhere with me and like it was my fault, not hers cause I was so stupid in French. I didn't know anything.*

*I had to go for extra help and I think like when I got there we just, she had this weird thing, she had this weird sand thing with sand in the box and she would make me draw like a number in there or something like it wasn't French tutoring at all. It was all in English, I didn't need that so, that was weird. See I was supposed to be getting help from French but she gave me help from English. I just thought she was so mixed up cause I thought this was such a mix up like doing pretty bad in French and I'm doing pretty good in English and I'm having tutoring in English? She just guessed I was having troubles in English.*

*In grade three I could only understand some parts like when I recognized what the word meant then I would know. Not all the kids spoke French, probably half the class did and half didn't. We'd fool around, they'd pass notes and stuff in English yeah and some said like boring and stuff, it was funny. Probably most of the girls spoke French cause they're smarter than guys at that kind of stuff but we're better at sports though.*

*When I went to resource room that was pretty easy it took up my class time, some of my class time. So that was good. She would teach me like French and stuff and we would do little games in French. I'd color. I'd just fool around in there and stuff yeah. It was like French city. It was unuseful, it helped just like a little bit probably. I remember that I used to be able to understand hello and stuff in French. If you said it in French I would be able understand it. If you ask a question in French I would be like whaaa? Basically understanding in French, that was it understanding it. I couldn't understand any French except for like hello and stuff. I couldn't speak it, write it and read it, maybe a little, that's about it. It was a big problem cause I*

*didn't like French cause I couldn't do anything, I couldn't understand or anything. I don't even*

*know how they do math in French. I didn't even know you did math in French, that's weird.*

*I wanted to go into the English. There's more people my kind in the English. It's a different*

*kind of people in the French program. Like French people do Frenchie stuff, like you know in*

*France they'd just sit outside and drink coffee all day and talk in French. Like they were kind of*

*different like different stuff and talk in French and stuff like that. I want kids that can talk in*

*English yeah and there's more variety of friends in English too yeah.*

*The hardest thing I'd say it was really difficult. French, learning French was really hard.*

*Yeah, in a lot of ways the hardest thing was probably that the teacher was talking in French and*

*I can't understand so I don't know what to do. I felt like I just wanted to go home and just watch*

*tv and continue my life like on the couch watching tv.*

*When I left French I felt like it was one of the best days of my life. I'm like, my life is*

*totally better!*

# JESSE'S and DAVID'S STORY

*"Est-ce que je peux aller aux toilettes?"*

| *JESSE'S STORY* | *DAVID'S STORY* |
|---|---|
| *I have an older bro, Dave, he lives in BC right now and uh right now he's a scuba diver and well he's 28 I'm pretty sure. He's been away from home for quite a while.* | *Well, we have another older brother, Mike, he's eighteen almost and he used to be a kick boxer. Now he has a job which I don't know, I don't know his job. He still lives at home and he's going to college.* |
| *My dad, he works at the airport and he's got a wife. She works at a lot of different jobs.* | *That's about it for our family.* |
| *Oh, me, I am in a lot of sports. Um I'm athletic and not bad at school. I'm in ten and I'm fifteen years old. I snowboard a lot in the winter and play soccer. I was in the summer games in 2004. Umm and I'm playing soccer right now. Indoor.* | *I'm sort of a sit down person, not in any sports right now but wanting to go in boxing or karate. And I've been in soccer but I quit. I'm in school sports things. I'm in grade ten and wrestling. I like to do a lot of water sports I guess. Tubing and wakeboarding at the lake. Umm I guess I'm going in the army in the summer I guess and that's about it.* |
| *Oh and umm, I have an identical twin brother…* | *And he's a lot cooler (laughs).* |
| *Yeah, right! (laughs). He's annoying (laughs) Ahhh.* | *He's older by about fifteen seconds.* |
| *Yeah, he's more mature!* | *Yeah, more mature! (Both laugh). Oh, we hang out lots. Usually yeah.* |
| *We have the same friends and Yeah I guess we're pretty close.  Mhmmm we have the same ideas sometimes. Yeah its always been like that.* | *We have like the same friends but are in different classes at school.* |
| *The teachers can't tell us apart. We switch…* | |

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Yeah and trick them. They don't have a clue…

They don't know. Switch, yeah. (both laugh). Yeah like starting in grade six we started doing that.

Our voices are kinda the same. But we got different styles of hair too.

It's kinda the same but mine just isn't as curly as his.

We breed our dog every year and we used to have a bird Polly I think or Molly but we sold it cause it got in the way.

It was a cockatiel, we taught it to talk, say 'Pretty bird' and all that, so pretty funny. Our dog is always very playful. It gets along with all the pets we've had in the past years and doesn't run away much any more. Yeah, it used to run away but it never ran far. Our neighbors always knew that it's our dog to get it, so we could have it back, like they return it to us. Our cat Fluffy, she gets along with Zoe good too. She doesn't fight or anything. She's calm. Every year, in an average our dog has about two or three puppies. This year we didn't get any, I guess. Then we sell them…

As a family we like to travel, go to the lake and spend time there and go skiing, watch tv. Then like separate, when I'm alone I go on the computer a lot and play soccer, go to my friends houses, watch tv and listen to music. I like some rap and rock. Mostly like the 80s and stuff. Sometimes I skateboard in the

…classes sometimes.

We haven't told them yet.

And they've never caught on. Our parents might have a hard time telling us apart if they didn't see our face.

But I like mine curly (laughs). It's naturally curly.

We have a dog, Zoe, I can't remember its age and we have a cat Fluffy and we've had that cat since grade two I think.

I didn't want to sell it but it was for two hundred dollars I think or one hundred, I can't remember. He ripped the money, it was my bird, I'd had it for about a year. It was a cocka, what was it?

Ummm, for $950 around. She pays for her food that's for sure.

*summertime. I guess I just hang out with my friends a lot. They come here all the time. House full all the time.*

*We play poker too…*

*Not much though.*

*Our friends are nice people. Sometimes they can be big jerks on different times I guess. They don't really get in the way, like they are fun to hang out with and stuff. We think of ideas of what to do for the weekend, help each other out with homework. I guess a bunch of them come over here a lot and like everyone's friends with everyone that we hang out with so no fights happen or anything.*

*with real boxing gloves, but it's all for fun…*

*It doesn't bother us as long as they don't try to get us on it. They don't really smoke that much around us. They don't even smoke that much, it's like a couple occasionally.*

*Usually when we go to the lake we always bring at least one or two friends so my dad takes us out tubing a lot or wakeboarding whichever one. Then sometimes we tented out at the lake and go to the beach a lot. I guess when I'm alone at the lake if I'm really bored I'd fish or sleep and listen to music or tv. I sort of like fishing and sort of have a good fishing hole. Yeah when we're at home we used to play board games and then well yeah we have a bunch of people here, like eight to ten every day practically.*

*Yeah, poker. We play a lot of pool. We bet money…*

*Ah, then when I'm alone I usually go on computer too and listen to music. I play my x-box and play online stuff. That's about it.*

*We usually have boxing matches outside my house, real boxing matches…*

*…and after that we usually go in the hot tub and my dad's building a deck around it. It's good. Our friends smoke, well half of them do anyway.*

*Our friends are someone we can depend on, I guess most of them. That's important. Usually we kick them out of our house and then we go on to someone else's house, but it's mostly always at our house that we go. Yeah they eat all our food. Our parents don't*

*really tell us what they think but I can tell they get annoyed cause they leave plates and everything around. Leave the whole house a mess.*

*We have friends too like from when we went to school with them in French immersion. We bring them out here sometimes to be with us, to hang out and we go there sometimes. They're still in French immersion, in high school right now and all my friends are still in French. We talk online a lot on the computer, not in French. We're not the greatest at French anymore but like they are and they can teach us sometimes what it means, So, that's a pretty good thing.*

*I remember when I was real young I used to like hide under the couch all the time. I'd be under there for hours and my parents wouldn't be able to find me. They like actually called the cops once. I've no idea why I'd hide, I just liked the under of the couch. It was a good place. We used to play on the deck a lot when we were young on these toy car things. We'd go in and like pedal and then we'd jump on the trampoline and stuff.*

*I usually played Lego and with my brother Mike. I used to play with him a lot. I made him cry once. It was awesome. He was under, his head was under the bed trying to look for me but then I crawled over and then I went on his back, kept jumping on his back. And then he started crying and I ran away. I was really young, I can't really remember how old I was.*

*We went to our grandpas house a lot and we watched him hunt for gophers. He like told us when we're older we'd get to like hunt for gophers too with him. I thought that was pretty fun. We did get to when we were older like eleven years old but we were watching him like when we were five to six.*

*Yeah he told us lots of stories and then when we were older he gave us each our own gun. A 22 Winchester.*

*He gave it to us for remembrance of him like*

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*when he passes on. They come here for like Christmas and Thanksgiving and all that, so. We have a big family. We have a family reunion every year. There's about fifty of us I'm guessing.*

*That's only on my dad's side though I think. My mom doesn't come because it's not on my mom's side so. Then we go tubing a lot there, have like fires on the beach. It's about five hours away. We go there for half the summer, like a month. We have our own cabins there. It's really fun.*

*When I started school I didn't really know many people when I got there so it was sort of, I was sort of shy I guess. Especially around the guys cause they looked a lot bigger than me. Yeah I was sort of intimidated and then well the teachers were really helpful. My mom came with me the first day so I wasn't that intimidated but still the days went on but, yeah…*

*I was that young yeah. I guess I wasn't that intimidated by anyone because most of them were my age and littler in preschool. There was a lot of screaming and yelling from what I remember and crying too. Yeah, the first day that was bad. Then we made friends as we like the months went on when we were in that grade. Well I've got friends that I've been with ever since preschool a few of them.*

*Yeah we went to preschool, we also went to this, well, my brother went to a speech class thing. I'm not sure if I did or not. I can't remember. There was nothing wrong with my talking but he had a problem.*

*I never paid attention in that class. I never liked that class at all when I went to learn how to speak. That was at French immersion school, so that they tried to teach me but like I wouldn't listen or anything cause I didn't want to be in that class at all. I felt well like uncomfortable and like I don't know I just didn't like it at all so I just got pulled out of that class.*

*We were both in French immersion. It was fun…*

*Yeah we met a lot of people.*

*We read a lot of French books from grade one to grade three cause I can remember. We'd like I guess to go to the bathroom we had to umm, we had to speak like in French like 'Est-ce que je peux aller aux toilettes'? I can remember that still cause I've said it so many times. I had to go to the bathroom a lot, oh yeah. I don't know, sometimes we just said that so we didn't have to be in class. Maybe because it was too hard or frustrating or I was tired sometimes. When we learned something new it's hard to understand because it was in French, yeah. So sometimes you would say you had to go to the bathroom when you didn't just to get out of there.*

*We went to school with three friends I think of ours. David, Bob and Jon. Jon, he's athletic. He plays soccer. He's the older one of all of our friends we used to hang out with. He's really smart like he's 99% average in French immersion. And he's really good at English too. Him and his family like to travel a lot. They go to Switzerland and I guess his family is like mostly French. His dad speaks a lot of French. Usually him and his dad speak only French when they're at the house. Our parents don't speak French.*

*Yeah, it was hard and fun I guess.*

*Yeah, me too. I have a few friends who still do that. We went to elementary with this person since we started school. His name is the same as mine. And uh, I guess the teachers kept uh he was not really smart and he always used to copy off of me. Now he's a lot smarter than me. He's a good friend. He was here two weeks ago I think. We always got confused because whenever the teacher called out our name we both would sort of look back and we didn't know who was talking to who.*

*I remember in grade three I used to always get into fights with a lot of people cause I didn't like a lot of people there. They were annoying and they kept coming to me on the playground and in the classroom and just*

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*I had lots of good days. A good day is like when I understand what's going on and I feel confident and like if me and my friends got along and we didn't fight that day that would be a good day.*

*Yeah I went to it too. I hated it so much. I don't like help really from the teachers or my dad or anything. That's why I didn't like going to that speech thing cause I don't like getting help at all. I'm kind of liking to do things on my own and not get help.*

*I didn't ask for help at school. I guess I never did like French at all. Well the reason they put me in Special ed was because I was not understanding sometimes what was going on in class so I got far behind because I wasn't that good at it. I didn't like going there at all. It felt uncomfortable. My mom even knows that I didn't like it. I complained all the time about it for her to take me out of that class and I'll just try even harder. Well, she never even took me out of that class. She kept me in it and it got me so frustrated. I didn't like it at all. So I wouldn't pay attention in that*

*asking for it I guess. This was French kids and sometimes the English people in the French immersion school. They used to always like take stuff of mine and throw it to each other so I couldn't get it yeah, so I'd just hurt them.*

*The same thing as what he said and then usually when I woke up in the morning and I had a test I would be like 'oh yeah, test. I would get taken out and get help cause I always got taken out. I got help from the kindergarten teacher. A lot of people did do I sorta felt confident in myself. This was in grade three. We were sort of in a special ed class. Some people didn't like it so they whined about it. I didn't mind because I thought it was helpful.*

*I like to do things on my own too but like I don't like asking for help but if they offer it if I needed it then I would get it. I hated asking to get help from my dad or anyone. I usually ask for help from the person beside me, like a friend I guess. I was actually sorta smart in French immersion. People usually ask help from me so it was pretty cool.*

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*class and I just caused trouble. Like I can't remember if I talked back to the teacher. Like I wouldn't do my work at all. Well I wouldn't do what the teacher told me to for assignments in that class. I guess that wouldn't be fair to the teacher cause they were just trying to help me and I'm just like not helping them. I was very frustrated. That would have been a bad day.*

*I used to be the destructive one in the class so I usually always talked and annoyed everyone. Well annoyed the teacher that was trying to teach. I'd talk to other people and disrupt the class. Then they'd take me out and in French if you did something bad I think they always made you write it out on paper what you did bad just in English. Then you had to draw something too. In your class the next day you'd have to read it out loud so in front of the whole class. I had to do that a lot. It was sort of funny. Like the first time I had to do it was sort of serious. Then all the other times I was just writing funny things so that I'd make the class laugh. The teachers hated that. I was just like that.*

*When I started school I kinda liked French. It was a new experience my dad said. Well I remember there was a time when I didn't want to be in French and my dad told me to spell apple in English and I couldn't do it. He said 'That's why you're in French immersion' because I couldn't do English that good so I guess that gave me confidence to do French. That was in grade two. I was eight years old. I couldn't spell a lot of words in English.*

*Yeah, I helped him out.*

*I could barely spell my name either in English.*

*Like I couldn't spell anything in grade two. I laughed then but when I got to grade four in the English program it got really hard. I almost failed that class. It made me feel dumb because everyone, like I had this one person in my grade four class I just met him and then we became friends. He'd always help me and then if I did something wrong he'd call me stupid. So I didn't really like*

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*that.*

*When I was in English in grade four it was kind of hard. I guess my teachers just helped me a lot. Yeah I was sent to special ed again and got frustrated with that cause I even told my teachers that I didn't like it at all.*

*I didn't like their special ed that much. I only like to work on my own. Then that same year we both got the independence award. I guess when the years gone by I got like a bit smarter but I was still having a lot of troubles. I got most improved student award like twice or three times. I can't even remember. We didn't have three years of English when we were in French immersion. Sometimes we would do a lot of English things but not that much. I guess because if some people did quit French they wouldn't be really bad at English. That was a big help.*

*We read French books but they taught us some English like we'd read some English books and well it was mostly French books. We understood the French books really good. There was a different level of books for French. Like some people in our class were really good in French so they'd get advanced books in French. Like some of us we'd just get easy words in French to like pronounce and understand.*

*And I didn't really like how that worked either cause I always wanted to move up in class but I always got stuck with people who had to slow it down or take it really slow I mean. I just wanted to always be advanced but that didn't happen in grade one, two, and three. I just stayed the same. I was sort of happy when I got out of French into English cause I thought it was a new thing. I thought I already know a lot of French so it's time to learn English. It was really hard in English because like I knew what words meant I just couldn't put them together in sentences or how to spell them or pronounce them right so. It got better in grade six or seven. Grade five was fun because we had French in there. We did French and I knew a lot of French and I guess I was top in the class. I was happy about that. I can't remember my*

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*I guess there were some teachers who were really cruel, like in grade one there was a certain teacher that wouldn't let us do things like go to the bathroom during like class. It would have to be at break. We had this really good teacher in grade three she'd like, be really nice to us and teach things real good and like explain it really good and like she was nice to the students and I guess all of our teachers except grade one really.*

*Yeah, and they didn't need to work for it. If I had been the grade one teacher I would have been nicer to the students, like helped more. I would have like given examples of what to do in that subject. Uhh, I wouldn't be so cruel and let the students get an idea of what to do and not well, let the teacher do everything like tell everyone what to do and they have to listen to her.*

*teachers from French immersion though.*

*I liked my kindergarten teacher she was really helpful cause like she'd know if you were struggling and she'd come out and give you the answer or help you whichever. Like the grade one teacher like wouldn't help you at all she'd like rather send you to a helper or just tell your parents that you are struggling and like she'd kick you out of class if you were talking. In grade two I can't really remember grade two that much I guess it was pretty easy. Then it got to grade three and the teacher was really, really nice and she was very helpful. She'd let us do whatever we want practically like we'd like have this time when we sat down and talked about things like on this rug or whatever. I really liked my grade three teacher. I hated it when people copied off me though in grade one cause I'd know they're taking my answers and it was really annoying...*

*I wouldn't, like for how young you were because you really didn't have any self-esteem, so the teacher like if I wanted to change something I wouldn't want the teacher kicking you out of the room for talking. I would just tell them to stop talking or something cause she never really gave you any warning. But there was sometimes that*

*she was being good. Like if you were sick she would like take you out of your desk and put you on the rug. In every class we had a rug thing and then she'd take care of you. I guess that was pretty good for her too.*

*I didn't like to go for help in special ed. What they mostly did in special ed what I can remember is like if we're learning something in class and I don't understand it and everyone else does, they move on. Like when I'm in special ed they teach me that same stuff except in an easier way. So while I'll be learning like little words and how to do it, the others, my class that I'm in would be learning the bigger words in French and saying them in sentences and stuff. And I'd just get farther behind because then I wouldn't know the harder words. I guess I'd be stuck. That's what I mostly hated about that. I got behind when I was in special ed. I didn't see the point of it at all. And then in speech class, I felt like it was awkward cause I didn't know what I was doing wrong. It was mostly my R's and my W's. I couldn't pronounce them really so they'd try to teach me that. I hated that so much. It frustrated me a lot. I didn't know what to do or anything. I guess I couldn't say them back then really good. Oh, I was there for a while. I was there in grade one and two and I finally told my mom to take me out and I'll do better. She took me out later on and those sounds just came.*

*When I wanted to get out of the classroom I just said I either needed to go to the washroom or take a drink or that I felt sick so I had to go to the office. Then like maybe I got to spend time in the health room and like just stay and sleep. That was fun. I only did that in grade three and not very often cause I liked grade three. I don't think I was smart enough to skip class in grade one. Then in grade two I was all around it if I didn't like the subject I'd just ask to leave.*

*I never had the idea in grade one to think of leaving the classroom. I didn't really do anything when I was in grade one, two but in*

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*grade three I guess I'd just say I wanted to go to the bathroom or get a drink of water. Then I'd just stay out longer than you usually would if I went to get a drink of water. I would do that when I was really tired, when I just needed a break. So I would go out for ten minutes and then come back. Then if I was falling behind and getting frustrated I'd do that. I guess that's mostly when I would do that.*

*Same with me pretty much.*

CHAPTER FIVE:  REFLECTIONS and INTERPRETATION

The purpose of this study was to provide an understanding of what French immersion was like for six children who left the program during their elementary years. The participants included ten year old Ashley, twelve year old Scott, eleven year old Dylan, the fifteen year old identical twins, Jesse, and David, and the youngest participant, eight year old Aaron. The conceptual framework guiding the research was adapted from Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly's narrative inquiry approach and Max Van Manen's hermeneutical–phenomenology. Both approaches focus on understanding lived experience.

Although the six participants had all received educational support while in the French immersion program Ashley was the only one diagnosed with a learning disability.  All were children with average or above average intelligence who could not function as successful learners in a French immersion classroom. This became evident once they withdrew from a French immersion program and entered a traditional English program. Each student continued to receive educational support for a time after the change to the English program. At the time of the interviews all of the boys had made remarkable progress in both academic and social situations. The twins will both graduate from grade twelve this year. Scott attends high school in grade nine, in a regular academic program. Aaron is at the top of his grade six class academically. Dylan, who no longer requires anger management classes, has now joined the senior band, and is proud to bring home his report cards. Ashley, diagnosed with dyslexia, is now in an alternate education program where her learning needs can be more closely monitored and accommodated for.

The experiences of the six students in this study would be consistent with the findings of Trites and Price's study (1976).  They found that "the type of learning disability in French immersion students was different from the pattern of deficits seen in more traditional types of

learning difficulties such as reading disability or minimal brain dysfunction" (p. 2). Their results showed that the students in French immersion who were experiencing difficulties in the program were unique in terms of the factors contributing to their learning disability. The tests indicated that in spite of above average intelligence and motor and sensory function, the students involved did not make acceptable progress in the early French immersion program. Recommendations from Trites and Prices' study included establishing a screening process prior to enrolment in a French immersion program to determine the appropriateness of the program for any given student. No such screening process is presently employed in the French immersion program.

Analysis

Most children who enter kindergarten are excited at the prospect of starting school. Exceptions may include some First Nations children, some children who live in poverty, or some children whose parents are recent immigrants or whose parents had negative experiences when they attended school. Kindergarten students start school unfamiliar with what school is all about and without the knowledge of how to "do" (Moje and Dillon, 2006)[25] school. Their experiences have generally been limited to their families and their immediate communities. They may or may not have some experience in a preschool. My experience with preschool children and kindergarten students indicates that feedback from adults, whether parent, preschool teacher, or caregiver, has generally been positive and aimed at encouraging the child. Kindergarten students start school full of enthusiasm, excitement, and anticipation and generally have an optimistic self perception with an exaggerated appraisal of their abilities. Most children do not know that within the school community there is a discourse about what constitutes a good student, including good learning and good behaviour. This classroom discourse also serves to define what is not good:

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[25] Moje and Dillon (2006) refer to knowing how to "do" school as the ability to think like a student, where the student understands classroom discourses and is able to enact the required identity to participate in the classroom community (p. 89).

things such as disruptive and confrontational behaviour, non-participation, and lack of effort. Wenger (1999) wrote, "practice requires the formation of a community whose members engage with one another and acknowledge each other as participants." (p. 149). The students in my study could not participate in the discourse of the classroom. They were disengaged onlookers on the periphery. They did not fit the French immersion program. They were different.

The participants in this study were engaging, energetic children full of curiosity and expectation for the unknown when they entered the French immersion program. They eagerly anticipated the school experience. Aaron said that he was "excited…really happy inside" while Ashley commented "ever since preschool I loved it". Ashley recounted her kindergarten experiences. She giggled while she shared how she and her classmates played and became quite unruly, all the while having fun. However, when Ashley spoke of her grade one experience she noted the change saying it was not the same. As well, when she was showing me her report cards, she took delight in going through her kindergarten report with me, category by category, reading each of the entries. When we started with the grade one report card, she told me she did not want to look at it and that I could look at it by myself while she looked at the second grade report. The enthusiasm with which she had spoken while she retold about her kindergarten experience was not evident for the grade one year.

Scott, more apprehensive than Ashley, was "nervous and scared" about the unknown. Dylan was frightened and shy, not knowing who was going to like him or not. Jesse was not intimidated by the other students when he started kindergarten unlike his brother David, who felt threatened by the size of some of the other students. David remembers his mother coming along on the first day and that the teachers were very helpful. All were enthusiastic, albeit somewhat anxious to start school. Unfortunately this enthusiasm was short-lived.

Profound changes occurred in their behaviours during their experience in the French immersion program. Dylan's mother spoke about the changes in his personality. She noted that the "very reserved, shy" child who started kindergarten would come home from school full of anger. She said he would display "anger, punching walls, and oh, throwing fits. Punching walls that was a big one, punching walls and I mean he's big for his age and it was just, it was hell" (personal communication, April 5, 2006). From the parent's perspective this behavior was unusual and unprecedented, "there was 100% turnaround, 100%. I mean I'm surprised they didn't end up them telling me that he had ADD because his behavior changed so dramatically" (personal communication, April 5, 2006). However, she never once attributed this change in behavior to his attendance at school or questioned whether there was a connection to his frustration with instruction in French. Rather, she assumed he was "pushing authority, pushing boundaries, growing up and going out on his own going to school, you know" (personal communication, April 5, 2006).

In the previous chapter I told the stories that the children shared with me. Each child offered his/her story to me willingly. All were willing to expose their vulnerability in order that their stories be heard. After careful listening to the interviews and reading and re-reading of the narratives the recurring motifs were grouped into three dominant themes. These were: an awareness of failure at school; a sense of not belonging, of being where they should not be; and, their resistance and the forms that this resistance took.

<div align="center">Awareness of Failure</div>

**"I Was Trying Really Hard But It Didn't Really Work Out"**

Throughout their interviews the students articulated their awareness of their difficulties in school through achievement I-statements (Gee, 2006). During my first interview with Ashley she

described her parents by sharing the positive qualities which she admired in both her mother and father. However, she began her own self-description by matter-of-factly stating that "I struggle with math". This brief reference to her academic struggles preceded all the other information Ashley provided about her school experience. Right from the beginning she made it extremely clear that she struggled in school.

Scott's statement, "so for me to just keep on going in French I wouldn't get anywhere" indicated his knowledge of his lack of growth in the French immersion program. Or, when Scott said "I felt like, I'm not learning anything. Like what's the point of school if you're not learning anything? I thought this is so stupid". Or, David recognizing his inability to progress with the rest of the class said, "I always wanted to move up in class… I just wanted to always be advanced but that didn't happen in grade one, two, and three. I just stayed the same". Dylan explained his experience this way, "It's kind of the main reason why I hated school that I didn't get a darn thing. It made me upset. I thought 'Why can't I do this?' I thought 'I'm stupid'".

Bouffard and Vézeau (1998) wrote that in very capable students social comparison will lead to underestimation which in turn "leads to low engagement, poor self-regulation, and lower performance than should be expected given their real competence" (p. 254).

Throughout the interviews the students repeatedly made assessment and evaluative statements about themselves, and, in comparison to other students indicating their knowledge of their performance in school. For example, although Ashley could understand some of the French instruction and asked for clarification in English when she could not, she recognized that there were differences between her and the other children. Some of the children did not need the extra help because they "just snapped on".

Despite this knowledge, there were indications that they wanted to do well. For example, when Scott talked about the help he received from the tutor and the special education teacher his words indicated that he anticipated success: "I finally thought I was going to get it". However, he finished his statement by adding, "But I didn't, so, yeah." Ashley repeatedly identified that she was "not there yet" despite extra daily work indicating her willingness to keep trying, as well as her conviction that her continued effort will "get me there". She was acutely aware that she was not at the same point as her peers academically and bypassed summer fun activities to keep trying only to realize, "Everybody was way ahead of me and I was just way behind".

It is also important to recognize that these students took responsibility for their lack of success in school. Aaron equated his difficulty with being bad and assumed full responsibility for his actions. In speaking about one particular incident he recalled questioning what was happening. His comment, "That's what I was doing", followed by "I guess", indicated his uncertainty about what the problem was. Throughout the interviews, Aaron referred to himself as "a pretty bad kid. That's how I was then…really; I was different than I am now".

Scott suggested that relying too heavily on the tutor for help made him feel like a "cheater", that the tutor was not supposed to "give it away" but rather was to "try to make you remember it, make you work". So instead of using the support of the tutor, he "just guessed. I felt like I kinda cheated or something, like I didn't do that good. I felt like a cheater cause guessing is not really good, so, and I wanted to try my hardest". He later related, "When I had to ask all the time I felt that the teacher felt that I wasn't getting anywhere and like I needed really serious help and stuff…the teacher wasn't getting anywhere with me". Jesse volunteered, "I wouldn't do what the teacher told me to for assignments in that class. I guess that wouldn't be fair to the teacher cause they were just trying to help me and I'm just like not helping them".

Chandler and Carpendale (1998) wrote that "young persons initially come to some self-understanding by seeing themselves reflected in their own intellectual efforts" (p. 148). Several times Scott referred to himself as stupid for asking for extra help saying "and like it was my fault… cause I was so stupid in French. I didn't know anything". Or Dylan who said "I didn't think I was very smart", and Ashley who alleged "everybody thought I was dumb. Mostly that's what they thought. They didn't say that but it was just their expressions".

Each of these students received regular educational support, where the students left the classroom to spend time receiving individual help from the special education teacher, Having to leave the classroom added to their frustration and did not appear to alleviate the problems they were experiencing in the classroom. Dylan explained that he did not like going for extra help saying "Not many kids went to her. I thought it was a waste of time because I usually had homework. I don't remember what she helped me with, that's what I don't remember". Ashley expressed the same sentiment about the extra help she received "I got a little bit of help in grade two from the teachers but it wasn't really helping. Like mmm we read a bit and we did some math in English. I got a bit for handwriting and that was it".

Scott also questioned the value of the time spent with the special education teacher saying "it wasn't French tutoring at all. It was all in English, I didn't need that so, that was weird. See I was supposed to be getting help from French but she gave me help from English. I just thought she was so mixed up cause I thought this was such a mix up like doing pretty bad in French and I'm doing pretty good in English and I'm having tutoring in English? She just guessed I was having troubles in English". Jesse's frustration stemmed from the fact that when he was pulled out of the classroom to receive help the rest of the class kept moving ahead with their learning and he fell even farther behind "And I'd just get farther behind because then I wouldn't know the

harder words. I guess I'd be stuck. That's what I mostly hated about that. I got behind when I was in special ed. I didn't see the point of it at all" and Dylan expressed the same concerns, "Whenever I came back to class I usually had homework so I was behind. I would go there for help and then I would come back and have to do catch-up".

Aaron and Jesse had differing feelings about the speech class that they attended. Aaron found this to be a safe and comfortable experience and looked forward to taking part in this. He described it this way, "There is a speech class we sometimes went to. We learned more speech, like speech and stuff in English. Just a group of four went like you get to learn more. It was a comfortable place. Nice and small…we do things and stuff but, it just feels comfortable there. We went every day. My favorite thing about school was speech class. It was in English". On the other hand Jesse said, "in speech class, I felt like it was awkward cause I didn't know what I was doing wrong...I hated that so much. It frustrated me a lot. I didn't know what to do or anything"

These students' low self-perceptions about their abilities developed out of their understanding of their inability to perform at an acceptable level in school and are consistent with the writing of Bouffard and Vézeau (1998). These authors stated that low student self-perceptions, although not necessarily accurate, influence self-efficacy and have lead students to perform even more poorly than should be expected. Additionally, Bouffard and Vézeau wrote, "self-evaluations of competence are important determinants of motivation and achievement" (p. 247). Despite wanting to do well in school, these children, through their self-evaluations, believed they could not "do" French immersion school and therefore believed they were not competent at school.

A Sense of Not Belonging

**"I was a green apple but they were red apples!"**

Participation in the classroom community is critical for identification within that community. Nieto (1999) wrote, "Students are empowered as learners when they can identify with school and with their teachers" (p. 152). The students in this study had identified differences between themselves and the other students in the classroom. These differences prevented them from fully engaging in the classroom community as effective learners. Wenger (1999) wrote, "Engagement in practice gives us certain experiences of participation, and what our communities pay attention to reifies us as participants" (p. 150). These students could not participate in the discourse of the classroom. They could not understand the language of instruction and could not readily follow the teacher's instructions like the other students. They could not speak the language and therefore could not communicate in the language of the classroom. As such, they became disengaged onlookers on the periphery of the classroom. They did not fit the French immersion program. They were different.

From the beginning Ashley felt she did not fit in and thought she "should go to another classroom". Although Ashley could understand some of the French instruction and asked for clarification in English when she could not, she recognized differences between her and the other children. She spoke of grade one as "a lot of things" elaborating that she felt different from the other students, and because she was "different" the other students "wouldn't want to be around me". Well the other kids progressed up to the next reading level and I didn't. It made me feel like I don't belong here. I felt weird. Weird to me is just different. Like you don't belong".

She knew that some of the children did not need the extra help because they "just snapped on" and "I was stuck at a lower reading level in French so. I knew that, yes, and the kids

were at a higher grade, so, I'm like I don't really fit in here".  Although she tried to fit in by "just go[ing] with the flow" her efforts were unsuccessful and "it made me feel like I didn't belong and that I should just go".  She could not identify the reasons why but she wanted to move to a different school saying, "I don't know why I just wanted to get out of there. I felt different from the other kids mainly. I felt different like I was really different and the other kids wouldn't want to be around me".

Scott articulated that "It felt like I didn't belong and stuff in French" and "I was in French from kindergarten to grade three, almost grade four. The days went by, they were really long. All that time I felt like a loser. It was French's fault. I tried to get out of French cause I didn't want to be a loser any more". He concluded that there were more students of his type in the English world and that "It's a different kind of people in the French program…. They're just bullies....I don't know maybe the French like changes the kids, the way they act and stuff. I don't know".

Dylan's feelings of not belonging also stemmed from his inability to learn as well as his classmates did. "The other kids learned it but I wasn't. That made me really upset. I felt I didn't fit in, like I was a green apple but they were red apples. I didn't think I was very smart". Aaron talked about usually being left alone at school. He told me he was fine with it, that it bothered him a little, but that he got used to it. Later Aaron wondered, "I don't know why people who aren't my friends don't like me".

Furthermore, the students did not report turning to their parents for support nor did they persist in discussing their difficulties with their parents. Nathan's mother said, "We've always been very close, very open, but he never talked about that [school]" (personal conversation, April 5, 2006). Dylan chose not to talk to his parents saying, "I didn't talk to my mom and dad about it that much because I didn't want to get any more help". Getting extra help made him feel singled

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out from the other students and his feelings were "And it never helped". Scott's mother stated that "he never had the tantrums or anything that said you know 'I hate this, I hate this' but you could tell inward that he was frustrated but he never really said I hate this" (personal conversation, August, 2005).

Ashley told me of daily conversations with her parents about her school day. Although she had the opportunity to share some of her frustrations with her parents, she chose not to: "After school every day we'd do the same old thing, like 'How was your day?' 'Good'. I'd say good even though it wasn't the best. I didn't tell them cause I just don't. Yeah I'd say good or good with a different tone pretty much what happened today".

On the other hand, Jesse indicated that he did tell his parents about his frustration and asked to be moved. "My mom even knows that I didn't like it. I complained all the time about it for her to take me out of that class and I'll just try even harder. Well, she never even took me out of that class. She kept me in it and it got me so frustrated". And, when broaching the subject with his father, "I remember there was a time when I didn't want to be in French and my dad told me to spell apple in English and I couldn't do it. He said 'That's why you're in French immersion'". These were not disinterested parents. The parents of these students wanted the best education for their children and believed that they were providing increased opportunities for them. Their understanding was that the program was appropriate for their children. Nathan's mother spoke about her concerns and the response and of the advice she was given by the school "they never once suggested he get held back, they encouraged us to continue with the program. I started wanting to pull him out in grade one and I was talked out of it". She was told "give it time, give it time, give it time. He'll work it out, he'll work it out, give it time".

Perhaps Dylan's explanation best sums up the reasons why the students did not push for their parents to transfer them out of the French immersion program. He explained that he did not talk to his mother about his frustration because "I felt like if I told my mom she'd probably kill me. I don't know if it was important to her. I don't know if it was. I thought she would be disappointed in me".

Teachers play a significant role in helping young students with the transition from home to school and student interaction, engagement, and performance increase when there is shared meaning between the teacher and the student (Murray & Pianta, 2007; Nieto, 1999; Ravet, 2007). Within the context of the French immersion classroom, the children in this study did not have a connection with their teachers and presented as students who were disengaged, who interacted negatively in the school setting, and who performed well below expectation.

Aaron's references to his teacher, always of the same teacher, were that he thought she was mean and he "thought I had an evil teacher in that grade. Evil". Although he explained that he now knew better and that his behaviour had in fact precipitated the negative interactions with his teacher, he continued to refer to her as "mean".

Ashley's comments about her teachers, although brief and less judgmental than Aaron's, informed of cool, reserved relationships that existed between student and teachers. She described them as "Mme. Smith and Mme. Jones, Mme. Smith, I had her twice, ummm is very nice but Mme. Jones, ummm she's allergic to chalk so now she has a white board" or "Mme. Jones would always be bugging me about my handwriting so I decided I would go to a different school. Handwriting is very important in the higher grades. The teachers need to be able to read it, I guess". Later an excerpt from her diary, albeit in a letter to the ducklings, may have expressed

her wish for a different relationship with her teacher "Hello Lucky, Rascal and Webster. Here is your lunch box. Have a happy day today. I hope you have a nice teacher".

Dylan did not remember much about his teachers saying "I liked Mme White. She's from Quebec. She speaks mostly French. She drives a purple car. I don't remember that much about my other teachers. Well I forget about my other two teachers. I only had three teachers". He conveyed a sense of apprehension, perhaps fear, towards the teachers when he expressed that he would always comply with teacher requests to speak before the class saying, "But if she told me to I'd always go up, I'd have to. I do not know what would have happened if I didn't. I never tried that, I didn't dare. I was afraid to say no".

Scott spoke at length about his grade two teacher as his favourite teacher because she did not make him feel like a failure as did his other teachers. He said "Cause she, like, she really helped me out, so, oh yeah favorite teacher, still is". Later he volunteered that "the teachers weren't that smart".

Initially, Jesse remembered some of his teachers as "really cruel" and suggested that he felt powerless at school because he had no choice in what happened. He offered that "If I had been the teacher I would have been nicer to the students, like helped more….Uhh, I wouldn't be so cruel and let the students get an idea of what to do and not well, let the teacher do everything like tell everyone what to do and they have to listen to her". But later Jesse stated that some of his teachers had been "really nice to us and teach things real good and like explain it really good and were like nice to the students".

David could not remember any of his French immersion teachers at first. However he later did make positive comments about some of the teachers. He did have warm memories of a teacher recalling," we'd like have this time when we sat down and talked about things like going

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on this rug or whatever. I really liked [that] teacher", or "But there was sometimes that she was being good. Like if you were sick she would like take you out of your desk and put you on the rug. In every class we had a rug thing and then she'd take care of you. I guess that was pretty good for her too". David spoke of the fragility of the young students and the need for teachers to consider this in their classroom dealings with their students and offered suggestions saying, "like for how young you were because you really didn't have any self-esteem, so the teacher like if I wanted to change something I wouldn't want the teacher kicking you out of the room for talking. I would just tell them to stop talking or something cause she never really gave you any warning". The children in this study lacked the strong connection with their teachers that may have enabled them to confidently become positive contributing members in their classroom community.

<center>Resistance</center>

**"I used to be the destructive one in the class"**

An active role of participation in a school community identifies "who one is, who knows what, who is good at what" (Wenger, 1999, p.150). It soon becomes common knowledge who is a good student, who is not, who gets educational support, and who gets sent to the office. Members of the school community quickly determine who "fits" and who does not, based on the ability to conform or meet the school community's expectations. The inability of these six students to actively participate within the predicated norms of the school community quickly established their identities in the classroom.

How the participants coped, as students on the edge, further entrenched them as not fitting in. Sfard and Prusak (2005) wrote, "With their tendency to act as self-fulfilling prophecies, identities are likely to play a critical role in determining whether the process of learning will end with what counts as success or with what is regarded as failure" (p. 19). And

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Wenger (1999) wrote that our identity is produced not only by what we think of ourselves or what others think about us but as a lived experience of participation in specific communities (p. 151). Ashley, Scott, Dylan, Aaron, Jesse, and David enacted who they were in the classroom in various ways. Their resistance ranged from passively refusing to do any work to more aggressive tactics such as acting out in class with disruptive behaviour, fighting at school, to physically harming themselves.

Jesse acknowledged that he would not pay attention and "I just caused trouble". He would not do any work or do the assignments that the teacher assigned. He remembered that he might have talked back to the teacher. Jesse's tone was remorseful when he volunteered this information. He stated that his behaviour had not been fair to the teacher because she had just been trying to help him.

On the other hand, David told his stories with pleasure about his unruliness. He took delight in telling of disrupting the class to annoy the teacher. He also reported turning the punitive consequences, given to him by the teacher, into opportunities to gain status as a comic in the class. David acknowledged that the first time that this happened he took it seriously, but soon these instances became opportunities for him. He said, "Then all the other times I was just writing funny things so that I'd make the class laugh. The teachers hated that. I was just like that".

Scott talked about becoming lazy and failing at school in an attempt to get his parents' attention. He said, "Kinda just lazy, not doing my homework and stuff, kinda failing so bad…so I could get out of it…and those days paid off". Scott further volunteered that in an attempt to avoid being called on by the teacher and have to speak in French he became very quiet perhaps in an attempt to become inconspicuous. He spoke of his anxiety about being called on by the

teacher, afraid of making an error and having everyone laugh at him because he did not know the answer. Although this experience had never happened he worried about it. Scott recalled his reaction when called on by the teacher: "Oh no, she asked me. I'm doomed. Like I'm done for, this is the end, like that kind of feeling. Like I wanted to just rip my hair out". He also told of often leaving the classroom in response to being called on by the teacher on the pretext of having to use the bathroom for an emergency.

On the other hand, Dylan's resistance was more aggressive. His behaviour became destructive at school and at home. Dylan recounted kicking and upsetting desks to get sent out of class. Furthermore, his progress report recorded that he needed to learn to communicate with words rather than by kicking and punching. His mother told of the years that he spent in an anger management class at school. At home venting his frustrations, he would yell and "torture anybody he would see", with his younger brothers generally being the recipients of his kicks and punches. But even more drastic were the times that Dylan would try to purposely make himself bleed by hitting himself to get out of class. He said, "trying to make myself bleed. I don't know if I don't get it and then I couldn't get very much information about it. I'd make myself bleed so I could get out of class".

Ashley did not exhibit any aggressive or disruptive behaviour as a result of her French immersion experience. Her anxiety and resistance were experienced through many varied physical symptoms. She spoke of feeling ill: "I felt kinda sick inside. Sick like, like umm you're going to throw up or something. I felt that way every day mostly but I just lived with it". And when called on by the teacher to speak in French, she said, "It felt like, like I was going to pop over and die….It's the same as falling off my bike and having to go splat right in the middle of the intersection". Ashley also imagined that the other students resented the fact that she needed

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extra help from the teacher. As a result she acknowledged these feelings: "In French it felt just like they were going to wring my neck out. One kid even made the motions of wringing somebody's neck out…. It didn't bother me that I had to get help from the teacher, but I thought the other kids minded. Like I thought one kid was going to wring my neck out for five years without letting go. And that really scared me so. One kid could wring my neck out in five minutes".

Although Ashley was the only girl taking part in this study it is important to consider whether any gender differences in the coping strategies that the children used emerged in this study. In the adult literature, gender differences in coping strategies are well documented (Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Thomsen, Wadsworth, 2001; Kohlmann, Egloff, & Hock, 2001: Kohlmann, Weidner, Dotzzauer, & Burns, 1997; Tamres, Janicki, & Helgeson, 2002: Weidner & Collins, 1993). Less is known about gender differences in the formative years. Some research found that there were no differences in coping styles between boys and girls (Altshuler & Ruble, 1989; Band & Weisz, 1988; Compas, B.E., Malcarne, V.l., & Fondacaro, K.M., 1988; Curry & Russ, 1985; Spirito, Stark, Grace, & Stamoulis, 1991). Other studies reported the opposite.

Hoffman, Levy-Shiff, & Ushpiz, (1993) wrote that boys displayed significantly more aggression as the result of stressful life events (p. 414). These findings were consistent with the efforts at coping by the boys in my study (e.g., I was a pretty mean kid, I fighted back then", "I was punching and kicking because people got me mad", "I'd yell, torture anybody I'd see, pull their legs"). In contrast, Bonica, & Henderson, (2003), reported that girls experienced higher levels of stress than boys did but coped by using internalizing strategies that afforded a protective factor resulting in fewer aggressive behaviours (p. 386). In comparison to the boys,

Ashley did not act out her resistance. Instead she turned her frustration inwards and became sick. Ashley reported that "I felt kinda sick inside' or "like you're going to throw up or something", and ". I felt that way every day mostly but I just lived with it". She used problem-focused coping strategies more frequently than the boys did. Her attempts to "catch up" by doing more work indicated that in her mind these situations were controllable stressors. On the other hand, the boys reported higher avoidant coping strategies (e.g., "I just got lazy", "I wouldn't do my work at all", "I'd just sit there and be bored"} and more anger-related aggressive coping strategies (e.g., "I used to always get into fights with a lot of people"). This information provides evidence of gender differences in the coping strategies among children in stressful situations. Gender differences played a significant role in Ashley's resistance. However, my study only included one little girl. Future studies should consider the coping behaviours of multiple informants of each gender to more accurately reflect the effects of gender on the coping strategies used and on the construction of identity.

<div align="center">Identity</div>

School Storied Identities

What was at risk with these children was the development of their identities as effective learners in the school setting based on the stories told of them at school. Gee (2001) referred to identity as "Being recognized as a certain 'kind of person', in a given context" (p. 99). In the school context these children were recognized first, by their teachers as students with learning disabilities or behavioural problems and in need of remedial help. Teachers construct these stories influenced by cultural frames that taught them certain things about children, about gender, class, and race. Teachers have learned to see the child, the student in certain ways. The child who does not fit within the parameters of that framework is seen as different and therefore deficient

and responsible for any academic or behavioural problems. Second, they were identified by their peers in some instances as the class clown, in other situations as the "bad" student frequently sent to the office for disruptive behaviour, and yet in other situations as the "dumb" student who went to special class. Lastly these students viewed their own success in school as unattainable.

Sfard and Prusak (2005) spoke of designated identities as a result of discourse about us by others (p. 19). For children experiencing difficulty at school, often displayed through disruptive unruly behavior, the teacher talk about their intellectual abilities, frequent visits to the office for disciplinary action, teacher recommendations for help from the educational support teacher, and testing by the school psychologist all send strong messages to the students that they are different. They are not performing academically or socially at an acceptable level. These messages shape a child's identity within the school milieu. Sfard and Prusak (2005) elaborated:

> The fact that narratives authored by others are among the most important sources
> of our designated identities is perhaps the main reason for the relative inertness of
> these identities. Stories once told tend to acquire a life of their own and, while
> "changing hands" stop being subject to either their author's or their hero's
> creative inventiveness. Changing designated identities that have been formed in
> childhood is a particularly difficult task. (p. 18)

Gee (2001) suggested behaviour that may be considered normal in everyday home situations may be recognized by a teacher as being one of an attention, activity, or learning problem. However, the identification of these problems requires official sanction from a recognized clinical institutional testing mechanism. Unfortunately, schools and teachers, who have appropriated the language of specialists, are applying it routinely to student behaviours that are less than ideal in a classroom setting.

Despite wanting to be involved, the students in this study felt they were not able to participate positively in the French immersion classroom community. This lack of participation prevented the creation of relations within the group that allows students to determine how they fitted within the classroom community. Furthermore, traditionally the school community values such qualities as good learning, participation, work output, appropriate behaviour, and conformity. The ability to meet these expectations validates the participants within that community. Within the school environment the social reality of these six students, continually being constructed and dependent on their interactions with others, served to reinforce the beliefs that each child held about their learning ability (Averill, 1980, p. 55).

Bouffard and Vézeau (1998) wrote, "good learning requires not only knowing how to learn, but also being motivated to learn" (p. 247). The problem with these children was not a lack of motivation, but rather the fact that they did not know how to "do" French immersion school. Ashley confirmed her motivation when she talked about spending her summer doing "spelling to help me get there but I'm just not there yet… So to catch up, tutoring during the summer. All the kids were outside having fun and I was inside working, it just made me feel… ahhh let them go, let them have fun I'll just be working ahead. For a few months I thought I was ahead really, but I wasn't I was way behind. I did a lot of work to catch up. Everybody was way ahead of me and I was just way behind".

Comparing oneself to others within our social milieu constitutes one of the greatest determinants in our judgment of our worth within that community (Averill, 1980; Bouffard & Vézeau, 1998; Wenger, 1999).

Counterstories

Clandinin, Huber, Huber, Murphy, Orr, Pearce, and Steaves (2006) wrote about how the stories that children construct about themselves serve to counteract the stories told about them in school. The school stories told by Aaron, Scott, Ashley, Dylan, David, and Jesse were stories of children who did not fit the story of school. The students were all aware of these stories. From these stories they knew that they were different from the other children. However, each built a counterstory, a cover story to live by (Clandinin et al., 2006). Although they recognized that academically they were behind their peers and sensed that they did not belong, each student drew on skills and aptitudes from outside the school experience to build his/her cover stories. For example, Ashley spoke of her self-confidence "I'm still self-confident. That's one of the rules, you have to be self-confident to do Tai Kwon Do". And, when referring to her piano lessons was able to take pride in her success and initiate the role of teacher with me:

> I'll show you how good I am. Ok, do you want me to play (plays a bit) that's
>
> called Smoky Water. It wasn't for piano. This guy played it on guitar and I just
>
> learned it. I can't play my song I forget it. This is grade two. It was harder work.
>
> I played lots. I was a star… Do you want to play? Just follow my lead! To play
>
> Smoke on the Water you need three keys, one, two, three. Duh duh duh, duh duh
>
> duh, duh, duh duh duh,duh duh. Yeah, you got it! Smoke on the water!

Jesse and David countered the school stories about themselves with statements like Jesse's: "I was actually sorta smart in French immersion. People usually ask help from me so it was pretty cool", and David's: "I hated it when, uhhh, people copied off me though in grade one cause I'd know they're taking my answers and it was really annoying and they didn't need to work for it". Furthermore, their stories of family traditions, visits with their grandfather, and

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yearly reunions with extended family involving athletic activities at the lake, helped create positive and close ties and provided them with strong identities as valued family members.

Aaron's frequent references to life on the farm provided him with stories away from school that enabled him to see himself as successful. He spoke of having steers and of how these steers would eventually provide him with money to expand his farming endeavours. "I've got five steers…Pretty soon my steers are going to go and there is going to be $6000 and me and my sister get half of that. We are both going to end up with $3000 after that. Then I'm going to get some pigs…". Aaron also took pride in his role as a big brother. Stories of making things for his sister, of wanting to protect her, and of being able to accomplish harder tasks than she did, became important in his narrative.

Clandinin et al. (2006) wrote about marginalized students creating fictionalized stories to maintain narrative coherence (p. 71). Although Dylan felt that he hated school because "I didn't get a darn thing. It made me upset. I thought, why can't I do this? I thought, I'm stupid!" he was able to draw on experiences away from school to have stories to live by. Dylan fictionalized his athletic ability by volunteering, "I like to play hockey. I don't play on a team but I might" or "I like skiing. I don't ski very much but I'm a very good skier" and of being a woodsman: "I know a lot about forests" and "I'm a good fisherman, oh yeah, I caught my four pound jack". These stories helped sustain Dylan through the school stories about him that identified him as an unsuccessful learner at school.

The tension that Scott felt in his school experience was tempered by the strong sense of family that his parents and brother provided for him. Although the differences within the individuals in his family were acknowledged, "Yeah, weird family, it's like no one has the same interests", the distinct roles attributed to each family member were recognized, acknowledged,

and valued. The difference between Scott and the successful students in his school setting was intensified by the negative spin that the stories of school attributed to his inability to perform academically at an acceptable level. In contrast to the identity ascribed to him through the stories of school, the strong acceptance of individuality at home may have helped Scott sustain his story to live by.

Clandinin et al. (2006) wrote that "counterstories are narrartives designed to subvert, to shift, and to change" (p. 171) quoting Lindemann Nelson (1995) who defined counterstories as " a story that contributes to the moral self-definition of its teller by undermining the dominant story" (p. 171). The counterstories, that the participants in this study told, helped them endure their French immersion experience. It is important that, as Clandinin et al. (2006) stressed, teachers incorporate these counterstories of the children's lives into the story of school in order that students may live "lives of hope and dignity" (p. 174).

## Discusssion

### Ashley, Dylan, Scott, Aaron, Jesse, David

### What you have given me…

My interest in uncovering these stories was initially self-serving. I felt responsible for the lack of progress of some students in my classroom in the French immersion program. I felt that their struggles as students in the French immersion program, of which I was a teacher, reflected negatively on my performance as a teacher. As an idealistic, new teacher I believed that I was sensitive to my students and their individual learning needs and that I would be able to lead them to success in school. The research about French immersion stated that all students would benefit from enrolment in the program. However, despite what the research reported, many of my students failed to thrive in the French immersion learning environment. I soon learned that this

situation was not unique to my classroom. Neither the reading that I did, nor my colleagues could provide me with any suitable explanations or suggestions. Perhaps the children could give me some insight about their experiences while in the French immersion program and of their eventual withdrawal from the program. Thus began my journey.

The reasons that French immersion students leave the program are many. It is well known that academic difficulties such as understanding, reading, or speaking French; emotional or behavioral problems; negative relationships with the teacher; and the lack of remedial help within the program have been some of the reasons cited for withdrawal from a program (Adiv, 1979; Halsall, 1989; Hayden, 1988; Lewis, 1986; Obadia & Thériault, 1997; Parkin, Morrison, & Watkin, 1987). However, Halsall (1991) and particularly Mannavarayan (2001) related poignant examples of some French immersion students who eventually left the program.

My conversations with the students in this study confirmed what previous research revealed about the whys of leaving the program. They experienced academic difficulties, they were anxious, despondent, and frustrated. They displayed inappropriate social behaviours. These occurrences further diminished their ability to function in the classroom. They coped in the best way they knew.

The six children in this study were not responsible for their failure. Rather, their failure can be attributed to multiple causes. The French immersion myth that French immersion is suitable for all children (Bruck, 1978; Corson & Lemay, 1996; Cummins & Swain, 1986; Genesee, 1976, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1991, 1992; Swain & Lapkin, 1982) and parent aspirations for their children, based on the premise that knowledge of the French language would enhance job opportunities in the future, prompted parents to enroll their children in the French immersion program. Furthermore, French immersion teachers were reluctant to advise parents about the

possibility of the inappropriateness of the French immersion program for these children. This reluctance grew out of the claim about the suitability of the program for all children, from the claim that students experiencing difficulty in French would have the same problems in an English program, and also from the fear of having the French immersion program appear as an elite program.

Ashley, David, Jesse, Aaron, Scott, and Dylan gave me access to their lived experience. They shared their lives, their hopes, their successes, and their failures with me. They shared their feelings with me. Through their stories I was able to gain a deeper understanding of what being a student in the French immersion program was like for them.

As educators, parents, and policy makers, we are challenged to question the suitability of French immersion programs for all students. There are no easy answers or solutions. French immersion programs, like any other program, are suited to some children. However, for others, French immersion is not a good fit. Because French immersion parents generally do not speak French, they must monitor their child's education more closely. Parents must play a bigger role in the decision-making about their child's education. They must feel confident to ask questions and dig deeper when recommendations such as educational support or anger management are made for their children. Parents must listen to their children.

It is important that educators recognize the domain of emotions in the educational enterprise. Lack of success in learning triggers a low self-esteem. Educators must recognize the distress signals that students are sending and act upon them. Teachers must stop routinely labeling children who do not fit their constructed framework of what a good student is. Teachers must collaborate with their students' parents to ensure that every student has optimal opportunities to learn. Sometimes that may mean recommending that a child withdraw from the

French immersion program. Poorness of fit in a program does not provide children with the educational opportunities to which they are entitled. If teachers are truly looking to provide the best learning opportunities for their students they must recognize that the French immersion program is not suited to every child.

Now there is a new direction in school divisions toward continuous improvement gauged by standardized testing, with emphasis placed on test scores that measure approved lists of knowledge and skills. Teachers may renew the tendency to consider the children in their classrooms through a new pedagogical lens. They may think and talk of students in abstract ways or in categories: those students who excel, those students who are behaviour problems, and those students who have learning disabilities. This tendency "so easily makes us look past each child's uniqueness toward common characteristics that allow us to group, sort, sift, measure, manage, and respond to children in preconceived ways" (van Manen, 1986, p. 18).

In this study I considered the stories of six children. The stories that I told were unique to these six children. Other students would have their own stories that may or may not be similar to these stories. However, the stories that these children shared with me provided significant information about their experiences in the French immersion program and their subsequent withdrawal from the program. My hope is that Ashley, Scott, Dylan, Jesse, David, and Aaron's stories will compel educators to look beyond test scores, beyond the obvious, and consider the existence of the whole child. Alvermann, Jonas, Steele, and Washington (2006) cited Moore who said:

Young people's voices offer great authenticity and intensity. Reading them---
rather than what is said about them---encourages me to slow down, reflect on
what they are saying, connect with other conversations I've had with flesh and

blood kids, and be more empathetic to their situation. (p. xxxii)

Educators must acknowledge that French immersion and school generally can be experienced in different ways and that listening to the children is a valuable means of determining what those experiences are. Listening to their stories can help in evaluating the learning situation and guide educators to make informed, compassionate decisions about their school experience.  Listening to students' stories can give educators insight into how they need to live as educators.

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APPENDIX A:

Definition of Terms

For clarity, it is necessary to define terms that are commonly used in reference to the French immersion program and to second-language acquisition. These definitions have been referred to in this document.

- Additive bilingualism occurs when positive values are attributed to both languages and the learning of the second language in no way threatens to replace the first (Umbel & Oller, 1995, p. 61).

- Automaticity in a language requires little or no attentional effort and does not reflect strategic considerations (Segalowitz, 1995, p. 83).

- Bain linguistique was an experiment in Ottawa in 1995-1996, based on the model of intensive English in Québec. Students received 450 hours of instruction in French over one school year compared to 120 hours in core French over the same period. Results showed students made significant gains as compared to the students in the traditional core French program (Netten & Germain, 2004, p. 280).

- Block scheduling consists of intensifying rather than increasing the time spent in subject learning. By devoting a half-day for ten weeks or 80 minutes a day for five months, the same material as in a regular program is covered over a shorter period of time (Netten & Germain, 2004, p. 281).

- Early immersion refers to entry into the French immersion program at the kindergarten level. Students in an early immersion program receive 100% of their instruction in French and if successful continue from K-12. However, at the outset, the students do continue to

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use English among themselves and in interactions with the teacher (McLaughlin, 1984, p. 60).

- Facilitating environment refers to an environment that values the culture and the language of both the minority and the majority groups (Umbel & Oller, 1995, p. 60).

- Fossilization refers to the situation where a learner ceases to elaborate the interlanguage regardless of exposure, new data, or instruction. The student falls back on what they know from their primary language (McLaughlin, 1982, p. 230).

- French immersion is a program designed for students whose first language is not French, in which French is the language of instruction for a significant part of the school day, that is, several or all subjects are taught in French (Lapkin, 1998, p. xv).

- Heteroglossic society refers to the notion that there is not one standard form in a language.  The meaning attributed to the spoken language may vary according to the situation, i.e. an academic situation versus a social setting. Heteroglossia is the inclusion of all conflicting voices (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 107).

- Instrumental motivation refers to acquisition of a language for utilitarian purposes such as enhancing employment opportunities, or meeting entrance requirements of university programs rather than for integrative purposes where the aim is to communicate with native speakers of the language (McLaughlin, 1982, p. 231; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981, p. 202).

- Intensive English provides an alternative to the core English programs offered in Québec. Generally offered at the Grade six level, it can be offered in many different organizational forms. The emphasis is on learning to communicate in the second

language, not through the learning of other subjects but through a variety of interesting activities (Netten & Germain, 2004, p. 279).

- Intensive French is an enrichment of the core French program where students are offered from three to four times the number of hours regularly scheduled for FSL in a concentrated period of time (five months) at the end of the elementary cycle. No other subjects are taught in the second language. Regular curriculum is compacted and taught during the period following the intensive French period of instruction (Netten & Germain, 2004, p. 283) .

- Interlanguage refers to the complex relationship between the first language and the target language (McLaughlin, 1982, p. 220).

- Interlingual errors reflect the influence of the learner's first language in their use of the second language (McLaughlin, 1982, p. 220).

- Intralingual errors reflect developmental errors found in monolingual speakers including changes in word order, the omission of high-frequency morphemes such as nouns and verb inflections and the verb *to be* (McLaughlin, 1982, p. 220).

- A late immersion program is one where students enter the French immersion program at the Grade seven level. Late immersion reduces French instructional time to six years, from Grade 7-12 (McLaughlin, 1984, p. 70).

- Majority language refers to the dominant language of the community. Generally in Canada this is English. In Saskatchewan, even most who do not come from an English background speak primarily English (Stebbins, 2000, p. 22).

- Middle immersion refers to the entry point into the French immersion program at the Grade four level (McLaughlin, 1984, p. 70).

- Minority language refers to the language of a student who does not speak the dominant language of the community. This student would speak a heritage language or the language of the home. Generally this term refers to the children from immigrant families(Stebbins, 2000, p. 23).

- Primary language acquisition refers to normal language acquisition between the ages of two and five years regardless of the number of languages acquired (McLaughlin, 1982, p. 218).

- Secondary language acquisition occurs in the naturalistic setting after primary language has been mastered. It may encompass two, three, or four languages learned simultaneously and focuses on the communicative aspect of a language (McLaughlin, 1982, p. 218).

- Sequential bilingualism refers to the learning of a second language subsequent to the first (Umbel & Oller, 1995, p. 66).

- Simultaneous bilingualism refers to the learning of two languages at the same time. Generally this occurs in the home where the child learns a minority heritage language as well as the language of the majority population (Umbel & Oller, 1995, p. 66).

- Subtractive bilinguality occurs when the second language is taught to replace the first. Generally the language of the minority group is not sufficiently valued by the more prominent language majority (Umbel & Oller, 1995, p. 61).

# APPENDIX B

## Ethics approval form

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN
**BEHAVIOURAL RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD**
http://www.usask.ca/research/ethics.shtml

**NAME:**   Richard Julian                           **Beh #05-119**
Curriculum Studies

**DATE:**    June 29, 2005

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the Application for Ethics Approval for your study "Children's Experiences: Making meaning of unsuccessful French immersion experiences" (05-119).

1. Your study has been **APPROVED SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING MINOR MODIFICATION(S):**
   - Please revise the consent form to include a statement acknowledging that data will be stored by the research supervisor for a minimum of five years after the completion of the study.

2. Please send one copy of your revisions to the Ethics Office for our records. **Please highlight or underline any changes made when resubmitting.**

3. The term of this approval is for 5 years.

4. This letter serves as your certificate of approval, **effective as of the time that the requested modifications are received by the Ethics Office.** If you require a letter of unconditional approval, please so indicate on your reply, and one will be issued to you.

5. Any significant changes to your proposed study should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

6. **This approval is valid for five years on the condition that a status report form is submitted annually to the Chair of the Research Ethics Board.** This certificate will automatically be invalidated if a status report form is not received within one month of the anniversary date. Please refer to the website for further instructions: http://www.usask.ca/research/behavrsc.shtml

I wish you a successful and informative study.

*Dr. Valerie Thompson, Chair*
University of Saskatchewan
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

VT/cc

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APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study entitled **French immersion dropouts: Making meaning in a French immersion experience.** Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask any questions you might have.

**Study Supervisor –** Dr. Richard Julien
                Department of Curriculum Studies
                College of Education
                University of Saskatchewan
                Tel: 306-966-7568

**Researcher –** Suzanne Quiring
                University of Saskatchewan
                Tel: 306-982-4811

**Purpose and Object of the Study –** This study seeks to understand the experience of students in French immersion programs who have not succeeded in their program. Three individual interviews will be conducted with you at your convenience. It is hoped that information can be gained that will lead to an understanding of how you perceive the experience you had in a French immersion program by having you reflect on and talk about your experience. Each interview will last approximately 45 minutes.

**Possible Benefits of the Study –** There is no direct benefit to the participant for participating in this study. This study may provide parents, teachers, school administrators, and senior administrators with a fuller understanding of the experience of students who have withdrawn from a French immersion program because of serious difficulties. An additional benefit may come about if schools, and parents can apply this understanding to help shape future actions within schools.

**Confidentiality –** I intend to use the interview information in a written dissertation in the form of narratives. This information will be interpreted and the interpretations will be included in the dissertation. It may also be presented at conferences or submitted in journal articles in the future. Consequently, others will have access to this information for their use and interpretation. Although direct quotations will be reported from the interviews, each participant will be asked to choose a pseudonym. All identifying information such as the name of the city, the name of the school attended and of the larger school division will be removed from the report, so that it will not be possible to identify individuals. This is to safeguard the confidentiality and anonymity of participant responses. Because the participants for this study have been selected from a small group of people, some of who might be known to each other, it is possible that a participant may be

identifiable to others on the basis of what you have said.  After the interviews, and prior to the data being included in the final report, you will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of your interviews, and to add, alter, or delete information from the transcripts as you see fit.

**Right to Withdraw –** During the interviews, at any time, you may refuse to answer individual questions.  You may withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, without penalty or consequence of any sort.  If you withdraw from the study at any time, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed and no information from your interview will be included in the report.

**Future Contact –** If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any point.  You are also free to contact me at the numbers provided above if you have questions at a later time.The university of Saskatchewan Behavioural Sciences Research Ethics Board on _ has approved this study on ethical grounds.  Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Office of Research Services (306-966-2084).  Out of town participants may call collect**.**  You may contact the researcher if you wish to receive a copy of the findings and publications resulting from the study**.**

**Consent to Participate** – I have read and understand the description provided above; I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily.  I consent to participate in the study described above, understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time.  A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.


_____          _____
**(Signature of Participant)**                          **(Date)**


_____          _____
**(Signature of Researcher)**                          **(Date)**

Appendix D

Consent Form for Parents of Participating Students

Dear Parent or Guardian:

I am planning to conduct a research study to try to understand the experience of children ho have not had success in a French Immersion experience and have eventually withdrawn from the program. This study is part of the requirements for completing my Doctor of Philosophy Degree at the University of Saskatchewan. Permission to conduct this study has been obtained from the University of Saskatchewan.

It is my hope that by asking students to talk with me about their experiences, I can begin to understand the students' perspectives. The participation of your son/daughter in my study will involve three interview sessions that will be approximately 45 minutes long.

I want to assure you that your son/daughter's participation in this study is completely voluntary. They will have the right to withdraw from this study at any time. The interviews will be taped and transcripts will be made. You and your son/daughter will be given a copy of the transcripts to read and your child can make any changes deemed necessary. At the end of the study, the transcripts and tapes will be stored at the university for a period of five years and then will be destroyed. No names will be revealed in any report of the findings. Further information pertaining to the research study may be obtained from my supervisor, Dr. Richard Julien, Department of Curriculum Studies, University of Saskatchewan. Dr. Julien's phone number is 306-966-7568.

Please complete the permission slip below and return to Suzanne Quiring at R.R. 1, Site 1, Box 1, Christopher Lake, Sask. S0J 0N0 as soon as possible. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact me at 982-4811. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Quiring
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------


I grant permission for _____to participate in this research study. I understand that my son/daughter has the right to withdraw at any time and that his/her name will not be revealed in the study report. I have received a copy of this consent form for my records.


_____          _____
(Parent/Guardian signature)                    (Date)


_____          _____
(Researcher signature)                         (Date)

APPENDIX E

Assent Form for Student Participants

Dear _____,

I have gone back to school and part of my homework is to write a report about how students who were once in the French immersion program feel about the time they were in that program. I would like to invite you to talk to me about when you were in the French immersion program. I am trying to understand what that was like for you.

Since this is not part of your regular school work, you have the choice to say yes or no to this invitation. I would like to interview you because I think what you have to say is important. I would interview you three times. Each interview would last between 30 and 45 minutes. These interviews would be done at school or at your house, whichever you and your parents decided. I would use a tape-recorder to tape our interviews, but if you wanted to turn the tape-recorder off at any time you could. If there are any questions that I ask that you don't want to answer you don't have to answer them. If you decide that you don't want to continue with the interviews you don't have to continue. I will not be upset if this is your decision nor will this affect your grades or you at school in any way.

Anything you say to me during the interviews would be kept private. It would not be repeated to other children, to teachers or to your parents. Since these interviews would be a way for me to practice, what you say to me would not be included in my report but would be used to tell me how many students I need to interview. If you have any questions now, please feel free to ask them, or if at any time during the interviews you have questions or want more information about this you can call me at 982 – 4811. If you agree to participate in this please sign your name on the form below.

I have read and understand the invitation to give my story to Mrs. Quiring. I was asked if I had any questions and received good answers. Mrs. Quiring also said that I can ask questions at any time if I have any. I agree to tell Mrs. Quiring my story in interviews knowing that I can withdraw at any time. I have received a copy of my agreement to take part in this.

_____      _____

(Signature of Student)                                    (Date)

_____

(Signature of Researcher)

# APPENDIX F

## Audiotape and Transcript Release

I, _____ have reviewed the completed transcript of my personal interviews in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate.  I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interviews with Suzanne Quiring.  I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Suzanne Quiring to be used in the manner described in the consent form.  I have received a copy of this Tape and Transcript Release Form for my own records.


_____          _____

(Participant)                                                        (Date)



_____          _____

(Parent)                                                             (Date)



_____          _____

(Researcher)                                                       (Date)