

**THE FRENCH IMMERSION PROGRAM AT ÉCOLE AGNES DAVIDSON  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

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A Project  
Submitted to the Faculty of Education  
of the University of Lethbridge  
in Partial Fulfilment of the  
Requirements for the Degree

**MASTER OF EDUCATION**

LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA

April 2000

## **Dedication**

Ce projet est dédié à mes parents qui  
m'ont toujours encouragés, inspirés et aimés.  
Merci mille fois pour tout ce que vous avez fait  
et tout ce que vous continuez à faire pour moi.

Vous êtes modèles incroyables!

Aussi à mon mari; ton amitié et ton amour m'est si précieux.  
Finalement à notre petit miracle Chloé Emma; vive l'apprentissage continu.

## **Abstract**

This project focuses on issues facing a French Immersion program in a dual-track school in Southern Alberta. This study uses information collected from the following: graduate classes, interviews conducted with my fellow French and English school teachers, administrators and parents, conferences I have attended, as well as a review of the latest research conducted in this area. The project includes the following sections. The first section describes why the French immersion program is important to me as a student and as a teacher. The second section is an introduction to the French immersion program. The third section deals with my current teaching position at our French immersion school, Agnes Davidson. The fourth section describes the issues faced in Canada's French immersion programs as well as at Agnes Davidson School. The final section recommends ways of keeping Agnes Davidson's French immersion program alive and well.

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## Chapter I

### Why the French Immersion Program is Important to Me

#### My Family

My first spoken language was French and my first schooling took place in a French setting. At a young age, I lived in Switzerland with my family and was influenced by that culture and by the French language. These influences have remained with me throughout my life. During my youth, I lived for different periods of time in Switzerland and in France and during my university years I spent a few months in Québec. I remember once being with my grandparents and not being able to speak nor understand their English.

One might wonder: why did my family travel and live in so many French speaking countries? Since their childhood years it was my parents' desire to learn the French language. Growing up in England they were fortunate to be close to French speaking countries. Both my parents were fascinated by the French culture and therefore during their school years they learned how to speak French and continued their studies in French well beyond. They found the French culture intriguing for many reasons. They thought the language was rich, the French style of living enjoyable, the food delicious, the artwork and history to be elaborate and passionate and the geographical setting different from their surroundings. For these reasons, my parents decided to devote themselves to having a better understanding of the French language and culture. Every three to four years my parents took a sabbatical leave and we traveled to French speaking countries; they wanted to pass their love of the French language and culture on to me.

## Starting a French Immersion Program in Lethbridge

Living in French speaking countries, all of my schooling was done in the French language from preschool until grade twelve. When my family returned to Lethbridge, Alberta after a stay in Switzerland, they were disappointed that I was unable to continue my French education as there was no French immersion program or Francophone programs offered in any Lethbridge schools at the time. Although the task of starting a program of this kind seemed worthwhile, it was difficult to accomplish. Through advertising in the local paper, talking with fellow co-workers and spreading the word that there was a possibility of a French Immersion program starting in Lethbridge, my parents along with other supporters managed to start a local chapter of the Canadian Parents for French. They were a small but tenacious group. They knew their battle could be very challenging, especially as we lived in a predominantly anglophone community. Perseverance and determination are words that would characterize their continuous fight for a French immersion program to be started in Lethbridge. They organized numerous meetings with other parents, school officials in public and separate systems, city council members, the minister of education of Alberta, the provincial and national Canadian Parents for French association. Finally with many letters to the federal government, they managed to start a pilot program in the Holy Spirit School District. The Lethbridge School District # 51 at the time did not think that it would be a viable program for them to offer; they felt there would not be enough support or interest. It is interesting to note that a few years after the program flourished in the separate system, the public system decided to start a French Immersion program.

### My French Immersion Schooling

In 1976, I was in grade two and I was enrolled along with 14 other students in the first year of the French Immersion program officially offered at St. Mary's School. Ahead of us was the pilot group which consisted of 10 students. Although we were a small group as I recall we were very keen and involved in the program. We had great teachers as they created a loving and caring atmosphere in our classroom. From what I can remember, we did little desk work as we mostly worked in cooperative group learning situations. We sang a lot of traditional French songs and learned a lot of poems which we loved to sing and recite during school assemblies. We often presented plays in French, such as Snow White, and we were constantly recreating real situations in our classroom. I remember creating a make believe grocery store one week where the students with play money could buy materials at the store. All of our interactions were in French. Our teachers often used real life situations in order to make our communication skills more meaningful. In grades four and five, our class corresponded with our twin city school in Québec. We exchanged letters frequently and were most excited when in grade six our class flew to Québec to meet our pen pals as well as visit Québec. This wonderful opportunity seemed to reinforce the validity of our school's French immersion program as well as make our French education seem very practical. We could communicate with first language French speaking students due to our French immersion education. Upon our return home, we were most proud to be involved in our local French immersion program. We were closely observed by the school, school board, parents and other community members to see if the program would really work. Through the dedication and continuing support of participating parents, as well as community support for the program, our French immersion program did continue.



### My Reasons for Believing in the French Immersion Program

Having been raised in a French education system and now teaching in a French immersion school, my support for the French immersion program is very strong for many reasons. First of all, I believe that my French immersion experience has opened many doors for me. Having a good knowledge of the French language, many different job opportunities were available. Working for Travel Alberta, being a French Monitor in schools, being a French storyteller, were only a few of the jobs that were offered to me because of my second language. Because of my good education in the French immersion programs as well as living in France and Switzerland, I feel that I am able to apply for any job that requires fluency in French. Most of the students who graduated with me from my French immersion class went on to find jobs that used both the English and French language; everything from engineering to television announcers. Although our degree of mastery of French may differ, I feel that our French immersion education served us well, as it enabled us to communicate competently with other French speaking people. I do acknowledge that having had more experiences outside of Canada also played a huge role in furthering my mastery of the French language.

Another reason why I believe the French immersion program opened many doors for me is because it enabled me to see things in a different light. Learning about the French and Swiss cultures made me think about things in a more open-minded manner. Now rather than simply look at things one way I have learned to seek to understand why people do things in other ways. Different cultures place values on different things. In my opinion the French culture places a higher value on food, art, music and literature than the English culture. The French culture seems to celebrate more passionately and with more pride

special events such as *St-Jean Baptiste* and *le Jour de la Bastille*. The French people seem to have more of an inner drive which is filled with pride and remembrance of the past. Politics and religion are intertwined in all of their daily activities and their continual fight to maintain their unique identity. I feel that the English culture is more globalized and thus less passionate about their culture than the French. The English culture and language is more widely accepted the world over and is less threatened than the French culture. Breaking down barriers of language and culture is a necessity and challenge that awaits and confronts each of us. The knowledge of another language and culture has not only enhanced my career but also broadened every aspect of my life.

### Summary

In summary the French immersion program has opened many doors for me because it has enlarged my communication skills. I have met people from all over the world who speak French, simply because I have learned to speak French. I have traveled to the Caribbean and seen a completely different aspect of the French culture and language than in Québec. Nevertheless both places speak French and therefore I am able to communicate in both environments. I have met many new people and made many close friends simply because of this second language exposure. Once again this has allowed me to see the world in a different light. When problem-solving situations arise I am not quick to jump to first conclusions as I know that there are always two sides to each story, and this I believe is due in part to the fact that I was raised in a bilingual environment.

Teaching in a French immersion school has only strengthened my belief in the French immersion program. It is now my turn to share with my students my experiences and make them believers in the program. On a daily basis I try to celebrate with them their French

identity in order to make them proud of the second language they are learning. I show them the benefits of learning a second language, not only in terms of jobs but also in terms of meeting new people and being able to be more accepting of others. Readily we celebrate French cultural days. For example, a few months ago we celebrated the Winter Carnival, le Carnaval d'Hiver, where we made *tire*, a maple syrup treat which is poured over snow then rolled onto a popsicle stick. We also have learned a variety of traditional French songs and dances so that students feel the livelihood of the culture.

## Chapter II

### An Overview of French Immersion Programs

French immersion is not simply another successful language teaching program-it may be the most successful program ever recorded...No program has ever been as thoroughly studied and documented, and no program, to my knowledge, has ever done as well. (Krashen, 2000)

French immersion is an internationally acclaimed Canadian innovation in second language learning that has proven successful. There are Canadian-style immersion programs in many countries, including Australia, Finland, Hong, Kong, Singapore, Spain and the United States. Over the past three decades French immersion has become a popular and highly effective approach to second language teaching. It is said to be the most researched topic of all educational innovations in Canada (Canadian Education Association, 1992). From a small enrolment of 45,000 in 1977, it has grown to become the program of choice for over 317,000 Canadian students. In Alberta today there are about 27,000 students enrolled in French immersion programs, in large and small communities (Krashen, 2000).

#### Beginnings of French Immersion in Canada

Although bilingualism and multi-lingualism occur in many parts of the world, in Canada, French immersion was initially seen as an experiment. The title of Lapkin, Swain and Argues' (1983) book *French Immersion: The Trial Balloon That Flew* captures the attitude of experimentation toward French immersion. This idea of experimentation is one reason for the extensive research surrounding French immersion. A second reason is that each generation of parents, administrators, and trustees has sought fresh evidence that

French immersion works. By this people seem to mean that French immersion will do no irreparable harm to students, that the students will learn French, and that their English language skills will not differ from those of non-immersion students. A third reason is that, as immersion has expanded, students with all levels of ability have entered programs, and researchers have wanted to check whether immersion is suitable for a wide variety of students (Lapkin, Swain & Argues, 1983).

Some of the basic claims of a French immersion program are as follows: it is a highly successful approach to second language learning, an effective way for a child to become functionally fluent in a second language while achieving all the objectives of the regular school program. Designed specifically for children whose first language is not French, the basic concept is simple. If parents can not have their child live where the language is the common means of communication, then bring the language to the child with the school being the primary means of communication. Immersion first began in Québec, and it should be remembered that the parents who initiated the program “felt that their lack of competence in French contributed to and indeed was attributable in part to the two solitudes which effectively prevented them from learning French informally from their French-speaking neighbors” (Lapkin, Swain & Argues, 1983, p. 35).

The parents who first proposed the concept of French immersion in Québec based it on a number of observations. First, young children who are exposed to a second language quickly develop accentless fluency. This is seen, for example, among children whose parents use two different languages in the home. Older children and adults have greater difficulty learning a second language and developing an authentic accent. Second, they consulted with Dr. Wallace Lambert of the Psychology Department of McGill University

and Dr. Wilder Penfield of the Montreal Neurological Institute of McGill. These experts gave insights into the positive social-psychological and cognitive aspects of bilingualism as well as pinpointing the specific brain mechanisms underlying language functions. Finally, they were confident that this home/school language switch would have no negative effect on their children's competence in English. After all, even though they were living in Québec, their children were immersed in English. Unlike immigrant children whose home language is overwhelmed and often replaced by the language of their new country, often referred to as negative or subtractive bilingualism, there was no fear that French would take precedence over English in the lives of the immersion students. This would come to be known as additive bilingualism (Lapkin, Swain & Argues, 1983).

#### Characteristics of an Immersion Program

Six characteristics have been identified to define an immersion program (Lorenz, 1990). Firstly, the target language is acquired primarily by using it for meaningful communication within the school; that is for instruction in subjects such as math, science and social studies. Secondly, the instructional strategies and materials are designed assuming that all the students do not know the target language. Thirdly, the target language is not the prevalent language of the community. Fourthly, the program begins with intensive instruction in and via the target language by teachers fluent in that language, with instruction via the first language often increasing in later years. Next, instruction of subject material is never repeated in the two languages, and finally, the program is expected to take several years to achieve its objectives, usually defined as the end of grade 12. Some authorities also note the strong role of parents in establishing and supporting immersion as a fundamental feature of the program (Lorenz, 1990).

### French Immersion Programs Offered in Alberta

There are now many variations on the immersion theme, with different points and relative amounts of instruction in French and English offered throughout Canada such as early immersion programs, middle immersion programs and late immersion programs, defined as a program beginning in grade six or later, sometimes but not necessarily after a few years of core French. These programs are often also known as “immersion tardive.” Alberta school boards offer the early total immersion program format and it is the format that is by far the most common in Canada (Carleton Board of Education, 1992). Early total immersion typically means that most or all instruction is given in French for the first few years of school, with English language arts introduced as a subject in the early grades. Alberta school boards (Alberta Education, 1990) are required by the province to introduce English language arts by grade three. In Alberta, 60-75% instruction in French is most common at the junior high level (grades seven or more). In grades 10-12, there is even more variation throughout the province, with schools offering anywhere from two to seven subjects in French each year. In all other aspects, the French immersion program in Alberta follows the same curriculum guidelines as the regular English program. Alberta Education’s Goals of Basic Education (1990) apply to all students, regardless of the language instruction.

Another type of French program where French is taught as a subject for one period each day or a few times a week. This may begin at any time from kindergarten to grade ten (depending on the local school board). It is also known in Alberta as “French as a second language” or “FSL” and in some other provinces as “basic French” or “Français de base.” The objective is to provide students with a basic knowledge of French as well as interest in

and appreciation of the French culture. The depth of this knowledge will vary according to the length and intensity of the program.

#### For whom is the French Immersion Program Intended?

The French immersion program has often been labeled as an elitist program, but in fact it is open to all students of the appropriate age. There are no selection criteria and no special fees for registration. Public information meetings and program announcements encourage all parents to consider the program for their children.

At Agnes Davidson we hold meetings at least three times a year which promote our French immersion program. The Fall Orientation meeting, which is an information session for prospective French Immersion students, features displays of students' projects, testimonials given by parents who already have children in the program as well as a general overview given by our principal.

#### How does the French Immersion Program work?

For a child learning French, the immersion way will be much the same as learning his/her first language. When he/she was a baby a parent talked and gestured while he/she watched and listened. Soon he/she began to associate the parent's words and gestures with objects, actions and feelings. Before long the first words were said, and parents were pleased the child was talking. The child continued to watch and listen, gradually learning to repeat and imitate more acceptable speech as praise was given. Gradually, the child moved from single words and phrases to sentences, and so on.

In a typical French immersion kindergarten classroom, the teacher uses French all of the time, speaking in English only if a student's health or safety is at risk. Gestures, mime, pictures and objects are used to help the children understand. Songs, poems, storytelling



and choral speaking as well as routines or sequences of activities, such as beginning every day with “bonjour,” are also used to help familiarize students with words and ideas and to encourage their earliest attempts to speak the language. Very quickly, through watching and listening, the student begins to recognize words and phrases, responding appropriately. The children begin to sing along, join in the choral speaking, add a few French words to their sentences.

It is interesting to note that the French immersion pedagogy is closely linked to the Suzuki music pedagogy, which believes that repeated imitation plays a key role in the student’s knowledge retention (Benson & Greaves, 1983). Another common trait is that immersion students, like Suzuki students, learn to be good listeners. From the beginning, they have to pay very close attention to the teacher, more so than students who are taught in their first language. They must attend not only to words but also to gestures, body movements, intonation and expression. In addition to these clues, the students soon notice the similarities between certain English and French words. Also the students are sensitive to the teacher’s verbal and kinesthetic response to what they do and say.

The teacher plays a key role in the language learning and development of the child. The teacher also listens and observes carefully to verify what information the students possess and understand. On this basis, the teacher consciously adapts his/her speech and classroom activities to assist the children. For the first couple of years, the students are not expected to speak French at all times. There is no prohibition against students speaking English. Rather, through the use of positive encouragement they are encouraged to use the new language. When they make mistakes, the teacher is not supposed to say that they are wrong, but to use repetition to model the correct form similar to how parents model speech

to their children. Claudette Tardif (1990) did a study on students' reactions to English and French immersion kindergarten classes and found the following results.

At the beginning of the year, the immersion kindergarten children often told me that they did not understand French, but they were adamant in asserting that they did understand the teacher, who spoke almost exclusively in French. For most of the immersion students, the second-language feature quickly became a natural, normal aspect of classroom life, something they just took for granted. (Tardif, 1990, p. 35)

#### How well does it work?

This is a common question asked about the French immersion programs. As mentioned above, the Canadian Education Association (1992) research shows that French immersion programs work. Research usually measures success in a language by looking at the various skills involved in communication: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Then, through studies of carefully chosen groups, researchers compared French immersion students with their peers in French second language programs, such as late immersion or core French, and with Francophone students.

The results from these studies suggests the following: by grades five or six, early total immersion students soon understand what they hear and read. Their listening comprehension is similar to that of their Francophone counterparts. The development of reading comprehension does not lag far behind. In other words, they will not be familiar with as wide a range of topics as native speakers of French, but if they are acquainted with the specific vocabulary associated with a subject, they understand almost as well as Francophone students of the same age. By junior high, their spoken and written French is quite functional. They are well able to communicate factual information, thoughts and

ideas but they do make some errors in grammar and syntax. Students do achieve a high level of functional fluency but they do not reach native-like competence by the end of grade 12. Studies of the various French second language programs clearly show that the more exposure students have to French, the better their communication skills and the greater their confidence in their ability to use the language (Canadian Education Association, 1992).

### What are the Social or Psychological Effects of Putting a Child in a French Immersion Program?

Studies have found no evidence of emotional or social difficulties linked to a child's immersion experience (Language and Society, 1984). The gentle introduction to French in the early years of an immersion program appears to help build students' confidence and ability to understand what is going on. Stresses experienced by children are often found to be related to factors other than immersion, such as difficulties at home. Immersion and second language study seem, in fact, to enhance some aspects of students' social, psychological and intellectual development. Thinking and problem solving skills, for example, may actually be strengthened by intensive exposure to a second language. This could be the result of an increased understanding of how language works, a greater sensitivity to linguistic meaning, and greater cooperation between the hemispheres of the brain. Furthermore, students do not lose their cultural identity in an immersion program, but rather seem to maintain a strong sense of their own identity while developing sensitivity towards other peoples and cultures. In particular, studies (Language and Society, 1984) have shown that French immersion students develop a greater affinity for Francophones and recognize more readily the fundamental similarities and the deep-seated

differences between Canada's two official language groups than do regular program students.

### Summary

Many factors play a part in the overall success of any educational program: for example, school setting, teachers, student motivation, parental support and involvement, as well as curriculum and resource materials. For French immersion programs, other factors such as the percentage of French offered at each grade level and the level of administrative support can influence the degree of success.

## Chapter III

### My Current Teaching Situation

Growing up in French speaking countries, being part of the local French Immersion program, and graduating with my B.A. and B.Ed. majoring in French has definitely made my working reality (Butt, 1998) possible. If I had not had these experiences I know that I would not be where I am today.

It has now been five years since I started teaching in French immersion at Agnes Davidson School. Each day is filled with a new adventure! Teaching music in French for grades two through five as well as all other subjects to my grade three students has opened my eyes to how students interact with each other. The students seem to enjoy learning French and although they may encounter difficulties, they are proud and happy to be learning a new language.

#### French Immersion at Agnes Davidson School: A dual-track School

In September 1977, the Board of Trustees of Lethbridge School District #51 commissioned a feasibility study relative to the introduction of a French Language Immersion Education Program. The study was completed in December 1978 and, as a result of the recommendations, a French Language Immersion Program was established at Agnes Davidson School in September 1979 beginning with a kindergarten and grade one program. Each year a grade was added until 1984, the program went from kindergarten to grade six, and in 1987 a grade one to nine French Immersion program was in place at Agnes Davidson Elementary School and Gilbert Paterson Junior High School. Finally in 1988 a grade ten to twelve program was implemented at Lethbridge Collegiate High School.

The program introduced at Agnes Davidson School was a full, early immersion program and by 1984, 150 pupils were registered in the program from kindergarten to grade six. The population, with rare exception, consists of pupils from an English-speaking background. In this dual track French-English school, the French program has twice the number of students as the English program.

Agnes Davidson School is a facility constructed in four stages in 1962, 1965, 1970, and with three portable expansions added in 1980. It accommodates approximately 500 ECS and grades one through 6 elementary pupils. The school is an excellent facility and is well cared for by a competent maintenance staff. As the school population increases yearly, the school is approaching its maximum occupancy rate of approximately 550. The library facility is large enough to provide services to both the French Language Immersion Education Program and the English Language Education Program. Students are bussed to Agnes Davidson from all over the city. The school is administered by a principal, Mr. Ed Wilson and an associate principal, Mrs. Jennifer Little.

Previously, the French Language Immersion Education Program was supervised by a Curriculum Associate. However due to lack of funding this position was abolished in the early 1990s. In the coming school year, 2000-2001, our school has received a provincial grant to reinstall the Curriculum Associate position as our French Immersion staff felt that our program desperately needed someone to fill this position. Mme Carolle Babin, one of our grade five teachers, was the successful candidate for this position and she will be devoting one morning per week to help other French Immersion teachers with their curriculum needs.

The Agnes Davidson School French Immersion program exists in parallel with a full

English Language Education program. This is referred to as a dual-track school. The school administration and the Central office administration felt that this concept was beneficial to all of the pupils at Agnes Davidson School. At the outset of the program, there was considerable feeling that the acceptance of the program within the community also would be facilitated by this arrangement. It was felt that the “separation” of pupils on program lines could then be avoided.

As a consequence, the organizational model established at Agnes Davidson School requires that all of the grades, regardless of the nature of their programs, be time tabled on a master timetable. It was felt that this practice was a desirable feature of the dual-track school because all pupils, regardless of program, operate under the same time frames. The staff are treated as one; all staff members attend the general staff meeting.

When the program was initially modeled in 1979, teachers of the immersion French program were used to provide instruction to regular pupils in the French as a Second Language program. Similarly, the pupils enrolled in the French Immersion Program received instruction in the English language arts program, starting in grade three, from teachers who instructed the regular English language arts program of the school. At present, in order to avoid the interruptions in the time blocks necessitated by a common timetable, most French immersion teachers are teaching their own English Language Arts classes and only the grade six English teacher has our bilingual principal teach her French as a Second Language class.

The staff members involved in the teaching of the immersion program participate in regular school life activities as well as in the activities peculiar to the French Language Immersion Education program. Cultural activities that are considered essential for the

French Language Immersion Education program also are made available to the other pupils of Agnes Davidson School.

These features were judged to be desirable and to be supportive of the dual-track system of operation adopted by the Board of Trustees of the Lethbridge School District No. 51 for the implementation of an immersion French Language Program.

#### Our School's Teaching Personnel

The staff for the dual-track program has been selected with care. Adequate information regarding the nature of the immersion program is provided and assistance for successfully teaching the program is available, mostly through a mentor program or by other immersion teachers. The instructional program is carried out at all levels in a very formal and effective manner. The French immersion teachers follow the learning resources prescribed by the Program of Studies and the curriculum guides. Staff members are aware of and use the official documents which describe the content of the French program. All of these resources are used in planning. Long-range, medium-range and daily plans are carried out by the teaching staff as well as Teacher Professional Growth Plans which are shared with our administrative team. French immersion teachers find their planning time divided between teaching pupils the language and teaching concepts by utilizing the second language being studied which is often difficult to manage. However, this planning creates a strong awareness that students in this program are learning a language that is used as a communication tool for mastering the concepts of the Alberta curriculum. Due to frequent changes in curriculum, teachers have also approached the planning task in a somewhat different manner by integrating the curriculum more intimately with language acquisition. This way the student finds it easier to cope with the increasing complexity of the



curriculum as his/her ability and fluency in the second language increases.

Agnes Davidson school currently has 22 full time teachers on staff, 14 of whom teach in the French Immersion program from kindergarten to grade six. Agnes Davidson school currently has an enrolment of 467 students from grades one to six, 310 of whom are enrolled in the French Immersion program. Each grade level has two French Immersion classes and one English program class. The average French Immersion class size is about 21 students per teacher. The French immersion teachers at this school are either francophone or anglophone; five French immersion teachers have graduated from the Québec educational system; two from Manitoba, seven from Alberta, three of those from a university majoring in French and the remaining four from The University of Lethbridge. Coming from different backgrounds and educational institutions has kept the French immersion staff alive with different views about how an immersion program should be run. Most French immersion teachers work collaboratively at each grade level in order to facilitate the task of planning as well as developing stronger long term plans for French immersion at each grade. Agnes Davidson French immersion teachers meet regularly as an entire group in order to plan activities across grade levels such as Carnival d'Hiver days, as well as to share teaching ideas. In September 2000, a new French immersion program is to be implemented and therefore teachers have been attending inservice sessions as well as group discussions about how to approach the new curriculum. Working collaboratively as a staff is a vital for keeping the French immersion program viable.

#### Background Information About my Grade Three French Immersion Students

I am currently entering my third year as a grade three teacher. Previously, I had been teaching French music and resource on a part time basis. During the 1999-2000 school

year, I had 20 students; 18 of whom were anglophones and two of whom were francophone. Four children were only children, like myself, and the rest had siblings. They all started French immersion at Agnes Davidson school's kindergarten, "Bonjour Copains," and over one half started in the local French pre school, "Les champignons." They all converse in French and seem to really enjoy being in our French immersion environment. Even though most of their parents do not speak French, they have managed to keep up with the schoolwork and homework. Their parents have been devoted to keeping the program alive. Most of the parents are involved in their child's learning, even though both parents may have full time jobs. As in an English classroom, parents and students have developed good study habits, such as nightly French reading, and students' communication and comprehension skills are exercised daily as they explain to their parents their day at school or what a certain French assignment or story was about. Many times these grade three students had to explain some of their homework to their parents, for example a math problem. The students had to organize their thoughts to give a coherent explanation because the parent can't read their textbook. This is why some say immersion helps to build "mental muscles" as the students have many opportunities to "exercise" their brains. By the end of any school year, I can typically tell how much my students really appreciate being in a French immersion classroom. They converse at recess time in French, they enjoy speaking French in class as well as to other classes, they enjoy participating in out-of-class French camps and activities, and their written and oral skills flourish.

#### My Classroom and my Teaching Style

My classroom is filled with bright colors and French posters. The posters offer not only practical information but also words of encouragement. Thoughts such as "A partir d'ici

seules les attitudes positives sont acceptées.” Throughout the year two classroom bulletin boards display students’ work, which the students have chosen to showcase. As a teacher, I believe in a democratic classroom where the students are given active roles in their learning. On most issues-such as desk arrangement, deciding who will be in whose group for group work, and evaluation measures-the students play a significant role in deciding what is best for themselves and their classroom. The students have weekly journals where they can comment and reflect on issues such as what we can do to make this classroom a better place, and the students really seem to enjoy having the opportunity to be heard as well as to see their ideas used in the classroom. Therefore I consider my classroom a very liberal environment where the students learn about respect as well as taking responsibility for their own actions, and where they practice democracy. The students are direct with their comments and ideas, which leads me to believe that my students are comfortable with me as well as with learning. The class has extended discussions about issues, through which they develop comprehension, vocabulary and listening skills in French. The students also love to read books and to listen to stories in French, as well as English. My hopes for my students are that they enjoy coming to school and that they are excited about learning French. I try to do as many group activities as possible which encourage students interact with each other. This year my students have worked on many plays, as well as sing-alongs, project presentations and many more bonding activities. As a teacher my motto is to never stop being a continual learner. When I first went into teaching I was doubtful whether I would ever become a teacher, simply because I thought I needed the wisdom and knowledge of an eighty-year old in order to understand how to teach effectively. How could I ever learn enough to teach someone else? My answer to that question is never.

Each day, each year is a learning experience for me. Every day and year, I revisit and revise my plans. What could I improve, what worked, what about trying this idea in order to better communicate the message? Everyday I find myself revisiting how I taught, and jotting down things that went well and things that I could do better. I have found these reflections help me become a better teacher. I have told my students and their parents from the beginning of the year that indeed I do not know everything and that I believe in the philosophy of being a continual learner. Since I was a young child, my summers and school years were filled with learning new things and exploring new avenues. As a teacher, I have continued with this process. Each summer I have attended summer school and throughout the year have assisted numerous workshops in order to pursue my continual mission as a lifelong learner. My students see that I am a learner like them and this I believe gives them more insight into my teaching style. They see that I am walking in their shoes, as a student, and I believe this makes them more receptive to my teaching. They know that I understand when things are difficult and frustrating at times, and that often things take a lot of time in order to do a great job; however they also see the joy, and the reward when they keep persevering with a task just as I do with my teaching and my schoolwork. Especially when teaching a second language I believe that how the teacher delivers the task at hand really affects the students' perception of it. I have always been excited about teaching in a French environment and this joy is expressed daily in my teaching, even with grammar lessons. The students see how much I enjoy speaking French as well as how often I speak French in and out of the classroom and this motivates them. I believe the power of modeling and enjoying one's work is present in my classroom. This year my students expressed their feelings about my French immersion teaching very clearly. I received a letter in the mail

from Pan Canadian, which said that my class had nominated me for a teaching award. I was thrilled, touched and really content to see that my teaching had impacted my students.

### Summary

The French immersion program continues to be important to me on a daily basis, and I believe that the more I share and do with my students to promote and learn about the culture and language, the more they will believe in it too. Having had a French education and exposure to the French and English cultures, I have been able to share with my students the benefits of having multiple interpretations of a situation. Hearing students speak and use French, and seeing them able to write coherently in French enhances my teaching. Students want to speak, write and learn in French, and I, in turn, am able to encourage these activities by promoting the French language in and out of my classroom.

As far as my job is concerned, working in a French/English teaching environment is very fulfilling. Going in the staff room and hearing the intertwining of languages is very enriching and shows that people of different languages can productively work together.

## Chapter IV

### Issues Faced in Canada's French Immersion Programs

Canada is a land of diverse cultures, largely as a result of immigration. The country has two major linguistic groups and two official languages, English and French. There are large concentrations of French-speaking Canadians in Québec, New Brunswick, Ontario and Manitoba. In addition, the country's aboriginal people make up about three per cent of the population and reflect numerous languages. Immigrants from all over the world have made Canada their home and consequently, a national policy of multiculturalism encourages the development of educational programs that reflect the country's cultural diversity.

Singh (1986) refers to Canadian bilingual education as immersion instruction in French language for native English speakers. His article pinpoints six socio-linguistic parameters that may constrain an immersion program: linguistic, psychological, sociological, economic, political and educational. In the linguistic parameter, Singh notes that the longer the range of the program, the more likely the student adoption of features of behavior of the other linguistic group. Singh states that a proper evaluation of a bilingual program should take into account not only the attitudes of children learning the second language but also the attitudes of the educators and the parents.

French immersion programs continually face numerous issues. Some challenges arise daily whilst others seem to have existed since the implementation of French immersion programs. Having read various research articles and documents, as well as attending many immersion meetings and teaching in an immersion school, here are the key issues that French immersion programs, including the one at Agnes Davidson School seem to face: the

level of acquisition of French language skills, the level of acquisition of English language skills, special education for immersion students and administrative issues such as attrition, staffing and funding.

### Language Teaching in French Immersion Programs

Language teaching in French immersion programs is one of the greatest challenges. Recent research, strongly suggests the need for more focussed language teaching in immersion classrooms (Harley, Allen, Cummins & Swain, 1987). According to Roy Lyster (1990), this suggests that weaknesses in the grammatical competence of French immersion students may be attributable to the inadequacies of teaching methodologies and materials that were designed for Francophones but are being used in French immersion classrooms.

The evolution of teaching practice in language teaching is often described as a dichotomy between older traditional methods and newer innovative methods. Lyster recommends Stern's (1981) model for a multidimensional language curriculum. This model includes a mix of complementary experimental and analytic features in the hope that together they may provide support for one another in the second language classroom. For example, students would be more receptive to language learning because they would be engaging in purposeful activities, tasks or projects, not just exercises. Another important aspect, according to Stern, would be concentrating on the diversity of social interactions where focus would be given to meaning and fluency over linguistic error avoidance and accuracy.

Immersion has been criticized (Bibeau, 1984; Hammerly, 1985; Harley, 1984; Lyster, 1987) because immersion students have difficulty using French in real-life situations and because the students speak a faulty language that is

neither correct English nor correct French. Tardif and d'Anglejan (1981) found that the accent of Anglophones hindered communication with Francophones. When reviewing these issues, researchers (Edwards, 1989; Lapkin, Swain & Shapson, 1990) conclude that these are reasons to look for precise modifications to immersion curriculum and pedagogy that will overcome the difficulties encountered, rather than reasons to abandon immersion programs. Indeed these concerns, along with other issues, have led to the current research interest in specific classroom practices. The French language skills of immersion students are high, but their skills fall below those of Francophones (Genesee, 1978; Holobow, Genesee, Lambert & Chartrand, 1987). The skills that diverge the most are speaking and writing.

Immersion programs vary according to the grade level at which they begin and the amount of time devoted to French during the school day. Early French immersion typically begins in kindergarten or grade 1; late French immersion usually begins in grade 6, 7, and middle French immersion usually begins around grade 4. The amount of time spent in French varies by grade level, by the grade at which students enter the program, and from province to province and school to school. These variations make studying language acquisition in French immersion complicated, but the abundance of evidence is clear.

Lyster (1990) also expresses another concern regarding language skill acquisition. He feels learning content simply translated from the English program does not necessarily promote the use of French as an expression of cultural identity. The result is what has been called "functional" bilingualism, which satisfies the mandate of both administrators and parents who want their children to learn French well enough to eventually compete for bilingual jobs, but not at the expense of jeopardizing their anglophone identity (Bibeau,



1982; Singh, 1986). Bibeau suggests, for example, that French Canadians view French immersion programs as ridiculous insofar as the French that students learn is not the natural language of the milieu. Singh (1986) goes further by saying that “one is often struck by the almost complete inability of some immersion pupils to engage in any sociolinguistically meaningful communication acts” (Singh, 1986, p. 561). Calvé (1986) suggests that by focussing exclusively on the communicative function of language, French immersion programs may be presenting French as a means to communicate but without sociocultural relevance, without knowledge of cultural values and viewpoints implicit in language. In order to improve the weaknesses found in grammar and sociolinguistics, immersion research studies suggest more contact with Francophones (Bibeau 1982; Swain & Lapkin, 1981). Although a costly and somewhat unfeasible undertaking for many communities in Canada, the French immersion educator must look at ways in which the second language can be perceived less as a functional code and more as a socioculturally relevant and dynamic means to discovering the richness of difference transmitted through language and found in other cultures.

A curriculum for French immersion programs that aims to challenge students to go beyond functional bilingualism requires a comprehensive model of second language curriculum. Stern’s (1978) multidimensional language curriculum that includes language, communicative, and cultural components is such a model. Stern believes that it is important to broaden the notion of teaching to include not only syntax, morphology, lexicon and phonology but also language functions as a sociocultural phenomena.

Swain and Carroll (1987) point out another language acquisition challenge. Since the initial focus of the French immersion program is on meaning, which may or may not be

accurately expressed, teachers appear to give negative feedback in the form of error correction only very inconsistently to students. In the case of French immersion students, it is clear that the incorrect use of some aspects of syntax and lexis has become automatic. According to McLaughlin (1987), once learned, "an automatic process occurs rapidly and is difficult to suppress or alter" (p. 31). This provides an explanation for what appears to be fossilized forms in French immersion language learning and suggests that an earlier focus on learning correct forms would make it easier to correct errors than waiting until a later time. The way in which language should be practiced in the second language classroom, however, is the subject of an unresolved debate in the literature.

#### Issues with French Immersion Teaching Strategies

This leads to an exploration of instructional and educational program issues in Canada. Does the manner of instruction differ when learning French or English, for example? Elaine Freeland (1996), Assistant Deputy Minister of the Québec Education Department, seems to believe that when teachers are using French as a language of instruction and English as a language of instruction it is very odd to see the same students learning French in a more formal manner than in the way they learn English. She goes on to add that the instruction in French tends to put a greater emphasis on writing skills, is less tolerant of errors and often treats reading, writing and oral skills in separate components. The English mother-tongue instruction, on the other hand, is far more holistic and literature-based. Students move daily from one instructional language emphasis to others, and appear to be acquiring both English and French languages. They appear to be adjusting their learning strategies to take into account the different instructional emphases. This makes one wonder if those differences are simply cultural, or could it be that teachers of French are putting

learners through a great deal more stress than is necessary? Freeland (1996) also states that the English language seems to have always had a somewhat accommodating nature and has suffered very little from fears of contamination by other languages. Its tendency to supplant other languages perhaps accounts for the sense of security it produces in speakers. With few exceptions, the English speakers in Québec appear to share this sense of security.

The students who have had the most number of hours in French instruction have had the highest achievement. Students who start French immersion in kindergarten do better in French than students who start late or middle immersion programs (Day & Shapson, 1989; Wesche, 1996). Early French immersion students have been found to have greater speaking ability, greater listening skills, and more confidence in using the French language than later starters. More consistent levels of performance have been found among these earlier starters as well (Lapkin, Hart & Swain, 1991).

Another pedagogical criticism that has been leveled at French immersion programs is that they are not and cannot be child centered. The basis of such thinking is that second language teaching must be teacher directed and cannot therefore respond to the interests and needs of individual children. However, Halsall and Wall (1992) have found that immersion, if designed and carried out along child-centered lines, does not have to be teacher directed. French immersion classrooms can be as child centered as English program classrooms if there is will to do that (Halsall & Wall, 1992).

At Agnes Davidson School, the French immersion teachers use a variety of teaching styles in order to meet their students' needs. Although parents may initially assume that the students will simply be taught by rote learning and that their lessons will all be teacher directed, immersion teachers from kindergarten to grade six try to use the most effective

ways to teach the language. In kindergarten, for example, the teacher uses a centres approach to teaching so that the students develop social skills as well as learn through playing. In grade three, I have encouraged my students to become more independent workers who are responsible for some of their own learning, especially with material that has already been covered and simply needs to be applied in different situations. In grade five, the students work frequently in groups as well as with computers in order to increase their abilities across the curriculum. In general, the Agnes Davidson School French immersion teachers use similar approaches to the English teachers in order to best deliver the curriculum to their students.

#### English Language Skills of French Immersion Students

Another issue that French immersion programs face is the performance of French immersion students in tests of English language skills. Parents and students have been and continue to be concerned as to whether or not students jeopardize the quality of their English language skills by taking French immersion (Halsall, 1997). Much investigation of the issue has been carried out and several summaries of findings have been assembled (Alberta Education, 1992; Carleton Board of Education, 1994; Edwards, 1989).

Researchers have found that there are some lags in English language skills in students in grades one to three. The lags disappear by grade four or five, independent of the proportion of English instruction time provided from grade three on (Edwards, 1989). Recently researchers have found that some skills, such as the figurative and metaphoric use of language, might be enhanced by second language learning (Neufeld, Arnold, Flaborea, Paterson, & St. Lewis, 1992).

At Agnes Davidson school, the English Language Arts program starts in grade three

when the students receive one hour of daily instruction in English. Given that the grade three students are tested provincially at the end of the year, some immersion teachers feel that the English program should perhaps start in grade two in order to avoid overloading the grade three students. Nevertheless, the whole French immersion teaching group saw the value in keeping the French immersion program as it is because it is what best encourages language development and consistency with French immersion students. As most immersion students are Anglophones, the principal as well as most immersion teachers feel that the students are exposed to the English language on a daily basis and that in school should expose them as much as possible to the new language in order to reinforce the French. To date, the grade three immersion students at Agnes Davidson school generally have scored lower in their English written and a little lower in English reading tests than the English grade three students. However by the time they reach grade six their scores match if not excel the English grade six students.

#### Special Needs Students and Attrition

Recently attention has turned to the issue of whether students with special needs can be served in and benefit from immersion programs. This issue is integrally related to the issue of attrition from French immersion programs. Immersion has been found to be suitable for students with academic difficulties as well as for the learning disabled (Edwards, 1989). Language disabilities are an impediment to academic achievement, but this has not been found to be more so when students are enrolled in immersion (Edwards, 1989). Yet the main reason for the transfer out of immersion continues to be difficulties with academics, language problems, and behavioral problems (Kasian, 1993).

Researchers have not concluded that students experiencing difficulties should leave

immersion programs, but have encouraged the development of strategies for working with students with special needs within their program (Wiss, 1989). Interestingly, the call for increased services within immersion has been made by researchers with extensive experience not only in immersion but also in special education (Cummins, 1984; Demers, 1994). The empirical evidence that transferring a student out of immersion leads to success for that student is scant (Carleton Board of Education, 1994). This practice of removing students who are referred from assessments from immersion cannot be supported on the basis of research. Students who remain in immersion are more likely than students who leave to have parents convinced of the value of immersion and to be devoted to having their children remain in immersion (Demers, 1994; Stern, 1991).

In Edmonton, for example, the public school district experimented for two years with a self-contained class specifically designed for learning disabled students in French immersion programs. On the basis of the evidence gathered, the program will continue and may expand (Rousseau, 1998). Although the trend in education is toward integration of students with special needs into regular classrooms along with appropriate programming and support, this experiment in a self-contained setting for French immersion students with learning disabilities will undoubtedly produce information that will be helpful to all immersion teachers. The matter of the provision of support to special needs students frequently leads to questions regarding the prediction of who will be able to cope and how well they will do in French immersion. Edwards (1989) states that prediction of success in general, in English, French immersion, or any type of program, while possible for groups of students, is not possible for individuals. Edwards believes that prediction in immersion is not possible, given the state of knowledge in the early 1990s and the measurement

instruments available, and he cautions against the overinterpretation of assessment results. Edward's discussion is based on the work of Cummins (1984), and Trites and Price (1976, 1977, 1980). There has been little research on prediction of success in immersion. In one study on stress in the immersion classroom (Ali Khan, 1993), the researcher found that more students who tested low on coping strategies and resources transferred out of immersion than remained in immersion. To date, most research on prediction has focussed on the ways of continuing to serve students in immersion programs rather than removing them.

At Agnes Davidson school there are no physically challenged students enrolled in the French immersion program. However there are several coded I.E.P. students in French immersion. Teachers recommend students at any grade level to the L.S.D. #51 psychologist for testing if the teachers have any suspicions that the student has learning difficulties. The students who are coded are then given half an hour a week of extra resource time where a teacher works one on one with them. The student also receives help in the classroom with the teacher and, if necessary, an aide in order to keep him or her abreast of the class. This year I did not have any coded students in my classroom. However last year, I did have two students who were coded. I received an aide for one hour every day as well each student had a half an hour of resource time. The Agnes Davidson resource teacher tried to identify and remediate their learning difficulties with various materials and worked with them on their basic reading skills. With both students basic learning skills were missed and not mastered. This contributed to self-esteem problems as well as compounding other learning problems. The parents, myself and the other French immersion teachers chose to keep the two students in the French immersion program as they did show potential for achieving

success if the necessary aide was given to them. Therefore, the resource teacher and I prepared the modified materials for the two students to avoid overloading them and to increase their self-esteem. Although they used the same texts as the other students, I made sure the exercises that were given were appropriate for their learning needs.

Attrition remains an issue and a challenge to French immersion programs. Halsall (1994) and Parkin, Morrison and Watkin (1987) found that the reasons for transfer from immersion at the elementary level have been as follows: difficulty in understanding, speaking, and reading French; difficulty in reading English; poor relations with the immersion teacher(s); emotional or behavioral problems and lack of remedial help. An Alberta Education study (1992) as well as other research (Bennett, Boss, Carlson & Soucy, 1982) lends support to the belief that French immersion students achieve higher marks when they take exams in English. By policy, Alberta allows students to take diploma exams in English. This is an issue requiring further study and may well be explored in the future as researchers turn their attention to the pedagogy, or teaching/learning aspects, of French immersion programs.

At Agnes Davidson school, we are committed to retaining students in French immersion. Therefore we try our best to give those students who are struggling extra help either in or out of the classroom. In general, attrition problems occur when students leave Agnes Davidson school to go to junior high school. Some parents feel that they would simply do better and have more opportunities if they went into the English program. Needless to say, every year we do encounter one or two students at various grade level that transfer into the English program simply because the parents and sometimes the teacher feel that this would be best for that student. Mostly students that have already had two to



three years in the immersion program and are still encountering serious learning problems with the language are the students encouraged to go into the English program. In this domain, Agnes Davidson school is following similar trends with other French immersion schools across Canada.

#### Administration of a French Immersion Program

Administrative issues play a role in the current immersion programs. Everything from program costs to staffing are of great concern to future French immersion programs. At the behest of trustees, Halsall (Carleton Board of Education, 1994) reviewed the cost of immersion programs offered in a number of school districts. Among the school districts surveyed was Mount Rundle, part of the Canadian Rockies School District, which in 1992 reported that immersion did not cost more than the regular program and, in fact, improved the overall financial situation. Some districts reported increased costs because of starting immersion programs, higher textbooks costs, administrative staff, and transportation. However, most boards found that immersion programs, once established, do not cost more than regular programs (Halsall, 1994).

Results of a survey sent out by the federal Official Languages Services Department gives contrasting results to Halsall's latter findings. On October 15th, 1998 Language Services sent a survey to all superintendents and principals of schools offering a French immersion program in Canada (Official Languages Services Department, 1998). The purpose of this survey was to get a better understanding of the funding and costs associated with providing a French immersion program. It was hoped that the results of the survey would serve as the basis for negotiating a new agreement between school jurisdictions and the Official Languages Department in Education. Analysis of the surveys which were

returned (16 superintendents and 66 principals) yielded the following findings. Our principal did this survey and we concurred with the following findings.

#### Funding.

In general, the additional funding provided to school jurisdictions and schools offering a French immersion program is not sufficient. The additional funding provided for the French immersion program is managed differently in each school jurisdiction, which is a cause for concern. Smaller class sizes, especially at the secondary level, represent an additional cost to schools offering a French immersion program. French immersion resources cost more; for example, library books, textbooks, software, duplicating costs, etc. In addition, schools have to provide resources for French language arts. This represents an additional cost to schools. Also, the professional development needs of French immersion teachers and aides are not being addressed due to limited funding. Finally, differential grants for Francophone, French immersion and FSL students are problematic and create tensions in some communities.

At Agnes Davidson school, funding seems to be a continual problem. The school is desperately trying to keep enrollment up in order to be able to keep the French immersion program. In the past few years, numbers have stayed consistent, with approximately 310 students enrolling from kindergarten to grade six each year in the French immersion program. However, steady enrollment in French is countered by increased enrollment in English classes. This year, for example each grade three French immersion classes had 20 students and while the grade three English class had 33 students with only one teacher. Numbers become an issue not only for funding but also for teaching staff. The principal at Agnes Davidson school hopes that through the summer of 2000 and next year students will

continue to enroll in the French immersion program in order to avoid a split grade and possibly the loss of a French immersion teacher.

Because the French immersion program is classified as an alternate program by the federal government, there are transportation costs in effect throughout Canada. These costs are covered in different ways ranging from user pay to being partly subsidized. Regardless of the different ways jurisdictions manage the transportation of students, transportation represents an additional cost.

At the present time, special busing is provided for students in French immersion. Regular school bus service for Agnes Davidson school serves the entire city. Two special buses bring immersion students from North and West Lethbridge. These buses also make several stops coming through the central Lethbridge area. Parents unable to use these services and who drive children from a distance greater than two kilometers may receive limited reimbursement through the Province of Alberta. Lunch supervision is provided for students unable to be bused home at noon because of the long distance to be traveled. These busing expenses also plague our school's funding budget. Although students are brought in from all over the city which bring funds to the school, arranging and funding transportation costs and schedules is still a challenge.

Enrolments are of concern. All partners share a responsibility in promoting French immersion programs and supporting schools in their recruitment efforts. Without a viable population, French immersion programs are threatened. In some jurisdictions, the populations are not viable and require a subsidy from the regular programs.

#### Curriculum development.

In light of the lack of resources and teaching assignments involving multiple grade

groupings, teachers require additional preparation time. There tends to be a lag time (at least one year) when implementing French language program curriculum changes. This affects the overall status and the credibility of the program.

Lack of French resources continue to plague the French immersion program at Agnes Davidson school. Although most teachers have developed a huge bank of resources mostly through their own time and effort it would facilitate teaching if more resources were made available to the French immersion program.

As French immersion teachers, we often feel at a loss where resources are concerned. Many of our materials come from Québec and are not appropriate for our immersion students. As well a lot of excellent English resources have not been translated into French, for example with our grade three math curriculum. The recommended teaching resources to match the new math curriculum was Quest 2000. I was excited to use the new materials as I thought they were well developed. However it has now been two years since the new resource has been out and still all the material has not been translated into French. Teachers end up spending a lot of time redoing the texts and exercises in order to facilitate the learning. This takes up a lot of time and as well increases photocopying costs for the school. In order to keep our program going all stakeholders need to realize the special funding needs that a French immersion school has in order to maintain its effectiveness.

#### Staffing.

Another concern in the 1980s was the rapidly expanding immersion programs and the lack of qualified immersion teachers (Obadia, 1984). Now that former immersion students are graduating from teacher preparation programs and entering the job market the situation has eased somewhat. The Canadian Education Association (1992) reported that the

availability of qualified French immersion teachers had improved over a ten-year period. In some parts of the country, however, there are still difficulties in staffing immersion programs (Asper & Whitla, 1990; Fine, 1992). The common notion that the French language skills of teachers do not matter with young students has no basis in the research literature. As far as administration of French immersion programs, principals have become more accustomed to supervising immersion programs, and support has been provided to them through workshops and the sharing of expertise through journal articles (Dagenais, 1990; Safty, 1992).

Nevertheless, despite this progress in staffing immersion programs, training teachers remains a high priority (Calvé, 1986; Tardif, 1990). Indeed, teacher education was identified as the highest priority for the 1990s (Lapkin, Swain, & Shapson, 1990). A review of the activities of the 1990s will tell us if this priority has been addressed or has fallen by the wayside because of reduced budgets.

At Agnes Davidson school, staffing issues are going to be of concern especially if enrollment does not increase. Justifying two teachers with 18-20 students in a French immersion classroom when English teachers face 30-33 students is a staffing concern. Stakeholders, for example, need to realize the importance of having sufficient staffing in the French immersion program, either with classroom teachers or specialized resources teachers. In order to keep the French immersion program viable these staffing resources need to be in place. However it is becoming increasingly difficult for English teachers to see the importance of this issue, especially as their workload increases.

### Conclusion

This review of the research literature on French immersion programs illustrates the

contribution that research has made to understanding immersion and the issues surrounding it over three decades. Research can not make the decision, however. The role of the researchers is to provide information for decision-makers. In the case of immersion, the information tells the story of success despite the issues that it faces. For example, despite the following issues, superintendents and principals did find that once the program was established with a viable population, the cost of operating and administering a French immersion program was not substantially more than for English programs. However, the additional grants received for these programs are critical for the long-term survival of these programs.

Until 1992, federal funding levels met the growing needs of French second language programs. These funds were made available through the Official Languages in Education Program of the Department of Canadian Heritage. The funds were used for classroom resources, library resources, transportation, learning assistance for French immersion students experiencing difficulties, for cultural activities, the addition of new programs, the expansion of existing programs to new grade levels, curriculum development, teacher training, research and student support such as post-secondary bursaries. However, during the 1993-94 to 1997-98 school years, funding levels were drastically reduced. There is concern that reduced funding has already affected the stability and quality of French immersion programs and that further cuts or a total withdrawal of funds will do serious damage (Carleton Board of Education, 1994).

Decision-makers face a difficult task to resolve the many issues plaguing French immersion in their school districts, for each decision must be made in light of the particular circumstances of the local setting. What the research shows is that French immersion

works. Students do learn French, and the more time they spend in French, the better their skills are. Students also learn English. In fact, French immersion might strengthen English language skills, though that is not always the perception. Creativity and divergent thinking may be fostered by bilingualism. Although there may be some students for whom immersion is inappropriate, with the exception of the severely disabled (such as autistic students), we do not yet have ways of identifying students who will not benefit from immersion. Research is still being conducted in this area. At any rate, since it is not known who will not benefit from immersion and it is known that support for individuals via special education and remedial resources has proven effective, the prudent strategy would seem to be to provide support within immersion similar to that in regular programs. It is difficult to see why it would be more costly or problematic to provide resources in one program or another. Many of the reasons for attrition have to do with the quality of immersion programs and the way the programs are structured. For example, the practice of blending students with differing numbers of hours of instruction in French has repeatedly been pointed out as a possible cause of attrition. The French language skills of some teachers and their capability in second language teaching have also been targeted as causes of attrition. Knowing the above, decision-makers should support research that leads to better teacher education and should demand funding for ongoing training for immersion teachers. Looking further down the road at the high school situation, gathering a sufficient number of students to offer a vibrant program must be weighed against the costs of transportation and students' desire to be with their friends. In order to keep the French immersion program attractive for future students and to keep the current students interested and involved, high schools need to offer the richest possible courses and extracurricular

activities in French. Decision-makers can support the aspirations of students by encouraging linkages with institutions of higher learning, such as universities and colleges, so that these institutions continue the work that has been started by the school districts.



## Chapter V

### Improving the French Immersion Program at Agnes Davidson School

A huge component to keeping a French immersion program alive and vibrant is the school culture. The school culture must immerse children in a meaningful, rich and secure second-language-learning world. A person learning a language in the real world is immersed in contexts that provide meaning and support his/her learning. An effective immersion school culture must replicate this as well as compensate for many of the elements and forces that are found in the natural language learning process but absent in schools. It is precisely because second language learning in a school is often confined to activities organized by the teacher in the classroom that planning and creating an effective immersion school culture becomes so important. There is a need to create a more natural language learning environment in immersion schooling.

When the Agnes Davidson school began to look at how we could improve our French immersion program we started with looking at what the research said. Our principal set up a French immersion committee which looked at what we, as French immersion teachers, could do to improve our program. By coincidence a conference dealing with the future of the French immersion program was being offered a few weeks after our committee was struck. I attended the conference, along with our district's Curriculum advisor, to see what ideas and issues other French immersion schools were facing in Alberta. Indeed I came back with vital information about evaluating, monitoring and improving French immersion programs. The conference stressed the importance of creating a culture that would encourage learning, both of the second language and the subject matter. It is important that school trustees, as well as school districts and school administrators reflect on the factors

that affect second language acquisition.

When I took the issues and ideas back to Agnes Davidson school committee, we started identifying our strengths, weaknesses and future goals for the French immersion program. What were doing at our school to create this vital “culture”? Our findings were as follows. In our school, the announcements are read daily in French and in English, which tells the students that the French language is valued in our school. Four years ago, a grade five French immersion teacher at our school became principal. Having a school principal who talks and communicates in the hallways in French has really helped the teachers, students, and parents see the value of the French immersion program in our school. Previous to his appointment, our school always had assistant principals who were bilingual and would be the bilingual ambassador for our school.

As far as teachers talking French amongst themselves, we have noticed as a staff that we need to work more on this area. Certain teachers are content to speak English once out of their French teaching setting. I believe this occurs for many reasons. Firstly, they feel that they can better communicate in English than in French. They say, it is easier. Secondly, because we are a dual-track school some teachers believe that they are being rude if they speak French amongst the English teaching staff; therefore they resort to the common language. Thirdly, it has simply become a habit to communicate in English during breaks. Finally, some teachers feel that they have the right to communicate in English when they are on their breaks. Personally, I find it difficult because even if I speak to certain teachers in French, they answer me in English. Therefore, other than mentioning these delicate but important communication problems during our French Immersion meetings to my principal or to fellow French Immersion teachers, I am not certain about what can be

done about the problem. Personally, I find this sad because it suggests that certain French immersion teachers do not really believe in the French immersion program. They are simply teachers teaching French.

Another concern is when student teachers come in to our school and have mentor teachers who continuously speak in English to them during their consultation time. What message is this sending to the teachers of the future? I enjoy speaking French. I simply love the language and therefore I am always speaking French to my fellow immersion teachers. Fortunately there are many teachers like me on staff. However I began to wonder if the few teachers that speak English outside their classroom could be contributing to the decline of our French immersion program? Not because they are incompetent teachers, on the contrary, they may be wonderful teachers; however if they do not believe in the program at heart, what message is this sending out to the public? Teachers need to demonstrate not only their competence in teaching, but also in speaking, reading, writing and in the way they express themselves in the target language.

What is the difference between an ordinary meal and one that immediately catches your attention and whets your appetite? What is the difference between an ordinary immersion school and one that immediately catches the students' attention and whets their appetites to learn more? What is the difference between a good immersion program and a great immersion program? The answer to these three questions is that we must pay very close attention not only with respect to what we teach but also to how we teach.

Thinking about ways that we could improve our school's delivery of the French immersion program, I decided to ask fellow teachers and administrators for their suggestions and recommendations. When I attended the *Building our Future* conference

last year, another huge component of the conference was making recommendations to the various stakeholders about French immersion programs. I was able to share in a large group format what our concerns were at our school concerning our French immersion program. Interestingly enough, many other schools shared the same concerns. What I found to be most useful about this discussion time was that the recommendations were not all directed to teachers. They were directed to the other stakeholders involved in the French immersion program, for example to trustees, superintendents, school administrators, parents, Alberta Education, provincial and federal governments. Until I attended this sharing session I had not thought of addressing recommendations about our school's issues to other stakeholders. However after being in this group I found that in fact a lot of school issues were not simply teacher concerns, they were everyone's concerns. The recommendations were gathered by Agnes Davidson French immersion teachers and Building the Future conference committees. The committees organized the recommendations to the attention of eight different groups all of whom are involved in the success of the French immersion program. Here are the recommendations given by both groups.

The first set of recommendations were directed to school trustees. Trustees need to support the promotion of the benefits of French second language education and of French immersion as a credible program choice. Also all trustees should become better informed about the French immersion program through such means as increasing their involvement with school councils and steering committees; inviting Canadian Parents for French and students/graduates to make presentations at school board meetings and attending conferences and taking advantage of other learning opportunities.

The second set of recommendations were directed to the superintendents and central

office administrators. Central office administrators should actively promote networking among their immersion schools and establish regional partnerships with neighboring districts, making provision for the participation of members from their own school districts. The purposes of such partnerships would include networking among French immersion teachers and administrators; sharing of school/district resources; sharing the services of a French immersion consultant and providing and coordinating quality professional development activities.

The third set of recommendations were directed to school administrators. School administrators should establish effective time tabling to accommodate the needs of French immersion students for continuous language learning. School administrators should create site-based teams to work with French immersion students with special needs. School administrators should work with and encourage groups such as the Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers and *Le Conseil Français* to provide teachers with professional development opportunities, through conferences, workshops and inservicing for French immersion teachers.

Creating an effective immersion school culture requires the school staff to bridge the gap between the informal or implicit curriculum and the formal curriculum from Alberta Education. In order to achieve this goal, trustees, central office personnel, and school administrators, in close cooperation with teachers, will need to examine closely the school environment and use of French in their school.

A chef will pay close attention to the variety of ingredients used in a dish and to the presentation. A good chef will not be afraid to use ingredients he/she may not know or to use familiar ingredients in an original way. Is the task of a school administrator in a French

immersion school all that different from that of the chef? Not really. The French immersion administrator will want to establish a school environment that catches the students' and parents' interest and nourishes their enthusiasm, so the parents and students will want to communicate in words and in actions that the French immersion program is an important and valued facet of the school. The French immersion administrator will implement practices and policies that demonstrate, unequivocally, support for his/her immersion staff as they implement classroom practices that support effective learning of the French language, effective acquisition of the curriculum, and an effective understanding and appreciation of the French culture. Effective teaching and learning is not just a matter of the classroom but of the whole school.

At Agnes Davidson school, the administrative team agreed that it needed to hire quality teachers in order to make the program more viable. When hiring new teachers, administrators and human resource managers need to be vitally aware of the impact that these teachers will have not only on the students but also on the program as a whole. If they hire teachers who are not fully committed to creating a French culture in the school as well as in their classroom, they will have a marginal program that may eventually dwindle to nothing. I strongly believe that administrators and teachers need to set clear expectations for teachers in an immersion program. If teachers are uncertain of these expectations, then guidelines should be set. Although this may be difficult to implement, I believe it is essential to keep the program alive. Notwithstanding the fact that we live in a predominantly English-speaking community, the need for exemplary teachers with an excellent command of French is paramount to the success of a French immersion program. Whilst these teachers need not be Francophone or of French heritage, this would be an

added bonus because they would bring cultural understanding to the program.

The Agnes Davidson school administrative team thought that it would also be a good idea to offer inservice for beginning teachers. We all agreed that it is essential for a good French immersion program to have an inservice for all teachers who are new to French immersion. This inservice should cover topics such as the expectations of our school, the needs of the immersion students and the best strategies to teach students effectively.

The fourth set of recommendations were directed towards the French Immersion teachers on staff. As Agnes Davidson French immersion teachers we decided that we should offer the following criteria in order to better develop French language skills. Language practice should be characterized by activities which focus on the perception of language functions and their forms in various contexts, subsequently used in written and oral production activities including student interaction, role-plays and conversation clubs for children at each grade level. The children could be encouraged to speak in French by offering them incentives, special certificates and rewards. It is clear that language teaching does have an important role to play in learning French in immersion classrooms. However, it must also be made clear that its effects may be most beneficial to second language learning when integrated into a truly communicative context which continues to promote extensive language production through innovative techniques such as cooperative learning activities, process writing, and computer networking.

The fifth set of recommendations were directed to the parents. Parental involvement also plays a huge part in the success of the school's French immersion program. The involvement of parents and community members is also essential to the program growth. Parents need to believe that the program is worthwhile and therefore enroll their child in

our program. Our school parent council needs to think seriously about restarting a Canadian Parents for French group. This group would definitely help existing and starting French immersion parents with the support they need when going through the French immersion program. Years ago this group started the French immersion program in Lethbridge and it is sad to see that today this group no longer exists. Parents need to see the benefits that this group can offer rather than being apprehensive about having another commitment. Other towns and cities may be able to encourage our parents with this concept simply by presenting to them at a school council meeting the value of having this group in our community and school.

Once this group is reestablished in Lethbridge, they can help to ensure that parents know about the program by working with other French immersion stakeholders to promote it.

The sixth group who received recommendations was Alberta Education. Both committees began to realize the impact that Alberta Education has on our French immersion program and the important role the department of Education plays therefore we had numerous recommendations for them. Firstly, Alberta Education should lead the creation of a provincial gathering of French immersion teachers to support and promote quality French language instruction. Secondly, Alberta Education should include district French immersion consultants/specialists in curriculum development and implementation. Next, Alberta Education should make a French version of the Early Literacy Program and corresponding materials available to school districts. This program is desperately needed at Agnes Davidson school as grade one and two students are currently receiving this program in English when they are recommended to be learning French all day. Fourthly, Alberta



Education should work in conjunction with other stakeholders to address and resolve issues related to the certification of immersion teachers and the assessment of their oral and written French proficiency as well as their second language teaching competency. Finally, Alberta Education should provide funding to school districts for the implementation of new curricula and should continue to offer workshops for French immersion administrators and consider increasing the number from two to three per year.

Another suggestion for Alberta Education was that annual conferences need to be held for all French immersion teachers to create the support and promotion of French immersion programs. During these gatherings school districts would establish regional partnerships to facilitate the sharing of resources and networking among teachers and administrators.

Also, Alberta Education needs to assist the French immersion program by producing and providing necessary resources in order to keep the program in top form. The provision of French immersion programs is guaranteed to Canadians. It is imperative that teachers have access to resources that will allow them to teach the goals and objectives of the provincial curricula. At this time, French resources are scarce in many areas and are in inadequate supply in others. Often, the materials are being published in Québec and teachers need to rework them in order to adapt them to their students. If the government supports the provision of French immersion, it is its responsibility to ensure that published materials are available for teachers. It is necessary to have publishers at the local and provincial level who are working on materials that take into consideration the environment of the Alberta child in a French Immersion program.

The final set of recommendations were directed to both the provincial and federal governments. The provincial and federal governments should continue to ensure adequate

funding is in place to support quality French second language programs as well as provide stable funding for teacher education programs. As mentioned earlier in the issues section, funding support by the government is desperately needed all the time in order to keep our program going, not only when governments are seeking reelection.

### Summary

All stakeholders play an important role in the continued success of the French immersion program. There needs to be an increase in collaboration with all persons involved in the French immersion program. The Lethbridge School District #51 French immersion program should be offered in a spirit of collaboration and include all the stakeholders: students, teachers, parents, community and French-focused community agencies. The stakeholders should feel some ownership in the program and have opportunities to contribute to certain aspects of the program: supporting student learning, participating in events and activities, participating in program decisions that affect the students (particularly, but not only, parents of special needs students). If the program is based in a dual-track school, the need for collaboration and 'buy-in' increases, as the English component of the school must also embrace the objectives of the French immersion program.

Secondly, all stakeholders make the promotion of the benefits of French second language education and French immersion programs a priority. Alberta is a land-locked province in a bilingual country. Thus, the promotion of appreciation for a recognized Canadian language and culture is of the utmost importance. French immersion schools, whether they are located in single or dual track schools have an opportunity to invite and promote such tolerance. This can be done in many ways, for example, celebrating the

successes of students involved in French projects at events such as the Heritage Fair, Science Fair, Art Shows, and assemblies focussed on song, dance and drama. Also, stakeholders could increase community awareness of French immersion programs through school and board distributed brochures, school-based community newspapers, media exposure at special events, school-sponsored events where community members might be invited (assemblies, special performances, celebrations of themes related to curriculum, pancake breakfasts, etc.)

Thirdly, all stakeholders should encourage the provincial and federal governments to underline the value and importance of French second language education through visible leadership and the provision of adequate funding.

Being a part of both committees, I showed myself and other teachers that we are not the only ones responsible for the successful continuation of our French immersion program. Indeed we have specific teacher and school things that could be done to improve our program but in the long run we are not the only one's involved. We need the help and support from all the stakeholders. In the next few years, I am hoping that these recommendations will be shared with the other stakeholders. I am interested to see where these recommendations will lead our school next year and in years to come, however, in the meanwhile as a teacher I will continue on the motto of "thinking globally and acting locally." My classroom is the first place where I can make a direct impact on my student's learning and appreciation of the French language. I can also, with the help of other teachers, make slow changes with the French immersion program at Agnes Davidson school. Being actively involved is the key to keeping our program going, and that is my main goal as a French immersion teacher and advocate.

## Chapter VI

### My Future Goals as a French Immersion Teacher at Agnes Davidson School

Schools offering immersion programs differ from regular schools in that they require children to learn concepts, skills and attitudes in French at the same time as they are acquiring the language itself. In immersion, the second language used by children to negotiate and structure meanings becomes a primary focus of the teaching-learning process. This significant difference between regular and immersion schooling must be taken into account when defining, planning and creating the school environment. In other words, the culture in a school offering an immersion program cannot be a carbon copy of the culture that exists in a school where the language of instruction is the language of the home and of the community at large.

In the Agnes Davidson school goals for 2000-2001, the staff included a goal which dealt with the promotion of our French immersion program. French immersion teachers, like myself, want our program to stay as vibrant and as strong as it was when it was introduced in the early 1980s and I believe as a teacher I play a large role in keeping the success of the program alive.

In conjunction with our school goal, this past year, the Alberta Education system introduced a new evaluative measure called the Teacher Professional Growth Plans, which are intended to reflect the individual professional goals of a teacher and how they will affect his/her teaching. Having been a French immersion student myself and now teaching in a French immersion setting, I decided to integrate our school goal of French immersion promotion with my personal Teacher Professional Growth Plan for the coming years.

### Professional Goal #1

My first goal is to become a more active participant in the promotion of the French immersion program at Agnes Davidson school. As I mentioned in my first chapter, it was due to a determined group of parents that the French immersion program was started in Lethbridge. Through the promotion of the program, by French immersion advocates the program kept growing throughout the years. I believe it is time for me to become an active advocate of the French immersion program. As a teacher, I can certainly do more in order to show not only what my grade three French immersion students and music students can do, but also show the public what our dual track school is about.

Therefore my first step is to continue being a member of the Agnes Davidson school French immersion committee. I would like to propose to the committee some of my ideas of how to reach the public. For example, a few years ago a promotional flyer was created for our school; however I believe that it is time that this flyer be updated and more readily available to the public. I could be in charge of creating not only a new and updated flyer but also including more French immersion materials on our school website. Flyers could be distributed with our school newspaper which is delivered to the neighboring houses and could also be placed in the Lethbridge Shopper and other such flyers.

Another idea would be to have two open houses during the year, where the general public could come and see our dual track program. Once again being on the French immersion committee, I would ask their help and support in suggesting this idea to our staff. I realize that a lot of teachers may feel like this involves more work; however if the open house simply meant displaying students' work on a bulletin board or trifold then this

should not be a huge task for them to do, especially if the students get involved in the presentation.

Another idea would be to encourage the students to be advocates as well. Once again, I envision our students becoming active participants in our school promotion. The students are filled with creative ideas which often simply need to be structured and organized in order to be carried out. Our school offers numerous co-curricular activities during the lunch hour, both in French and English. With the help of a division two French immersion teacher, I would like to help the students become educational leaders in our French immersion programs. For example, a few students could be in charge of collecting data; asking French immersion students what co-curricular activities they would like to see offered at lunch time or what suggestions they would have about how we could better promote our dual-track school, maybe with after school French programs or special French celebration days, like *Carnaval d'hiver*. I believe that our students are the key to making our French immersion program a success and therefore I want to use their resources to help better the cause.

By becoming a more active advocate I believe I will be giving back to the program as my parents did so many years ago. By becoming involved, I may encourage other teachers, students and families to join the cause and this can only be a positive step for our program.

### Professional Goal #2

My second goal would be to keep working on ways to improve my second language teaching. I believe that it is crucial to develop oral and vocabulary skills at the early French immersion grades in order to give students a good base for future learning. However in order to develop oral and vocabulary skills the students need to attain a certain level of long

term memory retention beginning with the mastery of basic skills. Memory retention leads to the process of automaticity which is necessary when learning a new language (Tardif, 1990). I believe that the lack of memory retention skills causes many students to feel frustrated and resentful when studying a foreign language because they think they are hopelessly lost and have no way to improve.

Therefore in the upcoming year, I would like to implement new teaching techniques, such as Baker and Brown's memory retention tactics (including SQ3R), Boyle's memory retention ideas and Haggstrom's organizational techniques with the grade three students in order to see if the students will retain more information which in turn will assist them in their language learning.

#### Baker and Brown's memory retention tactics.

As Baker and Brown (1990) point out, reading for comprehension and reading for retention (i.e., studying) are not identical skills. The more students interact with the material, the more likely they will be able to retrieve it. Indeed, there are many ways to interact with the material. They suggest a few specific techniques that will help students store information in their long-term memory, for example, rehearsal--repeating items or sets of information (for example, repeat or encode) or using mnemonics as a cognitive cueing structure. Here are some examples of mnemonic cues, rhyme patterns such as "i before e except after c"; acronyms such as MRS. R. VANDERTAMP (verbs used in past tense with "ETRE"); acrostic cues, for example ROYGBIV - Richard of York gave battle in vain; using pegwords, which are associations based on rhymes which incorporate visual imagery; using the loci method which visualizes items to be learned stored in a specific location; finally, the keyword method where there is a visual link between the pronunciation of a foreign word to

its English translation. Baker and Brown also encourage note-taking, question-asking, highlighting material and the SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite and Review) method in order to achieve better comprehension and retention of material.

As part of my achieving my second goal, I would like to implement the SQ3R tactic with the grade three students. Known to be a beneficial study strategy, SQ3R seeks to increase students' comprehension, concentration and retention of textbook material with a certain real world validity. At first I would like to use the tactic with their language instruction, starting with simple textbook materials and then I would like to progress with more difficult textbook materials. I believe that using the tactic will improve the student's acquisition of automaticity and mastery of the second language.

The premise of the SQ3R tactic is that the learner is not merely reading but studying. The first letter S (survey) is often thought of as "road map to the material." In order to survey, the reader must read the chapter title and the introduction material; look at the chapter headings; notice charts, vocabulary, pictures; and finally read the summary and study questions. The goal of surveying is to define what the student is expected to learn in the chapter.

The letters Q and the first R represent question and read. These two steps encourage the active involvement of the reader in the text. In order to increase comprehension, the reader must be critical and alert. A simple way to achieve this is by turning the headings into questions. Students generate their own questions which lead them to become more involved in what they are reading.

The second R stands for recite. By looking away from the text, the student should be able to recite the answers to their previous questions. Here the transfer of short-term



memory to the long-term memory can occur. Through reciting, students learn the valuable tool of monitoring their own comprehension. As Brown stresses, "effective learning requires an active monitoring of one's own cognitive activities. Failure to monitor can lead to serious reading problems" (1984, p. 354).

The final R is for review, looking back at the headings and answering the questions again. The positive reaction by teachers and students to the SQ3R strategy shows that it is an effective strategy for teaching content area reading and definitely has a place in beginning language courses (Baker & Brown, 1990).

I am hoping that by using the SQ3R tactic, the students will feel more capable with their acquisition and mastery not only of language concepts but also with other subjects.

#### Boyle's memory retention ideas.

The next learning strategy I would like to use with the grade three students is suggested by other researchers, such as Boyle (1993), who suggest additional strategies to help French immersion students develop better memory retention.

As foreign language instruction becomes more proficiency-oriented, the majority of theorists favor placing vocabulary into a meaningful context. Ensuring daily practice of new and already learned lexical items need not be a chore dreaded by both teacher and students, but can develop into one of the most eagerly awaited parts of each new lesson ( p. 226).

Boyle presents new exciting ways to encourage vocabulary retention with students. She says that the key to success in language learning is learning vocabulary so that the students can take it home with them and formulate their own independent studies. The emphasis is on self monitoring. Boyle suggests several classroom ideas and strategies that

could be used to enhance the students' vocabulary retention, such as supplementing textbooks with authentic materials such as newspapers, advertisements, and short articles in the language. This will increase the students' vocabulary as well as highlight the vocabulary items that are most often encountered beyond the classroom setting.

Another strategy would be to arrange the vocabulary list in semantic fields such as color, related adjectives, or according to relationships. The teacher could also supplement the vocabulary with usage questions that require individualized responses and relate the questions to grammatical formations or to placing a word into its context. Narrating a story in which target words interact with those previously learned by the use of audiovisual and visual materials is another tool that could be used. For example, pictures can improve retention and comprehension, as long as they do not contain too much information. A teacher could share with the students his/her personal experiences in order to reinforce the vocabulary as well as inject some solid cultural instruction. The use of communicative exercises such as role playing, predicting and comparing as well as the use of games such as "Facts in Five," "Odd man out" and "Find the plot" really helped with student learning. Boyle believes that by using these classroom activities, long-term recall will improve by concrete organization of the lexicon.

#### Haggstrom's organizational ideas.

When I started my Masters program, I was introduced to the research of Margaret Haggstrom (1983) which dealt with automaticity and the importance of teaching basic study skills. In the coming year, I would like to implement goal setting ideas suggested by Haggstrom. For example, I would like to teach my students how to set goals and become more organized with their learning. Introducing goals for each unit helps the grade three

students to become organized. Then they will be able to see what we are going to learn as well as what my expectations are of them by the end of the unit. I would like to encourage my students to set their own goals at the beginning of each unit and this would help them keep focused. They have something to work for as they have set their own learning expectations. I believe that my students would feel responsible for their own learning, which I find really helps them become more better learners. I am hoping that by year end, I would see a huge growth in my students as they learnt how to organize themselves as well as take an active part in their learning.

Research (Baker & Brown, 1990; Haggstrom, 1983) shows that time spent teaching beginning language students how to read and study effectively and to self-monitor their comprehension not only enhances learning but significantly increases effective use of time for students and instructors alike. It can also lead to more positive attitudes toward language learning. It is hoped that by giving students the tools to study more effectively on their own and self-monitor their progress, they will become independent learners not only in foreign languages but in all subject areas.

### Professional Goal #3

My third goal would be to improve the students' oral skills. Indeed our students can speak French fairly fluently; however I would like to see their oral skills pushed even further. Here are the three areas where the students need improvement with their oral skills. First of all the students need to develop a better basic vocabulary and grammar. They need to be able to communicate clearly and without hesitation when asked simple questions, such "Quel age as-tu?" or "Quel est ton nom?" Most students can answer the latter questions as they have been practiced since they started school; however some students are

still confused about which verb or which tense to use. Therefore when the questions or the oral message becomes more complex the students mix everything together in hopes that the answer makes some sense or they revert to easier oral statements or plead ignorance.

Secondly, I believe that our students need to develop better listening skills in order to assist them with their oral comprehension. For example, often a teacher may speak very slowly or with a certain accent and voice intonation and therefore the student's ear becomes accustomed to processing information in that certain way. However when the student encounters a different speaker, often the student's listening skills diminish as his or her ear is not used to the change in speed, pitch or pronunciation. The students need to be subject to all kinds of oral media in order to facilitate their oral communication. Finally, students need to know how to speak French correctly. This involves learning correct grammar structure, good vocabulary and pronunciation. Often students have a tendency to mix both languages together, often called "franglais." If the students are not corrected continuously and immediately, "franglais" becomes part of their oral and written production in turn changes the whole validity of a French immersion program.

In order to improve the grade three student's oral skills, I would like to create a French environment in my classroom. Having experienced living in French speaking settings throughout my childhood, I am convinced that this greatly helped my French oral skills. Each day, the continuous repetition of French words were heard by my ears. Although a lot of written exercises were also had, my French accent was developed not through writing but listening. The power of the ear, as Suzuki would say, is far greater than sight. Therefore in order to recreate the French setting, I experienced as a learner, I would like to implement more of Suzuki's philosophy and music ideas in my French immersion classroom as I

believe one would help the other. I would like to look into more research that Benson and Greaves have done regarding Suzuki violin and French immersion. Seeing that I teach Suzuki violin at lunch hours to mostly French immersion students I would like to see if there is a correlation between the two programs. Using my Suzuki background and knowledge, I would like to set up a Suzuki French immersion classroom in order to see if language learning would become more effective for the students. Therefore one of my goals is to research the Suzuki method and its correlation with language learning.

### General Conclusion of the Project

While it was never a simple task, teaching today faces many new challenges. The economic and social environment is being transformed by the information explosion and by the dizzying pace of technological change, as well as by globalization, growing competitive pressures, and changing social structures. In big-city schools, one may hear a dozen mother tongues other than English or French. Many students are hungry; many come from broken homes; teachers are increasingly being called upon to fill a vacuum left by institutions that used to be the cornerstone of society, such as the family and the church. Mentally and physically handicapped children have been integrated into the regular public school system. In many cities, violence in schools has grown, in both poor and affluent neighborhoods.

Teachers are often ill prepared to meet these challenges. In addition, they must accommodate changes in educational philosophies and teaching methodologies, only to find later that the pendulum has begun to move back toward the originating position. For some the goal of schools is to teach students the skills and subjects perhaps even including consumer habits necessary for participation in the workforce. Others believe that schools are agents of social change. Yet others believe that a school's mission is to impart

Canadian values, a role that is especially challenging in Canada with its strong commitment to multiculturalism. Still others see school as intended to encourage the development of individual self-esteem and to assist students in becoming lifelong learners.

In addition to these beliefs and responses, Jane Gaskell (1995) states that since the early 1990s all educational institutions have been functioning in a climate of intense scrutiny. She identifies four major areas of concern: the structure of public education, the quality of schools, the challenges of meeting the educational needs of a pluralistic society, and the economic relevance of schooling. Some believe that the current quality of educational standards found in schools is too low. However, the problem is not necessarily a decline in the performance of students, but rather the requirement in a rapidly changing world for people with more knowledge and higher thinking skills than ever before. As the research and our experiences at Agnes Davidson School indicates, the story of French immersion can be a successful one. However it is up to us as educators to enhance and promote French immersion programs in order to keep them growing for future generations.

Studies of immersion graduates confirm their enthusiasm for the French immersion program. Halsall and Wall's 1992 study of immersion graduates in the Ottawa area reported that most were highly satisfied with their immersion experience and cited better job opportunities and functional French skills as their reasons. Many also noted a greater openness to other cultures. In this study, 19 out of 21 graduates said they would send their own children to immersion programs. A similar study (Tardif, 1990) in Saskatchewan and Alberta found that 86% of graduates were glad to have studied French immersion and would do it again.

In concluding this summary of my research pertaining to French immersion programs,

many factors play a part in the overall success of any educational program: school setting, teachers, student motivation, parental support and involvement, curriculum and resource materials, just to name a few. Language learning is a lifelong experience and I am living proof of that. How well we learn even our first language is influenced not only by our schooling, but also by our experiences, maturity, and the opportunities we have throughout our lives to hear, read and use language in all its forms oral and written, casual and formal. I feel very fortunate to have been raised by parents who provided me with many experiences and opportunities to live and learn in numerous French settings. All these experiences have led me to be who I am today, a graduate from the French immersion program as well as a believer in the French immersion program itself.

The research has shown that the overall objectives of the French immersion program continue to be met. The students achieve equivalent levels of learning in the content of all subjects taken, whether they are instructed in English or in French. Also, the students do become functionally bilingual; that is, they are able and willing to participate easily in conversations in French or English, they are able to take further education as appropriate to their abilities and interests, and they are able to accept employment where French is the language of work. The French immersion program keeps providing opportunities for students to gain insight into the common attitudes and values of the French-speaking community as well as to become learners with a greater awareness of global issues. This is something I truly believe in. The French immersion program has led me to look at the world in different light due to the fact that I learned about another culture. Not only did I learn the language, but I also experienced how Francophones live on a daily basis. Maya Angelou (1993), I believe, states it best in the following quote:

I do know, however, that being exposed to the existence of other languages increases the perception that the world is populated by people who not only speak differently from oneself but whose cultures and philosophies are other than one's own...Perhaps travel cannot prevent bigotry, but by demonstrating that all peoples cry, laugh, eat, worry and die, it can introduce the idea that if we try to understand each other, we may even become friends. (p. 12)

One thing is certain about learning another language, the knowledge of another language and culture enhances a person's career and broadens every aspect of his/her life. Knowing first hand that this is true, I feel most proud to be a French immersion teacher who continues to strive to create an even better French immersion program.



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