RESEARCH OF MENTORSHIP IN A PRIMARY FRENCH IMMERSION PROGRAM

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A One-Credit 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, 1998

Abstract

This paper describes the background, rationale, origin and components of an ongoing qualitative research project on mentorship at the primary level of French immersion in the Red Deer Catholic District.

The history and rationale are described in the opening chapter followed by a review of the literature, developing the philosophical basis of the project. The next chapter delves into the philosophy of French immersion teaching in particular. Both researchers have been involved in program development of French immersion at the provincial level which has contributed to the concepts elaborated throughout the project. Ongoing pedagogical research reveals new and more effective ways of educational practice resulting in frequent paradigm shifts. This, along with the foundations of French immersion philosophy, has led to the continuing evolution, elaboration and adaptation of this project.

A depiction of the mentorship project itself is delineated followed by a detailed description of the evaluation procedures used to ensure the program's success and viability. Supporting documents and illustrations are included in the appendices.

TABLE of CONTENTS

PROJECT HISTORY AND RATIONALE

The phrase "It takes a whole village to educate a child," was frequently heard during the United Nations *International Year of the Child*. That phrase was used to underscore the need for nothing less than global participation in the education of future generations.

As professional educators, we have long recognized the holistic nature of the child and the vast array of resources and personnel required to meet that child's educational needs adequately. Each child arrives at school with his/her own personal needs; spiritual, intellectual, cultural, physical and emotional. Within our school systems we are richly blessed to have in place a vast network of resources in many shapes and forms such as technology, learning assistance, educational resources and manipulatives, family and community support services and links with other agencies and professions.

In this paper we wish to explore the French immersion experience from the perspective of primary classroom teachers. We have come to recognize and appreciate the role of parents as their child's first teacher. We believe that parents and teachers can complement each other's roles in the educational process. No single individual can meet all the needs of

children. Cooperation and collaboration between stakeholders is not only desirable, it is essential.

Increasingly, in this era of post-modernism, recognition is being given to the holistic nature of the child, to the need for child-centered education and to the need for a greater diversity in educational practice. Policy makers at all levels of government, as well as international bodies like the United Nations are beginning to acknowledge the rights and needs of children. This calls for ever more involvement of other stakeholders in the education of children.

Learning is ongoing; it is a lifelong process. We want to learn more about language learning; and we are constantly searching for innovative ways to perfect our teaching. We strive in search of the "ideal" setting in which to "immerse" our students so as to facilitate their second-language development. In our nine years of experience in the French immersion program, we have attempted to build on the principle which is the foundation of French immersion education: to create an environment in the second-language classroom which closely resembles that of the home environment where first-language acquisition naturally occurs.

Our content-based curriculum also becomes process-based curriculum. In other words, we are teaching curriculum in a second

language. In our roles as educators, we meet with doubts and frustrations in attempting to foster an environment conducive to second-language learning for our students. Some of the more challenging experiences have since brought us to this point of reflection: we are wondering how realistic it is to expect a young anglophone child to naturally acquire a second-language while "immersed" in a French immersion classroom? How does a French immersion child bridge the English home environment and the French school environment with minimal stress and maximum ease? In what ways does the second-language teacher provide the link between the safe, familiar English home territory and the foreign or different French frontier? How can the French immersion teacher further promote the proficiency of the literacy and language skills of primary students, taking into consideration their varied learning styles? How can the anglophone parent successfully bridge the language barrier between home and school?

In this decade, schools are partnering with a wide variety of business enterprises in the hopes that these mergers will lead to an enriched educational practice to prepare students for their future roles in society. Corporations are carving a niche for themselves within the educational institutions of this country. People whose stake in the educational process was once considered remote are now involved. What about those who are directly involved in raising the labour force for the next generation? What is the role of parents in their child's education? Province-wide, school

systems are moving towards greater integration of parents as partners in their child's progress through site-based management. Although parent involvement has remained advisory, given the forward momentum this movement has gained, the role of parents may yet again evolve and change.

Parental Involvement

Action taken by parents to become more involved in classroom activities and to learn more about their children's progress closely aligns with the "Parent School Partnership Model" (Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, Hemphill, 1991): "...parents who take action to support the school's efforts are more successful in promoting their child's literacy achievement than those who do not" (p. 117). We believe that the rich literacy environment that parents can offer their children both before and while children are enrolled in a French immersion program is one of the most stabilizing structures in their children's bilingual program. The anglophone student often comes "home" to his/her first language to make sense of the second-language school experiences. The home literacy environment complements the school's by providing varied English literacy experiences and informal encounters with language which the school environment cannot sustain. The school, in turn, offers models for second-language literacy development in a more formal context that the home doesn't usually provide. In this way, the French immersion experience

4

becomes a "complementary" rather than a "compensatory" approach to education (Snow, Barnes,Chandler, Goodman, Hemphill, 1991).

Communication is essential between parents and teachers. Carey (1991a) has said that " bilingual programs should be designed to open doors of communication, not to close them" (p. 971). Increased and enhanced communication between home and school, between parents and teachers is the underlying principle of our mentorship program.

Given that the majority of parents are not francophone, we had to find a way to resolve this issue of language barriers between home and school. How can we implicate parents in the education of their child if they do not speak the language of instruction? This poses a serious problem. We have to find or devise a role for parents to play so that all parties will derive some benefit. How can we merge the culture of the home and the culture of the school? In "A Framework for Educational Change in Alberta" (The Alberta Teacher's Association, 1995) one of five highlighted fundamental principles of education is the goal to have "parents as partners" during the course of their child's education.

We believe that a common vision by parent and teacher is a powerful and unifying force in overcoming barriers between home and school. There is a need to build a connection between home and school to provide a

solid foundation on which to build the child's French immersion experience. Carey (1984) has stated that the values and attitudes communicated to the child on bilingualism are " the most powerful cluster of variables that will influence a student's performance in an immersion program..." (p. 258)

Typically, French immersion parents have chosen the program. They follow their child's progress very closely. They are usually actively involved. What is the experience of the child whose parents do not share the values of life, language and learning which are fostered by the "typical" French immersion parents; the child whose parents are unwilling or unable to provide a rich first-language literacy environment? What additional barriers does this child confront in the French immersion journey? How does this child cope with fewer support systems? We believe that this child is "at risk." In fact, we believe most children in French immersion are more "at risk" than their English peers, in this particular sense.

Alberta Education's *Vision for the Nineties* articulates the need for educational partnership with the parents and the school community. It states:

> "All schools will welcome parents to be fully involved in their children's education...and parents will support their schools and teachers, helping them achieve their mutual goals."

The reality is, of the 168 hours in a week, teachers are responsible for teaching students for 27 hours. Parents are their children's most powerful teachers. The provincial plan of action envisions parents being "actively involved" and as teachers we know such active involvement is the way parents help their children learn. Education also thrives outside the classroom, beyond the pages of books; education is ongoing and a parent is a child's most influential guide. Home is the classroom with the most profound lessons. In *Parenting the Gifted--Developing the Promise*, (1981, p. 10) Sheila and Joseph Perino write:

> "Research indicates that children learn from the most important people around them, their parents being their most important models. Whether parents instruct directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, they are still the prime teachers and personality makers of their children. This is true for any child, gifted or not. The parents and the home environment are the most important variables in what the child is likely to become."

Education must be viewed as a joint responsibility of the school, community and family (McGregor, 1991).

Origins of Project

Our project had its origins in the year 1994. We, as French immersion teachers, find ourselves in a minority. Seldom do we have opportunities to meet, to discuss and to plan with other teachers who are following the same curriculum as we are and who teach at the same grade level. In the fall of 1993, both teacher-researchers (authors of this study)

7

began teaching at the Grade One level in a French immersion center in the same school. The fact that we were both teaching the same grade level provided us with excellent opportunities to share, to discuss, to plan and to develop professionally together. These sessions, usually held after school hours, provided the impetus for many projects, ideas and activities which we later shared with our students.

Out of these discussions arose the idea for a mentorship project which we believed we could implement with our students. We believed some of our students to be "at risk", although not in the usual sense of the word. Acknowledging that a large majority of our parents are not francophone, we recognized that this could place some of our students "at risk" in the sense that, aside from the support within the school, these children may not have support to develop the reading and writing process, in a second language, at home. Not only could this be detrimental to the students, it could also be detrimental to immersion programs as a whole. Yet, who could we find as mentors to help these children if their parents could not speak , read or write in French? Tutors are available but are also expensive. Moreover, parents are not always willing or financially able to follow that route. If children are experiencing difficulty in an immersion program, parents frequently suggest moving them to an English program as soon as possible. The reasons for this are that parents will be

better able to assist their children in their mother tongue and the child will have less chance of "falling behind" if placed in a regular school.

Bruck (1978) concluded that the problems experienced by a child in a French immersion program can persist even when the child is switched to the English stream. Bruck points to evidence that better performance of a child in the English stream may be related to the fact that many "switchers" receive extra help in the areas of weakness. She reports that although linguistic skills are significantly related to achievement in both immersion and regular programs, there is no evidence that immersion has any differential effect on the academic progress of children with poor linguistic skills. For this reason, Bruck maintains that the French immersion setting is an ideal environment in which children with learning disabilities can acquire a second language. These findings were later confirmed by other researchers. Cummins (1979) supports Bruck's findings that children who remain in immersion programs despite academic difficulties progress just as well in cognitive and academic skills as those who transfer to a regular English program. Genesee (1983) found that below average students can master certain aspects of the French language to the same extent as average or above average students. Wiss (1989) discovered in a case study that a student may display evidence of similar deficits in both languages. In 1988, Safty concluded that students enrolled in French immersion programs

maintain and develop proficiency in their first language and that bilingualism is found to augment certain cognitive skills and to enhance intellectual development.

Slavin (1992) acknowledges that almost all children, regardless of social class or other factors, begin first grade full of enthusiasm, motivation, and self-confidence, fully expecting to succeed. In this article about preventing early school failure, Slavin also alludes to the fact that failing to learn to read in the early grades has severe consequences. Citing longitudinal studies (Lloyd, 1978; Kelly, Veldman & Mcguire, 1964), Slavin indicates that disadvantaged third graders who have failed one or more grades and are reading below grade level are extremely unlikely to complete high school.

All the educational research about the affect of children indicate a high positive correlation between self-esteem and successful academic experiences. Affective factors unquestionably impact upon students. Anxiety, self-diffidence, weak motivation and poor attitude are all factors that can impede reading comprehension (Cadrin and Sawchuk, 1996).

We wondered if we could devise and develop an activity which could, at the same time as it involved non French speaking parents, promote the positive self-esteem of the child and develop language and

10

reading skills in French. Thus was the entry-level question of our qualitative action research project formulated. We proposed a project which would involve French immersion students and English speaking parents. This project would include activities which would enhance the self-esteem of the child, strengthen the rapport between home and school and develop language skills of the students.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON FRENCH IMMERSION

The majority of research into French immersion education has considered the global impact of the program. These large-scale studies have addressed the specification and rating of programs, political arguments for the French immersion option and an emphasis on what is "not lost". The effectiveness of these programs has traditionally been measured on scales of academic standards (Genesee, 1987; Krashen, 1991; Lapkin, 1984), linguistic development (Carey, 1984; Cummins, 1983), and instructional outcomes (Carey, 1991b; Edwards and Rehorick, 1990). We would like to suggest that to really know the worthiness of this educational endeavour, more in depth research needs to consider the individual experiences of the student, teacher and parent; their values, attitudes and feelings toward the program and learning in general. Researchers need to somehow reach the level of the individual child and, in addition, to carefully document what immersion teachers actually do in their classrooms. In these attempts, we may come to observe the natural interaction processes in the classroom between the student and the teacher that develop second-language literacy and learning. Another consideration for researchers is to study the nature of the home literacy environment and its influence on the child's second-language development in the classroom.

12

In their article "French immersion Research: A Call for New Perspectives", Tardif and Weber (1987) review the existing research attempting to characterize the general orientation taken thus far by Canadian research in the field of French immersion education. They state that the majority of studies fall into the categories of program and student evaluation, pedagogical aspects of immersion programs and bilingualism and bilingual education. They maintain that there is very little in-depth Canadian research on second language acquisition processes within the classroom context and very little research on interaction processes in French immersion classrooms. They maintain that research perspectives are needed which permit the researcher to describe and understand the complexities of classroom life. Such ethnographic research, with its emphasis on thick description, on process, on meaning structures, and on the natural setting as the source of data, provides useful tools which allows the researcher to explore such complex phenomena as classroom processes. There is a definite need for qualitative research in immersion.

Researchers have defined literacy as a "mode of communication that takes on meaning within specific contexts" (Weinstein, 1984, p. 478). It is a set of mechanical skills used in the decoding of print; particularly reading and writing (Snow, 1983). The latter view goes beyond the notion of literacy skills to include the ability to exhibit "literate behaviours," using written and spoken language to communicate, reflect and interpret (Brice-

Heath,1991). By these definitions, literacy will be considered to comprise reading and writing abilities. Oral literacy, speaking and listening, will be referred to as language.

The Home Literacy Environment and the Nature of First-Language Acquisition

The development of literacy in children has dominated the research field for many years. Researchers have been intrigued with those children who arrive at school already exhibiting behaviours of conventional literacy. Investigators began looking more closely at the home literacy environments of these children. Numerous studies (Morrow, 1985; Teale, 1984; Wells,1986) have since concluded that the home literacy environment plays a crucial role in early literacy development. A strong relationship has also been found between success in reading at school and preschool experience with being read to at home: "...results from research consistently indicate that being read to is one type of experience that delightfully and effectively ushers a child in the world of literacy" (Teale, 1984, p. 120). The parents foster an interest in books by reading often to their children, by providing time for their family to read together and through modelling literacy by reading a wide variety of literature in their own leisure time. Reading materials are easily accessible to the children throughout the house (Morrow, 1985). Researchers have suggested that it

is what takes place during storybook reading, the kind of interactions between parents and children, that will significantly impact the young learner's understanding of print and shape his/her attitude toward literature (Morrow, 1989; Taylor, 1987; Wells, 1986).

A major factor in literacy development has been the active social interaction between parents and children during storybook exchanges. Through these interactions, the parent and child negotiate the meaning of the text cooperatively (Teale, 1984). Parents support the conversation by providing positive reinforcement for the child's responses, answering and asking questions, expanding upon the child's responses and relating the text to real-life experiences (Morrow, 1989; Taylor, 1983; Teale,1984). The technique of using the listener's knowledge to make sense of the text as "life-to-text interaction", is being recognised. Taylor (1983) refers this connecting of the illustrated text with the child's world as enabling children "to integrate their experiences of everyday life in readiness for their negotiations of tomorrow" (p. 153). The experience is also positive in that the talk and the stories give validation for the child's own inner storying: the internal mode of making sense of his/her world. Given these positive outcomes, it is not surprising that the regular sharing of a storybook with children, accompanied by verbal interactions, has been found to positively affect the child's attitude toward reading and lead the child to associate reading with pleasure (Morrow, 1989).

Literacy development has also been strongly linked to children's oral use of language (Morrow, 1985). Children are "seekers after meaning", says Wells (1986), trying to find the patterns and to incorporate them into their developing language system. Children's interaction with others help to test what they know, to make connections between what they know and what they are able to understand. At home then, talking and learning is characterized by collaboration in the negotiation of meaning (Wells, G. and Wells, J., 1984). The use of oral language then serves a meaningful purpose for the children's writing endeavours.

In all of these encounters with print, children see reading, writing and speaking as functional, purposeful and useful. Research suggests that young children are more likely to become involved in formal reading if their early reading behaviours have been associated with meaningful, functional uses of print (Morrow, 1985; Taylor, 1983).

French Immersion Legislative and Political Background

Developing successful immersion programs across the country did not occur without growing pains. There existed a very real concern on the part of Anglophone parents regarding the possible detrimental effect that French immersion might have on the development of English language skills. French immersion did not originate with Francophones trying to

"impose" their language on others although the uninformed may attempt to perceive it as such. French immersion is a phenomenon of English-speaking Canadians representing a determined effort on their part to overcome difficulties and inhibitions in learning a second language (St. Jean, p. 1).

Immersion classes are not language classes. French immersion is teaching *in* French, not teaching *of* French. The new language is learned by use and not solely by formal language instruction (Language and Society, 1984).

To really understand the "raison d'être" of French immersion programs, the political background must be addressed. In 1969 the Official Languages Act declared Canada officially bilingual and gave Francophones and Anglophones equal rights and status in federal matters and deliberations. This Act gave Canada a unique status as a country. It is one of the rare countries where two majorities are recognized. These fundamental sociopolitical reasons give French a certain status - a majority in Quebec where English is a minority and a minority throughout the rest of Canada where English is a majority.

As a result of the Official Language Act, bilingualism became a reality and laws and constitutional guarantees were created to support it.

Canadians have consistently elected governments that promote tolerance, understanding and equality between the two language communities (MacKinnon, 1990).

The implication of this for Alberta came in 1968 and in 1970 with changes to the School Act to permit boards and private schools to offer instruction in French from grades one to twelve. In 1969, the Calgary Catholic school district began its first "bilingual" French program. In 1970, the first federal grants for "Bilingualism in Education" became available.

In 1988, Canada adopted Bill C-72 which recognises the linguistic duality and broadens the scope of Canadian language reform. The new act, which recognises the language right arising from the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, contains provisions concerning service to the public, language of work and the participation of English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians in federal institutions. It assigns a general regulatory power to the Governor in Council and to the other federal agencies that regulate the activities of third parties. Treasury Board is responsible for the general direction and co-ordination of language policies and programs in all non-Parliamentary federal institutions, and the Secretary of State is to co-ordinate implementation by federal institutions of the government's commitment to enhance the vitality of the English and French linguistic

minority communities in co-operation with the provincial and municipal governments and the private sector (Our Two Official Languages over Time, p. 35). With such legislation, the Canadian public increasingly perceives the learning of French as a second language as being beneficial, particularly where it concerns job-oriented incentives.

The phenomenal growth of French immersion and core French programs has clearly reflected new parental expectations. Parents hold the principle that Canada should be a bilingual nation, (Nagy and Klaiman, 1988) the belief that their children will benefit economically from bilingualism, and the hope that they will develop an appreciation for French-Canadian culture (Bienvenue, 1986).

As immersion programs grow, social tensions can develop. English-speaking parents want their children to attend neighborhood schools. As immersion programs swallow up certain schools, parents have formed "concerned parents" organizations to argue against the growth of immersion programs (Burns and Olson, 1981). There is always the danger of polarization by different interest and social groups.

The Ontario Teachers' Federation, in an exceptional example, promotes a bilingual and bicultural philosophy which is far removed from the "I want to learn French to get a job" attitude. The following is a

summary of the minimal requirements in terms of sociopolitical ideology:

1. The bilingual character of Canada arises from the presence of a French-speaking minority and is not only a historical, constitutional and social fact but is also of the highest importance to the Canadian Confederation.

2. Equality of rights and status for those who are English-speaking and for those who are French-speaking is a major goal, requiring the safeguards of laws and of the Constitution of Canada.

3. The survival and the flourishing of English-speaking and French-speaking communities in Canada and their protection against assimilation is a right which all Canadian authorities should safeguard and respect.

4. The school is an instrument of major importance in maintaining the existence of a functioning linguistic community.

5. Because of the overwhelming dominance of English language media of culture and communication in North America, special measures are required for the support and protection of the vehicle of French language and culture (OTE/FEO, 1984).

There still exists many unresolved negative feelings between English and French Canadians which have the potential to impact upon the sociopolitical aspects of immersion. Behind every language program lies a linguistic philosophy along with teaching methods, approaches, materials and guidelines. Thus, one of the underlying issues is to preserve and

promote the immersion program as a viable, suitable alternative for all children.

French Immersion School Environment

The concerns expressed by parents of students in French immersion programs can be identified in five main categories, though Heffernan (1995) and others have identified several other foci of immersion research.

1. Are the English skills of students affected by participating in a program using French as the language of instruction?

2. How much French do immersion students actually learn?

3. Do immersion students studying subjects like Science or Mathematics in French learn them as well as if they were taught in English?

4. Is there a relationship between cognitive development and academic success in immersion programs?

5. What are the social-psychological implications of immersion education? (Heffernan, 1986; Tétrault, 1988)

A review of the literature on French immersion programs reveals research findings which address each of these questions. Tétrault (1988) refers to a study undertaken by Swain in which upper elementary immersion students wrote on the topic of why they liked or disliked being Canadian. The analysis of the contents were quite revelatory. Immersion

students gave two or three times more reasons for liking their Canadian identity than did the English control group. In a ratio of three to one, the immersion students described the rich and varied cultural and linguistic composition of Canada as a positive feature. Twenty percent of the immersion students commented on the ability to speak more than one language whereas none of the control group mentioned this fact. The non-immersion students tended to focus on the physical attributes and natural beauty of the country whereas immersion students tended to comment on the beauty of linguistic and cultural diversity.

Because English language skills were of such concern in a new program, these have been evaluated over the years and across programs using a great variety of techniques. These include standardized tests measuring vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, punctuation, spelling and grammar, the measurement of communicative abilities and sensitivity to the needs of the listener (Genesee, Tucker and Lambert, 1975). Generally speaking, where English speaking or listening comprehension have been assessed (Lambert and Tucker, 1972) results indicate similarities between immersion and non-immersion students (Swain, 1979).

Thus, in answer to the important question of the consequences of immersion education for native language development, the research

findings are consistent and clear. They indicate no long-term detrimental effects on English language development and for early total immersion students at least, a long-term enhancement of first-language skills (Swain, 1979).

In the French immersion program, the development of literacy in the second language is likened to first-language literacy development in the home (Krashen, 1991). The principles which facilitate first-language acquisition underlie the goals of French immersion: language is language to be used, to communicate meaningfully and to learn (Safty, 1990; Genesee, 1987). In this way, language is used as a vehicle for teaching and learning content matter rather than as a subject itself to be studied, as in the Core French program. The children learn the language by learning through the language. French becomes the language of communication to accomplish all the academic and social tasks that are part of the classroom experience. As a result of these purposeful encounters with language, the participating students acquire a functional competence in written and spoken French.

Children arrive at school with the natural curiosity of an infant and a desire to read and write. They proceed at their own individual rates and styles, as in first-language development. Errors are considered a normal part of communication in the classroom (Genesee, 1987). The child is to be

immersed in an environment which provides substantial contextual support for his/her initial communicative gestures. As language skills develop, the child becomes capable of communicating in words and phrases and eventually in forms that closely approximate complete sentences (Carey, 1984). Some of the methods of instruction in this setting parallel the techniques used for literacy development in first-language development.

The role of first-language literacy in second-language development has been extensively documented (Carey, 1991b; Genesee, 1987; Krashen, 1991). French immersion children who are from a literacy rich environment and who have been actively involved in emergent reading in their first language have been found to be at an advantage. First-language literacy facilitates the acquisition of second-language literacy by providing background knowledge; thus making the second-language text more easily comprehensible. In addition, Krashen (1991, p. 4) has suggested that "once you can read, you can read...this ability transfers to other languages that may be acquired."

The belief that good first-language learners may be good second-language learners has provided substantial evidence on which to build the argument for French immersion education. The conclusion that functional competence in the second language can be achieved with no long-term deficits to native language developments must be considered, in light of the

type of child who is typically enrolled in the French immersion program. Although some studies have found very different population mixes, these students usually come from anglophone, upper and middle class homes with rich literacy environments in which parents spend considerable time reading to their children, are actively involved in their education and value academic achievement. These parents have confidence in their child's academic ability and demonstrate positive attitudes toward learning French (Krashen, 1991; Genesee, 1987). Researchers and educators also recognize parental support and commitment to the program as an important factor in the success of any immersion student. Researchers have found that immersion students with a variety of difficulties--from learning disabilities to low intelligence to behavioural problems--will do as well academically as they could be expected to do in an English program, provided they receive the same assistance as they would if enrolled in an English school (Wiss, 1989).

In the area of listening comprehension, research results show that immersion students understand what they hear. Early immersion students, as early as the late elementary grades, perform as well as students whose first language is French (Swain, Lapkin, and Andrew, 1981). However, Bibeau's (1984) research findings indicate that the overall language skills of the immersion students are not equal to the language skills of the francophone students. The relation between bilingualism and

psycholinguistic skills may be explained by a common underlying linguistic pond in which first and second language structures meet. Kessler (1971) studied how bilingual children acquired syntax. She found that structures common to the two languages being learned develop in the same order and at the same rate, "finding their source in a common underlying base" (p. 4) and that bilingual children use "the same set of rules in acquiring a second language or two languages simultaneously." (p. 97) In a setting where 100% is in French in Grades K   2 and 80% in Grades 3 - 6, the receptive skills of listening and reading are native-like by the end of elementary school (Lapkin and Swain, 1984).

Early immersion students have been tested in core subjects in Grade Three using standardized tests. Their performance has been compared to English only students. The results have consistently demonstrated that when early immersion students are taught subjects like Mathematics or Science in French, when tested either in English or in French, the results are consistently the same. These students do as well as their English only counterparts (Tétrault, 1988).

Almost without exception, the early immersion students perform as well as their unilingually educated peers on both computational and problem-solving tasks in mathematics. Additionally, the immersion students demonstrate equivalent performance to their comparison groups in

26

science and social studies (Tucker, 1975; Swain and Barik, 1976; Lapkin and Swain, 1984; Fu and Edwards, 1984). Thus it can be safely concluded that the academic achievement of early immersion students is comparable to that of students being taught the same subject material in English.

If our hope in the immersion program is for children to learn through the language, then we need to create contexts in which the language is used frequently and purposefully and there is shared interest and involvement from the children. The cooperative learning model is one of several "bridges" being used by teachers in overcoming the barrier of limited exposure to the French language. It is our responsibility along with the help of our parents to maximize French speaking opportunities by producing meaningful situations within and beyond the classroom. According to Snow (1987), who has done a survey of experienced immersion teachers, the following terms "sheltered instruction", "comprehensible input" and "negotiation of meaning" are essential to comprehending immersion methodology. From the survey, ten specific techniques are presented as core instructional techniques leading to effective instruction in French immersion:

1. extensive use of body language,

2. explicit teacher modelling,

3. predictability in instructional routines,

4. indirect error correction,

5. drawing on background knowledge to aid comprehension,

6. variety of teaching methods and types of activities,

7. extensive use of manipulatives,visuals and realia,

8. use of clarification and comprehension checks,

9. building redundancy into the lessons,

10. review of previously covered material.

In addition to this list of strategies, Snow recommends that immersion teachers concentrate on vocabulary development and on the particular culture, in this case French. There is a need for more opportunity of language production on the part of the immersion student. She highly recommends the use of group work because it increases language practice opportunities, improves the quality and quantity of student talk, promotes a positive learning climate, and motivates the students. Snow also makes the recommendation of using cooperative learning activities in the classroom creating interdependence among group members.

Immersion teachers need to develop a student-centered approach which truly draws on the learner's experience and requires the student to play an active role. Immersion teachers provide a communicatively rich environment by exposing students to, and encouraging them to use, a vast array of language in a variety of contexts. Immersion teachers play the

role of facilitators and base classroom activities on interaction and cooperative learning to promote second language development. Teachers integrate a focus on language with other cognitive methodologies, and promote an interdisciplinary approach leading to general language education. The student needs to learn how to reconstruct meaning by developing comprehension skills in meaningful contexts, by practicing through exposure to a variety of texts. Reading, listening and critical thinking skills also need to be developed in order to allow students to become independent (Harley, 1993; Lentz, 1993).

Many helpful recommendations for implementing process writing have been presented by Hall (1993). In the prewriting stage, up to three times as much time is needed, compared to what is required in the first language classroom. This is based on the assumption that is easier to comment on an experience in French if it occurred in French. Therefore, teachers have students draw on their experiences within the classroom as much as possible, because most events outside the classroom are most likely to have occurred in English. Students write about what has already been mastered orally. French vocabulary and spelling are created and displayed in theme-related words. Quality pieces may be written as a class, involving the whole class in discussing events to write about. Students at all levels are challenged to create personal dictionaries. According to Hall (1993), spontaneous composition should not be scheduled first thing in the morning

because students should have been immersed in the second language for several hours. Collaboration among grades provides valuable language experiences. Children within a school have to have the occasion to share their work with other French-speaking audiences.

There are many people who yet believe that French immersion is an elitist program for children who possess above average intelligence. They cannot perceive children who are less able of being successful in such a program. Some also believe that immersion is not appropriate for an extremely small group of children described as "cognitively and linguistically immature" (Brehaut and Gibson, 1996, p. 106).

Genesee (1976) tested above and below average students in early and late immersion programs. Not surprisingly, the above average students scored better than the below average students. However, intelligence levels seemed to have little bearing on the students' ability to understand and to speak French. Below average students scored as well as above average students on oral production tests and were just as able to communicate in interpersonal situations. The conclusions that one can draw from such findings are that intelligence does not play a more significant role in the immersion program than in the regular English program as far as success in school is concerned. Also, children who are below average are not

more at a disadvantage in the immersion program than they would be in a regular English program.

The pedagogical aspects of immersion education tend to emphasize the communicative purposes of language. A second purpose of language which is often overlooked is that of language for discovery and learning (Tardif and Weber, 1987). As an approach to the learning of a second language which involves the total education of the child, immersion must come to terms with the issue of how to promote higher level conceptual development in the second language as well as how to foster communicative competency. This issue of communicative competency and ethnolinguistic identity is addressed in Heffernan's (1995) research. His findings indicate a noticeable absence of contact by immersion graduates with the French world around them. Although younger immersion students are receptive towards and positive about French culture, older immersion students seem to lose this acceptance. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that the French culture is generally the culture of the school, not of the society. Immersion teachers at all levels are challenged not only to teach subject matter in French but to impart cultural aspects of this language as well. The teacher is central to this process and must learn to make use of many second language teaching strategies, cultural activities, social events and external influences which will enhance the transmission of the culture.

31

OUR FRENCH IMMERSION PHILOSOPHY:
DISTILLED SPIRITS OF THE PAST

To distil is to purify: to extract the essential principle. This is, in effect, what French immersion classes in Alberta have done with a number of educational philosophies of the past. To cover the Alberta elementary curriculum in French immersion classes, basic tenets of education regarding the nature of children and the nature of learning have been taken from such philosophers as Dewey, Montessori, Rousseau, and Plato. This eclecticism blends itself into an approach which has proven to be a most effective child-centered way of acquiring and learning in a second language.

A famous educational philosopher whose distilled spirit permeates the French immersion classrooms is Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712 1778). This European philosopher is generally credited with having introduced child-centered education. Rousseau would certainly approve of many of the components of our curriculum which tend to nurture the holistic nature of children. Doubtlessly, he would agree that it is extremely important for education to be meaningful for effective learning to take place. He would definitely approve of the new science and math curriculum with a strong focus on the process of discovery and a great deal of emphasis on the

inquiry process using hands-on materials and interacting with the environment in a variety of ways.

John Dewey (1859-1952), probably more than any other American thinker, brought philosophy to the attention of educated Americans. Dewey listed the three main principles that were generally accepted by progressive educators. These were that education should be centered around the interests and abilities of each child; that a child must learn by doing; and that the school must instil the process of lifelong education where home leaves off. Progressive education is a system of thought which has internal integrity. In progressive education, you work with human nature, the human nature of children is innately good. Children are innately curious. They learn subjectively from experience.

The purpose of education is to stimulate a love of learning and nurture curiosity. Dewey felt that the only way children learned was by their participation. For Dewey, education should be based on a continuum of ongoing experiences that united the past and the present and led to the shaping of the future. There is no question that our present day French immersion classes adhere to these principles. There is a virtual plethora of activities that children engage in, using manipulatives, choosing centers of interest according to ability. The goal of education is to promote in our students not only the consumption of knowledge but the creation of it as

well. The inquiry method that Dewey advocated is certainly alive and well to this day (Power, 1982).

The new Western Protocol Math and Science curricula form part of the child-centered approach. The student is given the opportunity to experiment with materials, to discover what happens in response to chosen manipulatives. Thus scientific principles become not something learned from a text or by watching other people. Rather, the individual discovers by initiating activities, observing and interpreting their results. Such learning is likely to be clearly remembered and retained more than "passive" learning or learning by simply following someone else's directions. It may lead to further discovery and experimentation for the individual. The development of creative ideas or other creative behaviour is expected to be encouraged by such foundations of experience, observation and personal involvement.

Maria Montessori, an Italian educator, devised a method of early childhood education that still enjoys international popularity. Montesorri believes "that the psychological method in education implies that the educative process is adapted to the stage of mental development of the child, and to his interests, and is not wholly subordinated to the necessities of a curriculum or to a teacher's scheme of work" (Rusk, 1979, p. 285). Montesorri proposed that the child needs to be able to reason logically and

to think in an orderly fashion. She identified phases of child development and created sets of didactic materials to be used at each stage. These exercises progressed from concrete to abstract and were based on practical life and sensory training activities (Mahan, 1994).

Our classrooms adopt many characteristics of a Montessori school. We feel that the child needs freedom to explore his environment, choose his own activity and determine his level of participation in it, learn from mistakes and interact as a member of a community. Children need to learn to be independent and to take responsibility for themselves. The child needs love, respect, self-esteem and the opportunity to pursue "real life" activities. We are very aware of the differences in children's readiness levels in our classrooms.

Montessori believed the environment was a critical factor in the life of a child. We believe also that the classroom environment should be relaxed and informal. In our classrooms we have child-sized furniture and the children can easily access the learning materials. Our classrooms foster positive learning experiences through structured real-life activities. The discovery process is very evident in our classrooms. The new math and science are very child-centered, hands-on discovery programs with emphasis on the concrete. The child can set his/her own pace and discover on his/her own.

A Montessori teacher serves as a facilitator of activities. We are observers of children. Since the children are primarily involved in individualized activity, our activities are geared to each child rather than to the group. We use order and structure in the classroom to provide support and equal opportunities for each child to develop an awareness of culturally appropriate behaviour. The children are encouraged to help each other. There is emphasis on more cognitive learning. We strive to teach thinking skills and divergent skills. Some of the materials we have made and bought are used for specific purposes with sequences of step. We believe that our learning environment is secondary to the child. We can try to encourage and promote learning but we cannot create what is not within the child's potential. Many sensory activities are available for the children. We also subscribe to Montessori's belief that children have an inner need to work at that which interests them. Some children enjoy order and prefer work to play. The spontaneity of learning leads the child to begin and pursue writing and reading.

Given the increased levels of teacher training we now have as well as greater availability of professional development opportunities, the natural approach of progressive education seems to fit nicely with our current French immersion programs in Alberta.

At present, our French immersion program seems to be drawing on a combination of elements from both traditional and progressive education. French immersion has been criticized by many for being more teacher-directed in pedagogy than the regular English programs. The pedagogical practices of highly child-centered classrooms in French immersion were compared with highly child-centered classrooms in the regular program by means of a qualitative research study done by Tardif and Weber in 1986. (Halsall and Wall, 1992). This study was done in elementary schools with Kindergarten to Grade Six. The results can clearly put to rest the belief that French immersion classes cannot be as child-centered as the regular English programs. Child-centeredness does not appear to belong exclusively to the domain of any particular program and/or grade. It was therefore concluded that the French immersion classroom can be as child-centered as the regular English program classroom if there is a desire to make it so. Child-centeredness is synonymous with whole language learning, holistic learning, individualized learning, and integrated learning.

The issue of whole language comes into play at this point. Whole language is not an easy term to define. It refers to a philosophy or a cluster of theories that underlie teaching rather than a specific set of methods or a package of materials. In part, the antecedents of whole language are in progressive education and in the British infant schools of recent decades (Hickman, 1992).

One of the features is that teachers should take full advantage of the relationship between oral language learning and literacy learning. Cambourne (1984) outlined seven conditions under which children learn to talk. These are immersion, demonstration, expectation, responsibility, approximation, employment and feedback. He challenged teachers to recreate those conditions in their efforts to help children deal with the written medium. Halliday (1975) emphasized meaning and function in children's development of oral language, and his work is often cited as a base for emphasizing functional uses of print as children develop literacy skills. Goodman's (1986) book "What's Whole in Whole Language?" underscores the value of learning both oral and written language in the context of use so that literacy task has a natural function. He emphasizes the importance of whole texts and connected discourse. Indeed, this use of authentic texts is one of the hallmarks of a whole language classroom. The reading skills of the children increase as they listen to, read, write about, talk about and in other ways respond to stories. There is a growing body of research that demonstrates growth in vocabulary (Bridge,Winograd and Haley, 1983; Cohen, 1968; Elley, 1989) and in comprehension (Reutzel and Fawson, 1989; Roser, Hoffman and Farest, 1990; Wollman-Bonilla, 1989) associated with such methods.

With its focus on speaking, reading, and writing for personal and functional purposes, whole language teaching has the advantage of great

flexibility. Being based on principles rather than specific materials, methods can be adapted to various teaching situations as well as to individual children (Hickman, 1992).

Furthermore, children will use language more fully if there is something of importance to them to communicate, that is, of importance to them, not to the teacher (Mattick, 1981). Although whole language is described in many different ways, there are five fundamental characteristics worthy of note. These are that the program is child-centered, the language is owned by the children, the language in the classroom is meaningful and purposeful, the language is social and that the teacher is a participant, observer and learner also (Mickelson, 1989).

A set of guidelines for whole language instruction was issued to elementary schools of the Red Deer Catholic district. Whole language instruction became mandatory in the school year 1989-1990. Components of the program were to include student journals, wordbanks, spelling as an integral part of the whole, phonics also as an integral part of the whole and student evaluation. This provided a "point de départ" for us in the development of a mentoring program. Mentoring provides an opportunity to explore topics the children may not have thought of before. Adults provide resources and suggest directions for further exploration of a

particular subject. It is important to recognize that mentoring can exist informally.

In our classrooms, co-operative learning is very evident. Students spend a great deal of their time working in pairs and in small and large groups. They interact with each other in sharing information, planning activities and procedures, asking questions and clarifying ideas. Much of the time, the classroom has a busy hum and students enjoy freedom of movement as they work to achieve their goals. We, as teachers, perceive our role as facilitators who assist, encourage, provide feedback and reassurance. Our questions are usually open-ended, motivational challenges.

Our classrooms are usually arranged with desks in clusters rather than rows. Numerous concrete materials, manipulatives and books are available at centers around the room. Bulletin boards key into the centers, displaying theme materials or holding charts which record student work. Our work areas extend beyond the classroom to include the hallways, library, computer room and the school yard.

In active learning, we alternate between child-centered (progressive) education and a non child-centered more traditional approach. There are occasions when the students select and are involved with real-life, day to

day problem solving situations which encourage the continued use of concrete materials. The children explore, question, predict, experiment and seek the advice of peers, teachers and other resources in a variety of group situations. Students arrive at and express a personal reaction to learning. They have the freedom to choose, plan and make decisions on topics, time and the format of their work. Activities, which include choices, are planned throughout the day. They are encouraged and acknowledged by the teacher. Information is recorded in a variety of ways by students and work samples reflect their own ideas and purposes. In centers, students plan what they are doing and take ownership of their projects. They often initiate activities. Students are encouraged to be risk-takers and to problem-solve. We as teachers are not afraid to admit that we too are co-learners. We observe, we note and we remain ready to modify and make necessary changes to enhance learning.

Recess is sometimes an inconvenient interruption of the students' work. The children formulate individual opinions based on a diversity of personal and cultural backgrounds. Students gather and monitor feedback from self, peers and teachers concerning both the process and the product of the learning opportunity. In our non child-centered traditional learning environment to which we occasionally resort, we choose the learning environment, resource materials, learning opportunities, evaluation practices and program content. This is where, perhaps, the Montessori

philosophy comes in. We choose, but we strongly guide the children in order for them to arrive at certain conclusions. This poses certain difficulties for us as French immersion teachers because our students have a wealth of experiences upon which to base their learning but they lack the vocabulary with which to express themselves about these experiences. Dewey highly favored subject integration or enterprise education. Again, in our classrooms we strongly favor this type of approach which definitely reinforces and enhances language acquisition.

Alberta Education mandates a specified number of minutes each week to be devoted to certain areas of the curriculum. One of the most practical ways to do this at a primary level is to divide the day into half-hour periods and to maintain this schedule throughout the school year. Our physical education classes are taught by another teacher giving us four preparatory one-half hour periods per week. We have many activities which involve thematic units or center work. There is much integration between Math and Science, between French, Art, Health and Social Studies, and between Art and Religion. Students are encouraged to describe their learning and to make connections with other curriculum areas. Students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning because experiences and situations are made meaningful for them. Consequently, the half-hour time blocks tend to become quite elastic and flexible to meet everyone's needs. In the area of evaluation, we definitely are child-centered. Teacher

evaluation forms the basis for student evaluation. Observation takes place on a daily basis. We use anecdotal comments, conferencing work samples and occasionally we resort to quizzes, both oral and written. Student work is not red-pencilled and student feedback is frequent. There is respect for the child's ownership of the work produced. Student portfolios contain weekly samples of student work but not all work is expected to reach final copy. The children are invited to use self-evaluation to determine how they feel about their work on a daily, weekly and/or monthly basis. In our school, we are allowed to use child-centered evaluation at the Kindergarten, Grades One and Two levels. Because of standardized testing, a mark or letter grade is the benchmark for success in Grades Three to Six. Unit tests are commonly used as a means of evaluation.

We also evaluate and report on each child's spiritual, academic, social, physical and emotional growth. Most of this evaluation is done by observation only. Learning is a constructive and ongoing undertaking. Since children develop at different rates, the evaluation addresses the child's individual progress and levels of achievement in relation to the Alberta Education Program of Studies. In our report cards, the objectives of each subject are listed and we indicate each objective covered by a letter code. We use R (requires more direct assistance and guidance), I (showing improvement), S (experiencing success), and E (excelling in grade level objectives). It is interesting to note that in our school, the report card was

heavily influenced by parents' wishes. However, some parents are critical of the absence of marks or rank order and advocate a return to a more traditional form of reporting.

There is flexibility in the curriculum. We anticipate the needs of the children in terms of growth in skills, knowledge and values. Community values are shared and experiences are provided that motivate students to problem solve and to make decisions across the curriculum. We set realistic expectations for the students. Their notebooks and work samples reflect a process of gradual refinement in which making errors and trying again is observable and predictable. A wrong word or phrase is not treated in a negative manner but rather as a learning tool - by repeating the proper way or paraphrasing (Krashen and Terrell, 1982).

There is much individualization that takes place. Modifications to meet individual needs are clearly evident in terms of content, process and product. Materials are chosen to provide for a range of skill levels. Children are allowed to work at their own pace, with flexible time lines. Activities allow for differentiation according to cognitive abilities and learning styles. Remediation and enrichment is present in our program. Children can do peer coaching and we also have parent volunteers to assist students. Those who speak the language of instruction provide valuable assistance offering help to the children.

Students are free to talk among themselves, to ask questions and to seek answers from others. Two-way conversations between the teacher and the students occur frequently and are used to develop a range of thinking and social skills. We ask many open-ended questions which follow the child's lead in determining topic. Much written language is usually displayed and includes both student-made and teacher-made efforts.

We use progressive techniques in classroom management as well. Classroom rules for behaviour are generated with a high level of student input such as regular classroom meetings. At the beginning of the year we discuss the reasons for rules and their importance. Everyone is allowed input into the discussion and the formulation of rules with which everyone can live. Students are given responsibility for making choices for their own behaviour and may experience a logical consequence of making a poor choice. There is a relaxed classroom atmosphere with evidence of cooperation and mutual respect. Focus is on the positive e.g., good choices, meeting personal needs. In our classrooms, the focus is on creating optimum conditions for children's learning. We are always searching for ways to enable and empower each student to learn and to individuate.

Throughout the evolution of immersion programs over the last three decades, it has become apparent that teaching language without culture is

dysfunctional. A language which cannot be shared socially has no meaning and no use (Cazabon and Size-Cazabon, 1987). The implications of this are quite clear in our French immersion program. The cultural needs of the program are quickly evident. Our school has worked hard to create an ambiance which reflects the French Canadian cultural heritage. We prepare and host an annual "Soirée Canadienne," with ethnic food, costumes, displays and performances or a winter carnival "Festival des Voyageurs" with a strong emphasis on traditional cultural activities. Religious and cultural values permeate throughout the rest of the curriculum. Heffernan (1995) found that, in conjunction with and more often in spite of authorized curricula and approved texts, teachers are the most important variables in bringing authentic culture into the lives of French immersion youngsters. In our context, we can definitely state that this holds true.

Indeed, remnants of the Idealist philosophy can be found in our French immersion program. Central to this philosophy is the belief that the thought process is generally that of recognition, reflection and inculcation. This learning process is made more efficient through interaction with the teacher and the school environment. Immersion in the cultural heritage is of paramount importance. The process of growth and development is from the interior to the external. Consequently, there is no

one single method but rather an eclecticism which can be most effective in producing the desired results.

According to Butler in <u>Idealism in Education</u> (1966, p. 120) some desirable qualities of an idealistic teacher are:

1. to personify culture and reality for the student

2. to be a specialist in human personality

3. to be capable of uniting expertise with enthusiasm

4. to merit students' friendship

5. to awaken students' desire to learn

6. to realize that teaching's moral significance lies in its goal of perfecting human beings

7. to aid in the cultural rebirth of each generation.

The current discovery process in our new science and math curricula is a prime example of this philosophical base as is the meaningful and varied styles of learning and teaching which occur daily. Evidently, teachers also strive to be good role models and to be moral and cultural examplars.

Language Acquisition Equals Communication

The way we view second language acquisition has important implications for the way in which we conceptualize and structure the teaching of second languages in our school. As second language teachers, we use language in a special way so as to attain our objective: communication with the learner. When given in the learner's second language, all teacher talk can be considered as input for the learner, whether it be instructional talk or organizational-managerial talk (Tardif, 1985). An observational study by Ireland and others (1979) indicated that an average of 60% of what teachers said and 40% of student talk in Grades One to Six were functional, that is, having a primary purpose other than instruction in French. In Kindergarten and to some extent in Grade One, repetition and other structured activities related to language learning occupied a larger proportion of the time than at later grade levels. Stevens (1984) suggests that activity-centered programs help children develop linguistic skills more than a structured program.

Krashen (1982) referred to the "great paradox of language teaching." Language is best taught when it is being used to transmit messages, not when it is explicitly taught for conscious learning. The requirement that input be comprehensible has several interesting implications for classroom practice. It implies that whatever helps comprehension is important. This

is why visual aids, manipulatives and tactile materials are so useful. This is also why having mentors in the classroom is such an enriching experience for all our students. Vocabulary is also very important. With more vocabulary, there will be more comprehension and more language acquisition along with that. Also, in providing input, we need to be concerned primarily with whether the students understand the message. It is neither structure nor grammar that is imperative at this point, but rather comprehension. The crucial and central component of any language teaching method is input that is understood. Because of its very nature, teaching in a second language requires particular skills on our part. It is critically important that we speak the target language with a fluency which includes in depth knowledge of the nuances of the target language. It is also important that we are prepared to deviate from traditional methods of second language teaching to incorporate modern techniques implying child-centeredness. Aspects of former philosophies such as Dewey's progressive education, Montesorri's adherence to a systematic approach to visual, kinesthetic and tactile materials, Rousseau's belief in child-centeredness, the ideational and conceptual nature of education as per the Idealism philosophy all lend themselves extremely well to our immersion program.

To develop the highest possible level of second language proficiency in the student population, the curriculum guides suggest a methodology emphasizing the creation of meaningful, affective and socio-academic

interactions of varied complexity. These interactions motivate children to learn spontaneously and to use the second language as a tool to acquire and construct new schemata of thought and action. The curriculum guide suggests that the main criterion used to choose learning activities should be the meaningfulness of the activities to children. If children are using the second language simply to rename segments of their reality that have already been fully schematized in their mother tongue, the second language does not play a significant role in fostering mind growth. Consequently, developing second language proficiency has to be framed in learning situations related to the children's reality, but must focus on segments of it that have not been fully schematized in the mother tongue (Fallon, 1987).

The pedagogical orientation of the methodology suggested in the curriculum guides is based on choosing meaningful learning situations of varied complexity having the potential for developing high levels of language proficiency. There needs to be a strong focus on:

1. using the second language meaningfully with real life experiences.

2. providing learning situations that offer potential for mind growth in the second language.

3. stimulating the development of greater second-language proficiency by actualizing higher cognitive/thinking processes.

4. reaching an equilibrium of learning activities that nurture the development of each level of language proficiency.

5. using children's life experiences as a departure point for stimulating exploration and discussion in the second language.

In this perspective, our role becomes that of guide, facilitator, and communication partner. We are key actors in the language learning environment. We make use of many second language teaching strategies such as modelling, echoing, extending, prompting, questioning, directing actions, making requests, and varying intonation patterns. The children's role becomes one of active participants in the learning process. Evidently, there is ample room for the sound educational philosophies of Dewey, Rousseau, Montessori, Plato and the Idealists within the framework of bilingual education.

The results of such an eclectic blend of educational philosophies speak for themselves. The Guide to Education ECS to Grade 9 Handbook (1994, p. 3) sets forth as its mission statement: "The best possible education for all Alberta students." As its mandate, Alberta Education states: "Education is responsible for ensuring that students learn the skills and knowledge needed to be self-reliant, responsible, caring and contributing members of society". How is this to be done? This same document states that schools must engage students in a variety of activities that enable them to acquire the expected learnings.

Learning a second language involves much more than reading, listening, writing, and speaking. It is a process of enrichment that goes far beyond any classroom or work setting. It instils in a young person the ability to appreciate another culture, another way of life, another set of values, and another way of thinking (MacKinnon, 1990; Heffernan, 1995). Unquestionably, immersion teaching is multidisciplinary. This aspect of immersion teaching was recently researched by Heffernan (1995, p. 6) who wrote accordingly:

> "Nous constatons, dans un tel programme, que des éléments tant linguistiques que culturels peuvent donc être présentés aux élèves dans le cours de langue comme tel ou bien dans n'importe quelle autre matière qui convient. Qu'il s'agisse de mathématiques, de sciences, ou d'histoire, par exemple, on fait en sorte d'introduire dans le cours pertinent ce dont les élèves ont besoin tant sur le plan de la langue que sur celui de la culture."

Involvement in the new French Immersion Language Program

Claudette Lalonde, one of this project's authors, is a pilot teacher involved in the development of new French Immersion Language Arts program. This new program is based on the common curriculum framework developed through the Western Protocol. This project is entitled "Projet des modèles de rendement langagier Programme immersion." She is partaking in the initial phase of implementation. The principal phase is to develop illustrative examples that will enable teachers to determine if their students' performance is in line with the learning

52

outcomes set for each grade level. Teachers from across the province have been assembled and provided in-service preparation to work at all grade levels to collect and analyze samples of student work based on the outcomes set by the new French language arts program.

Lalonde is working at the Grade One level, collecting and trying activities that fall in the domain of oral production and oral comprehension. The annotated samples will illustrate the performance levels expected of students at each grade level. They will also provide teachers with bench marks to evaluate their students' French language skills. The samples of students' work and the tasks designed to obtain these samples will be available to schools in September, 1998.

Involvement in the Development of COLI

In 1992, a number of educators in Francophone and immersion programs gathered to form a committee. The purpose of this committee was to put together a resource document with the goal of providing strategies for the teaching and the remediation of reading skills. Irène Kukura, another of this project's authors, was asked by the Language Services Branch of Alberta Education to be a member of this committee. The final documents, consisting of two large binders containing a wealth of material about the teaching of reading in French, were published in 1996.

This teaching tool was named COLI. This acronym can be understood as C for "connaissance et communication", O for "observation", L for "lecture" and I for "intervention". The "raison d'être" and the goals are stated very explicitly in the introduction (COLI, 1996).

Participation in this committee's activities was an extremely enriching experience of professional development as well as an enlightening insight into the teaching practices in immersion programs throughout the province. Central to this teaching tool is the development of strategic reading skills. Examples include cloze exercises, questioning procedures and use of language experiences, among others. Criteria is established to assess reading ability. Evaluation and remediation strategies are clearly described. This ensemble of materials provides a very useful teaching tool for classroom teachers as well as special education teachers.

MENTORSHIP

Background and Definition

The word "mentor" first appears as a character's name in Homer's *Odyssey* some 700 years before the birth of Christ. "Mentor was an old friend of Odysseus, to whom the King had entrusted his whole household when he sailed" (Freedman, 1991, p.11). The word "mentor" derives from the Greek tale and from a number of Greek words meaning "think," "counsel," "remember" and "endure." One contemporary article describes a mentor as a " protector, benefactor, sponsor, champion, advocate, supporter or counsellor." Other descriptors include " patron, guide, teacher and role model."

According to Professor Uri Bronfenbrenner of Cornell University, a "mentor is an older, more experienced person who seeks to further the development of character and competence in a younger person..." (Freedman, 1991, p.11) Guidance may take many forms, including demonstration, instruction, challenge and encouragement. This relationship is distinguished by "a special bond of commitment" (Freedman, p. 11).

The current mentoring movement can be described in three ways: there is rampant growth; it is highly decentralized; and there is little available research to help direct practice (Johnson and Sullivan, 1995).

The desire to make a difference, reach out in a personal, direct and immediate way is the "raison d'être" behind the mentorship movement. However, Merrian (1983, p. 169) contends that "mentoring appears to mean one thing to developmental psychologists, another thing to business people, and a third thing to those in academic settings." Big Brothers/Big Sisters is a mentorship organization that has brought together unrelated adults and children in private, personal, one-to-one relationships. Mentoring is flexible, accommodating whatever attributes people want to give it.

According to Freedman, mentoring is usually about two ideas: the potential of relationships, instrumentally deployed to help poor children; and the potential of voluntarism practiced by middle class adults, to engage the disadvantaged.

A mentor working with a student is an adult tutor who provides individualized attention for a child according to the needs of the individual and the situation. In the school setting a mentor can provide encouragement and recognition for a student's commitment to specific

goals. It has been observed that the age difference between mentor and student does not make a big difference. Successful mentors believe that they have something to give back to other individuals and society. They take personal interest in their student, gain trust, help and encourage the student gain self confidence. Mentors usually demonstrate personal integrity, risk-taking, respect for people, and have good listening and communication skills. Mentors not only share their own expertise, but also are willing to learn new skills and ideas. The following five reasons were given by Sandra Harper (1990) as to why they encouraged mentors in her school in Delta, B.C:

1. mentors serve as exemplars of life-long learners to students

2. mentors show that learning doesn't only happen in schools; mentors have real life experiences and expertise that expand the horizons of the students

3. mentors are a natural access to our "tribes wisdom" (Darling, 1986)

4. adapting a mentor program into an educational setting is another way of organizing resources, in times when financial resources are limited

5. research has indicated that everybody who succeeds has had mentors (Roche, 1979).

In fact, mentoring creates a "ripple" effect (Roche, 1979). It has been found that those who have had a mentor in their life usually become a mentor to someone else during their adult life.

A French Immersion Experience of Mentorship

We recognize that our French immersion students need to develop and maintain strong links between home and school as well as between themselves and the significant adults in their lives. We also recognize that children who are learning in a language which is not their mother tongue are "at risk" in a manner which is not usually recognized or acknowledged.

Almost all children enter first grade filled with hope, enthusiasm, motivation and self-confidence. They have high expectations for personal success. Recognizing that this first school year can set the tone for the remainder of their formal educational career, we are constantly seeking ways to make their first year in school a positive, happy and successful year with great academic rewards. We expect to foster their desire to learn and know more. We not only wish to maintain their enthusiasm but to nurture it also. Research has demonstrated that children with high positive self-esteem are more efficient learners.

We believe that a coming together of people with these common goals can only be beneficial to the program, the students, the parents and the teachers involved. We believe that research which demonstrates how bonds can be created between school and home, and between varying

cultures, can enhance not only the immersive experience but can also demonstrate the efficacy of teaching and learning in a second language.

Mentoring attempts to duplicate behaviour under normal circumstances and conditions. Mentoring serves to increase the child's self-esteem and to enhance feelings of lovability. When the child's parents shows up in the classroom for an activity with the entire class, the child feels more lovable. The more a child feels lovable, the more likely that child is to perform in satisfactory ways.

We all recognize that children in Grade One are emergent readers, usually requiring much effort and instruction to work through the process of becoming proficient readers. The goal of mentoring is to help children gain social learning and command over the tasks of their everyday life in school, work or society. This occurs in the mentorship relationship through jointly carried out activities in which the mentor alternately models, teaches, manages, questions and structures tasks for the children. There is, as such, a quality of specialness about mentorship. Unlike traditional teaching where everyone is supposed to learn the same curriculum, and usually at the same pace, mentoring allows for more personalized care and attention to individual needs. Essentially, the mentor's most critical function is to provide moral support and a sense of caring. The children benefit from experiencing the mentor as a role model

and tend to imitate that person's behaviour and attitudes. The results usually indicate enhanced self-esteem along with a sense of accomplishment.

Our particular mentorship program began in the 1994-95 school year, with activities focussed mostly in the area of Language Arts. It was an idea whose time had come. This program is initiated in the latter half of the school year when the children have acquired a sufficient base in oral and written language. All the names of the children are put into a basket. The first name is chosen by the teacher. This person becomes "l'étoile de la semaine." The child gets to take home a large teddy bear accompanied by his "valise" which eventually becomes filled with various objects a travelling teddy bear might require. The bear is called "Teddy" which is not gender specific, being either "Théodore" or "Théodora." Also included are the "Bear Notes" (Appendix 1) which explain the program and procedures to the parents.

The first day of that child's week, the class brainstorms for sentence ideas about "l'étoile." As well, story ideas are derived from a web page originating out of the Social Studies curriculum called "Moi" (Appendix 2) containing personal information about the child's appearance, likes and dislikes, family members and favorite things. The collection of approximately ten photographs depicting the child's family activities and

life are another source of story ideas. These photos are mounted on the classroom door for a week long display (Appendix 3). The children compose true sentences about "l'étoile" which are printed on a large flip chart (Appendix 4). Each sentence is printed in a different colour to help the children easily identify the beginning and ending of each new thought. About half of the story is completed at this time. The following day, the story is re-read and more sentences are contributed by the classmates to complete the story.

The third day, usually Wednesday, the story is again re-read by individuals or the class. Ideas for illustrations are suggested by the children. These accompany the sentences and provide visual, contextual clues about the content. Syllables are underlined to add further contextual clues and to assist in the decoding process.

Thursday, an oral cloze exercise is done using sticky note paper to cover words or syllables and much humour is used to elicit responses to the hidden word. An example would be, "Elle a les cheveux blonds et les yeux bleus." The word, "yeux" is covered. Suggestions such as "bras" or "yo-yo" are offered which the children vehemently reject. Relevant phonics or spelling activities can also be done at this time.

The culminating activity of the mentorship project occurs on the fifth day, usually a Friday. The Language Arts activity involves a modified written cloze exercise (Appendix 5). A fictitious name has been used for reasons of confidentiality. The children are each provided with their own copy of the story, complete with illustrations. They individually complete the story which is then placed in their writing journal. They also underline a sentence of their choice which they re-print and illustrate. Parents and the sibling(s) of "l'étoile" are invited to join him/her for a special lunch at school. The student proudly shares her/his work, classroom, school and school life with the family members present. Prior to this day, through the "Bear Notes" and a personal invitation by telephone, arrangements have been made with the parents regarding an activity of their choice to be shared with the entire class.

This is the highlight of our mentorship program. Parents have shared many wonderful and diverse activities with their child's class (Appendix 6). One mother, a physiotherapist, brought in a variety of aids used for handicapped children. The children delighted in trying out the crutches, wheelchair and walker. This provided everyone with an opportunity to develop new vocabulary as well as experience the role of physically handicapped children. This also afforded them an opportunity to become acquainted with that child's mother and to learn about her chosen profession. In turn, the parent also was given an opportunity to

become acquainted with her child's peers and to experience classroom life for a short while.

Another parent, a chemical engineer, chose a science experiment about mass of objects as her activity. Into a tall, clear, cylindrical vessel three liquids of varying density were poured. Each child dropped a small object into the liquid. The children were amazed to see where their object sank. "L'étoile" for that week was obviously proud to have his mother take part in a class activity.

One child had both parents come to the class, although at separate times, each involved in a different activity. The mother played outdoor games with the children in the gymnasium. The class participated enthusiastically in this activity. The father, an opthamologist, came later and talked about the eye. He brought a realistic model and explained the functioning of the eye and how to care for the eyes. He also provided a colour-blindness test for the children.

Occasionally, both parents are able to come and share this special time with their child and his/her classmates. Other activities that have been shared by parents are cooking and baking, reading a childhood favorite book, playing T-Ball, art, dance, music and drama as well as cultural experiences. Field trips have also resulted from this mentorship program.

Visits have been made to dental offices, to restaurants, and to a curling rink for an afternoon of lessons and curling. Child-sized rocks and brooms were provided. The children were given lessons on how to throw, slide, sweep, et cetera and took turns having a game. The children enjoyed themselves immensely as they were initiated into this new sport.

Before choosing "l'étoile" for the next week, the present "étoile" shares with the class what has been added to Teddy's "valise." This is another opportunity for vocabulary development. Journal entries that the child has written about experiences with Teddy during the week are read to the class. Many children are loathe to return Teddy to the classroom. Teddy becomes an extremely well-travelled bear going up and down the province as well as to hockey games, concerts, etc.

Evidently, this program is a huge success (see evaluation section of this report), with each activity somehow building on the previous one. It seems as though each child is very enthusiastic about sharing his/her parents with the rest of the class. Upon reflection, we realize that the initiative and direction have to come enthusiastically from ourselves. If parents already have an idea or a project in mind, we endorse it wholeheartedly, assembling whatever materials they may require beforehand and preparing all that is necessary. If they are hesitant or unsure what to do, we suggest that they simply visit and become involved

in whatever activity the children are currently embarked upon. We see this type of mentorship as very viable in a Grade One classroom and we believe it helps to forge strong links between the school life and the home life of the children. We are discovering that the activities chosen by the parents often serve to give insights to the children about concepts, ideas and materials which are new to them and which they had not previously considered. An interesting example of this would be the mother who brought a younger sibling along with her. This child is almost completely deaf and can only hear very slightly with the aid of a transmitter and receiver as well as powerful hearing aids. "L'étoile" read a story while her mother and younger brother showed the class how to read the same story in sign language. The children were awed by this experience. They learned how to say colour names in sign language. We were able to integrate this with our Religion program by later making thank-you cards for the mother and the little brother.

The impact of background research into the second language learning process is evident in the development of various aspects and components of the mentoring program. This qualitative research project goes beyond attempting to respond to the needs of the research community regarding French immersion. Perhaps, more importantly, it answers some of our own personal questions by listening to the voices of the French immersion children and their parents. In exploring this research through

the eyes of the students, parents and educators we hope to become fully aware of the anglophone child as he/she listens, speaks, reads and writes in his/her second language, French.

PROJECT EVALUATION

Evaluation of the mentor program or project is a very necessary and key component. Setting up a means of evaluation by the participants provides essential feedback to assess, modify or otherwise alter the program. The literature on assessment usually mentions as a given that the instruments for evaluation be appropriate for the goals and objectives of the activity. Thus, we felt it necessary that we first consider our original goals in order to devise appropriate measurement tools. We believe that our approach focused on three distinct objectives.

Our first objective was to involve parents in a meaningful way and to increase the rapport between home and school. Strengthening the bond between home life and school life was seen as a measure having predictably positive outcomes. Section 17 of the School Act addresses the role of parents as being advisory. However, during the last few years Alberta Education has moved towards site-based management of schools, involving parents to a much greater degree than ever before. Parents are deemed to be partners in the progress of their child's education. The expectations are that they will be involved in the life of the school in a variety of ways, not just simply as an administrative council, in an advisory capacity or as fund-raisers.

Although the literature on site-based management has not yet released a "how-to" manual, the Red Deer Catholic Regional District has adopted a policy statement (Appendix 7) with regards to parents. Furthermore, in the Site-Based Management Planning Handbook (1997, p. 5), number 2 of the Board Goals for 1996-1999 reads as follows:

> "Recognize and invite parents and the community to utilize their potential as partners in the education process."

Involving parents in a mentorship program, particularly in the first year of their child's formal education is a natural move to partnership between parents and teachers in the education of children. Furthermore, as part of the site-based mandate, our school has set goals which are to be accomplished this year.

Various staff members agreed to sit on the committee which had stated as its goal to create community with our Camille parents. The desired results would be to have more parent involvement and visibility. A variety of strategies are listed, involving joint endeavours between home and school for social events, as well as activities of a religious nature reflecting our Catholic beliefs. Evaluation is to be done through surveys and questionnaires. The measure of success will be that 85% of participants will indicate an increase in the sense of community.

A recent article which appeared in the ATA Magazine (Danyluk, 1988, p. 8) focuses on this very issue of parents as partners in their child's education. Reviewing the paradigm shifts in education during this last decade reveals a shifting role in accountability with more rights and responsibilities of students in their own educational journey. The author believes that implicit in this is the involvement of the parents who are expected to collaborate with schools in their children's education. Ideally, parents should assume an interactive and ongoing dialogue with teaching and administrative staff as well as advisory councils and counsellors.

Our second goal was to preserve and to promote the self-esteem of the child. Most children start school with a great deal of enthusiasm and a high level of self-esteem. Generally, in Grade One, the children are filled with a sense of wonderment about the world around them. So many experiences are the "aha" kind of experiences as they learn and grow. If they do experience difficulties in learning, they are usually unaware that others are more successful than they at whatever is being asked of them. We have found that the students think it is very special to be able to go to the resource room for assistance with the basic skills of speaking, reading and writing. The remainder of the class all have asked when they will be chosen for this special privilege. No social stigma is attached and the children all view it as a temporary measure which will help them to get

over some "rough waters" until they can once more be sailing smoothly and independently.

Recently, on a worksheet about "Moi," describing the things the child likes to do and is capable of doing, the children were expected to draw pictures of their favorite activities and/or sports. One little girl wrote and in English no less, "I am talented at just about everything." She firmly believes this and we certainly wouldn't ever want her to believe otherwise.

Affective factors influence students. Feeling self-confident, feeling anxious, motivation and attitude are all factors that can impact upon academic performance and reading ability. Children who have self-confidence are more likely to take risks. In French immersion, students are risking a lot because they do not always understand the words they are expected to decode.

When parents are not able to understand the language of instruction in which their child is being taught, frustrations are felt and rifts can appear in the parent - child relationship. We have had the experience of receiving messages from parents concerned about their inability to read instructions on a worksheet or concerned about not being able to understand how their child is to complete projects brought home. Parents then start to worry and fret about their choice of program for their child,

feeling themselves alienated from what that child is doing at school. They may also feel helpless at being able to assist in the learning process. They then question their choice of program, seek answers and reassurance. These views have occasionally been expressed rather poignantly by parents whose children are experiencing some learning difficulties in speaking, reading and/or writing, particularly at the primary level. They will voice their concern by asking directly, "How can I help my child when I don't speak French and can't read it either?" Such parents are often unsure of what their own expectations should be regarding their child's accomplishments at school. As immersion teachers, we have to have answers for them.

Having parents come to the school and spend time in the classroom allows the child to "show-off" the parent and, more importantly, to feel special about being "l'étoile de la semaine" and having parents care enough to come to the classroom to share time and effort with the child and with his/her peer group. This personal contact in the classroom has the added benefit of providing the parents with some positive feedback regarding activities taking place in a child-centered classroom in a trusting, caring climate. It has been our experience that parents will often use this visit to broach topics that may have been causing them some apprehension and about which they may need to be reassured.

An involvement in a classroom activity also affords parents the opportunity to see how their child is progressing and performing relative to his/her peer group. As immersion teachers and particularly as primary teachers, we are subject to unrealistic expectations by some parents. They may be seeing or hearing how their child is doing relative to other children in their neighborhood who are attending school in a regular English program. Because we teach both content and language, our progress in reading and writing skills may not be as rapid as in the English programs. Furthermore, English Language Arts are not introduced in the French immersion curriculum until the third grade. Some parents need to be reminded about this occasionally.

Another interesting development in the parent participation involves the pleasant and happy surprise the parents experience when they hear their child interacting and conversing naturally and easily in another language which they themselves may not speak fluently.

The vocabulary of instruction and of daily interaction in a Grade One classroom in the latter half of the year is oftentimes more advanced than what many parents can follow. We have personally asked many parents who have visited our classrooms if they can understand and follow what their child is saying. The response is usually that they understand the essence but are often lost as to the vocabulary and structure. At this point

in time, the children are able to speak in quite lengthy phrases, using subordinate clauses, expressing quite an extensive vocabulary. For example, a child might say, "mon ourson porte une chemise rouge qui est pareille comme celle de l'ourson à mon amie." What has happened here is that the child has unconsciously been able to draw vocabulary from many different themes to create a unique thought and express it orally. The word "pareil" comes from comparisons in math, "rouge" comes from a unit in science on colors and the remainder of the words are from a variety of language art themes. For the most part, parents are awed when they hear their child easily express him/herself. The children delight in teaching new vocabulary to their parents. To ease their development as emergent readers, we have both developed an extensive library of teacher-created books with audio tapes as well as dictionaries and tapes for other reading series appropriate to the primary level. This has not only encouraged reading skills but has also assuaged the parents' anxiety about being able to assist their child.

Monod (1995, p. 6) reviews the various competencies of oral communication as a hierarchical development. The first of these is the strategic competency which is the capacity to succeed in communication in spite of linguistic gaps. The second level of competency is discursive, which is the ability to understand and to speak in a logical, coherent manner. The third level of oral competency is socio-linguistic, involving

the capacity to recognize and to produce language which is appropriate for the social context in which it is used.

In the latter half of Grade One, the children are generally producing language at the second level and sometimes even at the third level which is already quite an accomplishment for these little people. A most interesting example of this type of speech occurred two years ago after a visit to the zoo with the class. While there, we had observed a wolf prowling along the fence. It had been explained to the children that, "Le loup rôde." A few days later, the children were busy working on an activity at their desk. One little boy could not remain seated and was going about from one desk to the another. One of his classmates said, "Madame, il rôde." It was a very apt comment and an extremely interesting use of the verb.

In his article entitled, <u>Thirty years of French immersion programs in Canada. Are they adding value to children's education?</u> Obadia, (1995, p. 7) states:

> "In general, research has shown that French immersion students
> develop a high level of French proficiency at no cost to their
> English proficiency or to their achievement in other academic
> subjects such as mathematics, science, etc.
> Their productive skills, such as speaking and writing,
> although not at par with those of native speakers, allow them
> nonetheless to carry out normal conversations with French
> native speakers. They are generally self-confident when they
> speak French."

Our third objective in this mentorship project was to use Language Arts activities which would enhance speaking, reading, writing and spelling skills in French. As previously mentioned, strategies such as language experiences (creating their own stories) and cloze exercises go a long way towards promoting reading and writing comprehension. They encourage the children to stretch their thinking and to develop learning strategies such as looking for contextual clues, developing phonemic awareness and building a sight vocabulary. Recognizing that individual learners approach each learning task differently, an eclectic variety of strategies seems to respond well to this need. This explains in part why our mentorship program seems to have so many aspects. However, we have discovered, that all the components blend to create a positive, teaching tool. Everything which is done has a specific purpose and objective.

According to Edwards and Rehorick, (1990, p. 26), "French language classrooms should feature authentic communication, a variety of activities which are task-based and meaningful, sufficient "wait-time" of the teacher, student to student interaction, teaching of linguistic code in context, as well as ongoing formative evaluation." Interestingly, the activities of our mentorship program provide all of the above.

Rebuffot (1993) presents a summary of research suggesting that the key to effective instruction in immersion programs may be in the

75

integration of experiential and analytic teaching strategies. Analytic strategies could be described as those which emphasize accuracy and focus on the more formal aspects of French whereas experiential strategies are those which include authentic themes and topics and which engage the children in meaningful activities. These strategies would also emphasize the conveyance of meaning, fluency over accuracy and authentic language.

The children are well aware that each of them will have the opportunity of being featured as "l'étoile de la semaine." Furthermore, this experience will somehow be shared with their parents as well as with the entire class, thereby establishing that necessary link between home and school. There is also authentic communication when the parent comes to the classroom and is directly involved in a meaningful activity, not only with his/her own child, but with the entire class. An excellent vocabulary building exercise occurs when we "discover" what item the "l'étoile de la semaine" has added to "la valise de Teddy." We review the items already in the valise and note what has been added. The person who is the "l'étoile " shows his/her classmates what has been written in the journal and talks about the adventures which have been shared with "Teddy."

There is authentic communication between "l'étoile de la semaine" and the rest of the class when the photos of that child's life are being described and mounted on the classroom door. There is authentic

communication when the children are asked to contribute true statements about "l'étoile." They will volunteer ideas based on the appearance of the child, his/her experiences, likes and dislikes and favorite things. The activities are most definitely meaningful because they are produced by the children themselves, for one of their own.

Allowing sufficient "wait-time" for responses from the children has become a fact of life in a French immersion primary classroom. The children need to search their long-term and short-term memory banks for the right word or phrase. In a second language learning situation, this generally requires somewhat more time than in a regular classroom. Using a language experience such as having the children compose the story of the life of "l'étoile" allows for the teaching of the linguistic code in context. Furthermore, the oral cloze exercise, done with self-sticking note paper and the written cloze exercise done on the last day of the special child's week allow for an ongoing formative evaluation of the reading and writing process.

One of the quickest ways to obtain oral feedback is to solicit it quite openly through questioning. Asking the children what adventures they had with "Teddy" during their week with the visiting bear usually yields highly enthusiastic responses. It soon became apparent that most parents and children had absolutely no qualms about taking "Teddy" practically

everywhere with them, even to places such as hockey practices, various sport activities and music lessons, visiting relatives and friends, shopping, excursions in automobiles, et cetera. The children take great delight in speaking of their adventures, without particularly noticing that they are developing and perfecting their expressive vocabulary all at the same time.

Interestingly, some children seem to be able to relate their feelings about these experiences through the medium of "Teddy." "Teddy" did not enjoy his visit to dental and medical facilities quite as much as he/she enjoyed travelling to Calgary with the family and visiting young relatives. This afforded some children an additional opportunity of a boost to their self-esteem by being able to demonstrate how special they were to other children near their own age.

Being featured on the classroom door with a collection of photos which highlight the life of the child was undoubtedly a big hit with the children and with the parents. Most parents and children chose their photos very carefully to feature important events. Frequently, pictures of the Baptism of the child were presented. Also, photos of extended family, including grand-parents, uncles, aunts and cousins were often brought. This really helped the rest of the children to make the connections into the personal life of "l'étoile de la semaine." Given that these children are only about seven years of age, their experiences are rather limited. There are

some children however, who have already experienced a rich and varied lifestyle. Recently, one little boy showed a picture of himself in a boat made entirely of Lego. The picture was taken during a visit to Legoland which is in Denmark. Naturally, the other children were fascinated by this.

Their conversations about their personal life very often include stories about extended family members. This type of photo helps the rest of the children to put faces to names. The children also learn linguistic code in context, such as, "ma maman, mon papa, mes grand-parents, ma tante et mon oncle." They also become quite proficient at distinguishing the gender differences of words such as "cousin, cousine" and possessive adjectives such as "mon, ma, mes."

The instrument used to evaluate the developing reading skills of the children is a weekly oral and written cloze exercise (Appendix 8). Generally, a child is "l'étoile " for five days. On the fourth day, we use sticky note paper to cover up words or portions thereof. Taking turns, the children will read the sentence from the flip chart, omitting the word which is covered. We then, as a class-group, brainstorm for ideas of which word might make the most sense in that space. What clues can we find? Can it be a word with many sounds if it occupies only a short space? What would make sense? What would have meaning? This is an opportunity to

use humor by suggesting inappropriate responses which the children vehemently reject. For example, if the sentence was, "Elle a les cheveux _____" we might suggest that the missing word is a noun such as "chat." Such nonsense is usually recognized quickly for what it is and the response is immediately rejected. We may make a few other suggestions until we arrive at a colour word which is appropriate. The children quickly catch on that the colour word is placed after the noun.

This also gives us the opportunity to focus on a particular aspect of phonics or spelling and to involve some analytical strategies. For example, we may ask the children to find all the words which have "oi" as in "trois." On the last day of the special child's week, we review the story once again then distribute a written, cloze exercise. This is modified to suit the children at this reading level. The children do this independently. Once their work is corrected, they place it in their journal. At year's end, they will have a collection of all the stories about themselves and their classmates to which they have contributed. Most of the children finish the entire story correctly within five minutes. The first children to complete are sent to assist the two or three who may be experiencing some difficulty.

Valencia (1990) points out that effective portfolios of literacy assessment involve authentic activities that promote collaborative reflection. Developing abilities should also be measured repeatedly with a

multidimensional variety of tasks. In this manner, portfolios assess cognitive, motivational, and social processes that underlie literacy development. Assessment is embedded in the curriculum and interwoven with instruction so that strategies can be assessed and improved. Self-perceptions of competence and control can be encouraged, and appropriate individual mastery goals can be set and pursued.

Once the children have completed a cloze exercise, this is placed in their journal and becomes part of their personal portfolio. They choose a sentence which appeals to them, re-print it and add an illustration, thereby providing them with further opportunity to hone their reading and writing skills.

Harp (1991) devotes a chapter to the multifaceted process for assessment for multicultural students. This chapter includes some important concepts for teachers to keep in mind when working with bilingual and multicultural students. The assessment techniques suggested are the ones most teachers are familiar with - anecdotal records, miscue analysis, writing samples, and self-evaluation. We do this as an oral exercise within the classroom as well as including the story and a writing sample in the children's portfolio.

The large story on the flip chart is laminated and presented to "l'étoile" as a souvenir of this event in his/her life. Parents have told us that these stories are still prominently displayed in their child's room two years later. When each child in the classroom has been featured as "l'étoile," the entire class contributes their thoughts, ideas and experiences to a story about their collective experiences with "Teddy." This is also done as a cloze exercise and serves the purpose of evaluating reading skills (Appendix 9). Other language arts activities are added to evaluate their progress in reading and writing.

The entire program is evaluated using a questionnaire sent to parents near the end of the school year. The content of this questionnaire is chosen to reflect the activities which have taken place during the school year. Space is provided for answers and the parents may reply anonymously if they choose to do so (Appendix 10). The questions posed regarding the mentorship program formed part of this evaluation. The number of respondents is approximately 50% of the parents. We do get a lot of oral feedback from our parents even though they may not take the time to reply to yet another questionnaire. Our kindergarten hosts a parent helper every single morning and afternoon. When these children enter Grade One, the parents are already quite comfortable with the idea of being at school frequently and being very involved in their child's school life. Thus, the parents are usually not reticent to express themselves about activities in the

classroom. Consequently, a lot of "evaluation" of classroom activities is done by parents orally and informally.

We recognize that parents are the first teachers of their children. They are undoubtedly the first people to note the level of self-esteem and to sense the effects of the academic experiences upon their children. The questions in number 6 (Appendix 10) were meant to address the issue of self-esteem. Question (6a) asks,"Was the self-esteem enhancement successful?" Some of the responses were:

-Our son could not wait for his turn. It was fun to have Teddy as part of our lives for one week. We found it encouraged even greater talk about school which is positive.

-The feedback received from the classroom for the "Etoile de la Semaine" was great and is something that they can keep it for life in their room.

-Yes.

-Not sure.

-Very successful!

-Good program.

Question (6b) was our attempt to evaluate the parents response regarding the language arts activities. It is worded: "Were the language arts activities (student story) appropriate and valid? The large majority of

parents replied "yes" without further elaboration.

However, some parents did choose to add further comments.

-The language arts activities were one of her favorites.

-I think it was a special thing to do for each child and I'm sure it
made them feel special and good about themselves.

-I think the story about each child is a great way to teach basic
reading skills.

We believe that it is also very important to evaluate how the parents
themselves felt about their participation and involvement in the classroom.
The next question read as follows: "Was parent participation, coming in
to share a special time in the classroom helpful?" Predictably, several
parents responded with a simple "yes."

The following responses were also noted.

-This is a great way for parents to share a passion and/or skill and
demonstrate to the child that you truly care what they do at school.

-It is also nice to be able to put faces to the names of fellow students.

-It was definitely important for the special person of the week. As
far as I know, the coolest dad was the one that did the yo-yo.

-Yes it was. We found the children were excited to see us and have
us share lunch and spend some time with them.

-It helps the parents keep in touch with the class and the teacher as
well.

-Yes, the kids loved it!

All of the substantive parent responses were positive. The few negative remarks we heard were related to time constraints and demands. Examples of this would be, "I am working full time and just simply cannot book any time off work," or "We are too busy at this time of year with other extra-curricular activities."

We quickly discovered that a personal call early in the week was very helpful, indeed essential in encouraging the parents to come. It would appear that some parents may feel a little intimidated by doing an activity with their child's entire class. We do our utmost to allay their fears by suggesting a choice of activities which they perhaps already do with their own children at home. Examples of this would be reading their favourite story, baking shaped cookies, playing a game of T-Ball, creating a collage based on a story, singing songs, learning about that family's cultural roots, a dance activity or an activity related to the parent's work.

One father, a carpenter, seemed rather nervous about being in the classroom with several seven-year old children, although his young son was so extremely proud to have his dad there. The children were involved in the construction unit of the Grade One Science curriculum. Their assignment was to construct the tallest structure possible with the materials they had. The father was the "building inspector" going from group to

group, making suggestions. The children loved this activity and so did the father. When he was thanked for coming, he suggested that he would be just delighted to come any other time. Although this particular parent did not respond in written form to the year-end questionnaire, we believe we can assume that his response to the mentorship program is positive.

Our evaluation procedures for the Language Arts component of the mentorship program consisted of the weekly cloze exercise and the more comprehensive culminating activity at the end of the program. There is also ongoing anecdotal records, miscue analysis, writing samples and self-evaluation.

Our evaluation of the self-esteem enhancement was obtained through anecdotal reporting, personal observation, oral feedback from colleagues, students and parents, as well as the written responses on the questionnaire.

The evaluation of the parental involvement and participation came from several different sources. Mostly, the responses were given orally by the parents themselves or as a written response on the year-end questionnaire. As well, some parents have contacted our administration to laud this program. Our colleagues keep us informed regarding their personal observations.

Perhaps the most significant evaluation is the one we both do together. We sit down with our record of activities, our questionnaire responses, our anecdotal reports, our stories and the journals in which the children have recorded their stories. We discuss what worked well, what needs to be improved, what changes we can make, what materials we may need. In this way, the program has evolved over the past three years to include telephone calls to the parents at the beginning of their child's week as "l'étoile ." This not only allows us to personally communicate with the parents. We can then assist them in planning an activity with the class which will be mutually satisfactory and which will help in bridging the cultures of both home and school.

Another aspect has been added to our mentorship program just this year. We normally send out a monthly Grade One newsletter including a calendar of activities for the month as well as a review of the curricular themes, et cetera. Although we have always acknowledged parent volunteers in a general manner in the past, we are now doing so very specifically by mentioning who were the special persons for the previous month and what wonderful activities were done with their parents. We are hoping that this will have a positive impact on the communication and rapport between home and school.

A review of the literature on mentoring programs and the evaluation of such programs is quite inconclusive. Brown (1995, p. 21) writes:

> "Many educators have great enthusiasm about mentoring, and mentoring has produced memorable successes. However, the link between mentoring programs and results, while promising, has not definitely been shown by available research. This may be because there are so many types of pairing strategies, and present research is so limited, that it is difficult to derive any sort of conclusion on what works and what does not. Also, mentoring (of whatever variety) is rarely a stand-alone 'program' but is only one component of a multiple intervention strategy. As a result, it is difficult to conclude from the current literature which types of pairings work best, and what are the optimal conditions for program success."

By and large, most mentoring programs are conducted in business, commerce and industry. Very little research refers to educational mentorship programs, and these are usually professional programs for beginning teachers rather than student programs. This is undoubtedly due to the paradigm shifts of the recent decade in the field of education. Mentorship programs for students are relatively new, of diverse formation and implementation, and largely unresearched regarding their efficacy and results. Student programs are generally meant to address the needs of special populations such as "at-risk" students.

There is absolutely no literature specific to mentorship programs in French immersion. We therefore have no basis for comparison with any other existing programs. What we have done in our program is to assess the specific needs of our student and parent population and try to devise a

method to enhance oral and written communication in an authentic manner while preserving and promoting the self-esteem of the children. To date, no quantitative research exists to prove or disprove our hypothesis that such a program can function and be successful. However, we believe that our evaluation questionnaire, our Language Arts activities, the oral and anecdotal reports, etcetera do provide enough qualitative data to suggest that the program is a viable one.

Granted, the concept of mentorship may be a little stretched when one considers that it is the parents of the children who are the mentors, thereby already possessing a strong link and bond to the children. Establishing a climate of trust and developing rapport between mentors and protégés, usually a serious consideration in traditional mentorship programs, is certainly not an issue in our program. Mentoring, even of this particular variety, provides an opportunity to explore topics the child may not have thought of before. The adults provide resources and may suggest directions for further exploration of a particular subject. Our parents as mentors are acting in the role of catalyst in the process of growth, learning and becoming. The sense of community is enhanced.

CONCLUSION

"It takes a whole village to educate a child" clearly sums up the cause for immersion teaching, the cause for parent participation, the cause for mentorship. Throughout our professional development, we have been influenced by a "village" of philosophers, other educators and scholars, motivational speakers and authors, administrators and policy makers. These have served to make us who we are as teachers. Each has been involved to some degree in our evolving teaching style, methodology, techniques and planning. Creatively crafting the components of this program necessitated the study of educational philosophy in general and immersion philosophy in particular.

The parents and extended family who are their child's first teacher are also closely involved in the process of educating children. Indeed, their "village" community is the first immersion in education of the child. Educational consultants, researchers, curriculum developers and many others belonging to a "village" of professionals have developed programs and influenced methodology which impact upon the education of the child.

It has become increasingly evident that children cannot be educated in isolation. To learn, to know and to grow, they need to be immersed in

the "village" community. Their needs cannot be met in limited circumstances.

Involving and collaborating with parents in an innovative mentorship program just seemed like an idea whose time had come. In "Yes, You can Help! A Guide for French Immersion Parents", Brehaut and Gibson (1996, p. 44) address the issue of this shared responsibility for the child's education with the statement:

> "Your child began learning the day she was born, and you were her first teacher. Your responsibility doesn't end on her first day of school! What she does at home and in the community will continue to be a vital part of her learning."

Furthermore, continual professional development led us in this direction of "making good" on Alberta Education's mandate to increase the involvement of parents as partners in the progress of their children. Given the complexity of today's world, students need more help in their lives than students did in the past. Direct parent participation in the school is one such adjustment.

Persistence in educational endeavours is often the result of the "village's" mentorship of believing in oneself because significant adults believed in you also. Research has indicated that people who succeed have generally had a mentor (Roche, 1979). Those who have experienced the

effects of mentors will go on to be mentors themselves. Mentoring is an age-old concept that readily incorporates the needs of today's rapidly changing society and professional demands.

We believe that the results of our mentoring program speak for themselves. The students are enthused about participating, sharing, giving and doing. The parents are becoming increasingly more involved and more comfortable about being involved. Bonds are not only being forged between the school and home, they are being strengthened. The enhancement to the self-esteem of the children when their name is picked, when they present the record of their life through the medium of photos, when they share their experiences with "Teddy," and when they receive compliments from their classmates is clearly visible on their little faces. They simply beam! We, the teachers, see positive results in their speaking, reading and writing skills. Clearly, this is a project which deserves to be continued and supported. The costs are minimal and the returns on the investment of time, effort and planning are sensational.

Future of the Program

Where do we go from here? The evaluation at the end of the school year helps in part to set directions. Feedback from the parent participants guides us in the planning process. For example, we added the new feature

this year of recognizing the parents who came during the month in our monthly newsletters home. Our "Grade One Evaluation" at the end of the year will have a question based on that monthly report of the mentorship program. This added feedback will help us chart a course for the coming year.

As well, we are currently in the planning stages of extending the program to other grades at other levels. We hope to attract mentors, not only from the parent population, but from the community at large. Within the community itself, there is a small population who speak and read in French.

When parents become accustomed to being involved in Kindergarten and Grade One, the groundwork has been laid for their continued involvement and participation in their child's education. There may also be extended family members who speak French and wish to share the language, traditions and culture. There is a growing awareness of the need for links between home and school, between extended family and school and between community and school. We believe that our mentorship program has made significant inroads in this direction.

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Dear Parents,

Beginning in January, we will be featuring one child per week as our **special star of the week (l'étoile de la semaine)**. The child will be chosen on a Friday using a drawing of names by the previous star or the week. **The child will then bring home a Teddy Bear to cherish for his/her special week.** Please see reverse side of this sheet for "Bear Notes."

The star of the week should bring to school on Monday some photos depicting his/her life, (e.g. friends, parents, grandparents, relatives, babyhood, pets or special trips and events.) Please, no more than ten photos which will be featured on the classroom door for all to see and then returned at the end of your child's week.

The star of the week may also bring a favorite puzzle, game or toy to school to share with his/her classmates during the week.

On the Friday of your child's week, we invite parents and siblings to come to the school to spend lunchtime with your child. At this time, your child may share all his/her school projects and activities with you.

Parents are also invited to remain into the afternoon if they have a project, activity or presentation which they wish to share with the entire class. We suggest activities that have connections to your careers, interest , hobbies or customs. Some of the past activities have included: sharing of a particular family custom, making cookies, cooking activity, an art activity, parent reading their favorite childhood story, musical concert, outdoor activities(t- ball), construction, lab tech taking imprints of germs on the children's hands, curling at an arena, etc. Please let us know early in the week if you will be doing an activity with the class, so it may be scheduled.

Several Language Arts activities will feature the star of the week. Your child will have his/her personal story composed by the class to bring home as a souvenir of this special week. Thank you for your cooperation.

Madame Claudette, 1L   Madame Kukura, 1K

112
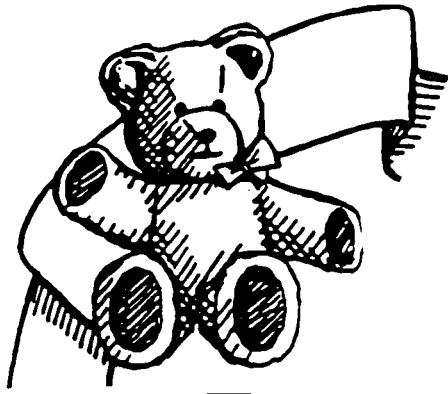
••••Bear Notes•••

The Teddy Bear will come in his special bag accompanied by his luggage. His/her name is "**Teddy**", short for **Theodore/Theodora**.

In the luggage, we would like each child to add something that "Teddy" may use or enjoy on his journeys. This could be an article of clothing, a hat, sunglasses, a favourite book, - whatever your imagination suggests. If these items are labelled, they will be returned at the end of the year. An inventory list will be included. If you send anything along with Teddy, please note this on the inventory list.

Parents, please check to make sure that the **previous items from the inventory list is returned with "Teddy" in the bag** when "Teddy" is returned on Friday, ready for her/ his next special visit to the next star of the week.

"Teddy" also comes with a journal . The star of the week should write at least one or more stories about their experiences and adventures with Teddy (in french please). They can also choose to write about what they have provided and its' use or any other relevant information they wish to share. Please make sure to note what you have included on the inventory list in the journal. Please guide your child in doing this throughout his/her week as the star. These stories should be illustrated by the child.

Thank-you to all parents for helping us to make this a wonderful language learning experience for your child.

Mme. Kukura

Mme. Claudette

113
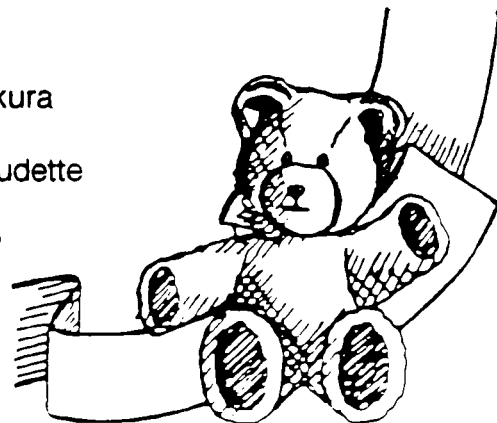
ÇA... C'EST

Je m'appelle

_____

Mon anniversaire est

le _____

J'ai _____ ans.

Voici mon animal préféré.

Voici ma famille.
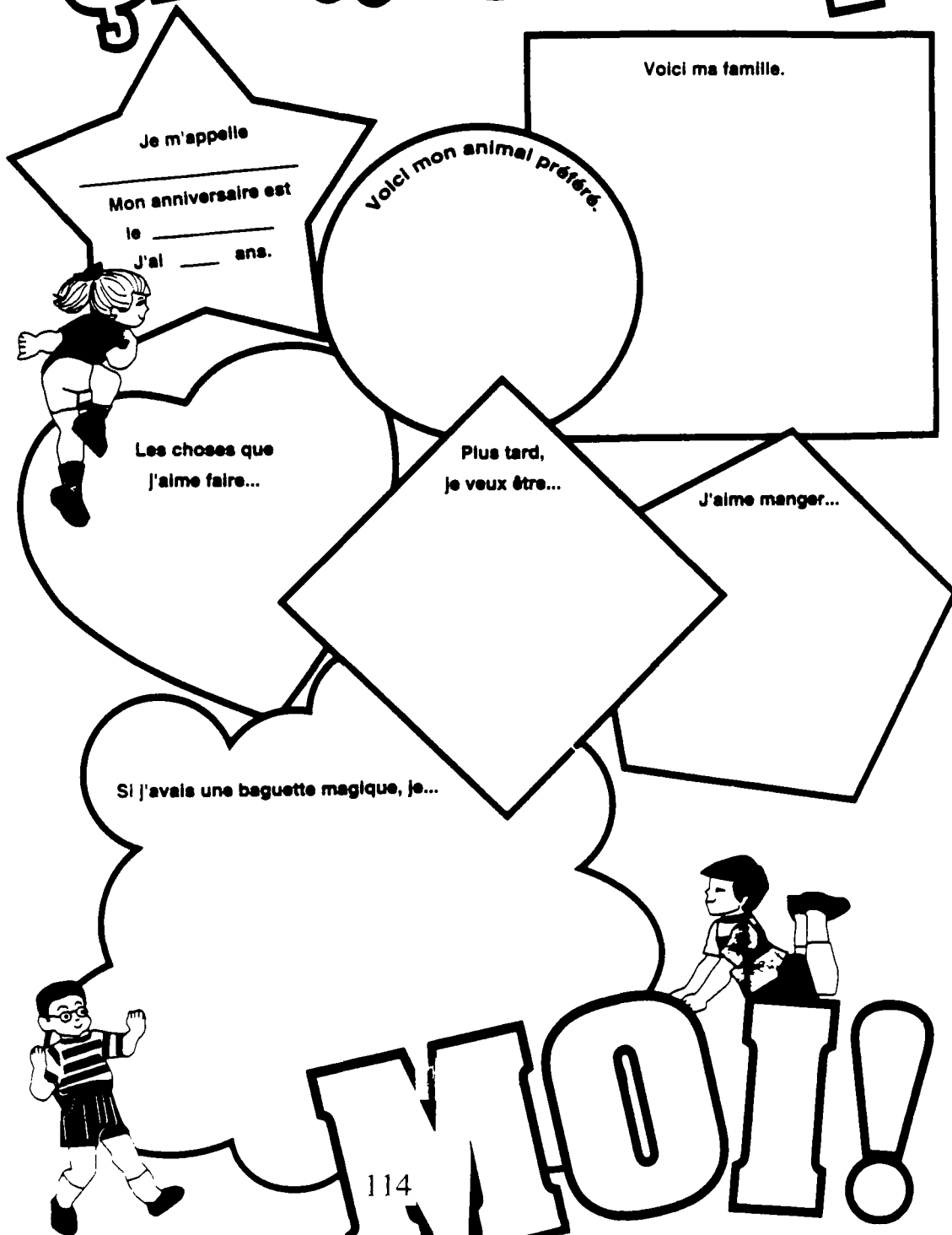
Les choses que j'aime faire...

Plus tard, je veux être...

J'aime manger...

Si j'avais une baguette magique, je...

MOI!

la porte

toile de la Semaine

Mary-Kim

Mary-Kim est une grande
Elle qui a six ans.
Elle est une bonne artiste
Elle écrit très bien.
Mary-Kim a les cheveux
noirs et les yeux bruns
Elle est une bonne amie
Dans sa famille il y a cinq
personnes: Un papa une
maman Un grand frère William
une petite sœur Mon Amie
Mary-Kim. Elle
pizza au pepperoni noir
Elle aime las jungle
Mary-Kim la Semaine

116

GRANT

Grant est un grand garçon qui a les cheveux

roux et les yeux gris-verts.

Il est un bon _ _ _ .

Son animal préféré est _ _ baleine bleue.

_rant adore faire des _ oyages.

Il _ _ _ _ Legoland.

Il aime aussi _ _ chocolat chaud.

Grant aime _ _ _ _ r au gymnase.

_ _ y _ cinq personnes dans _ _ famille.

L _ f i n

NOM_____

Stephen

118

119

	Code:	BP-2014
	Title:	School Councils
Reference: Board Resolution	Approved:	March 19, 1991
	Revised:	September 19, 1995
Cross		
Reference: Section 17		February 6, 1996
School Act		April 15, 1997

Background

Section 17 of The School Act authorizes the formation of school councils. These councils are advisory to the school principal and the board with respect to matters relating to the school. The board must make rules respecting the establishment, membership, and dissolution of school councils.

Policy

In accordance with Section 17 of The School Act, the board encourages the formation of school councils as advisory to the principal of the school and the elected trustees. The board sees the participation of parents, through their school councils, as a reflection of its philosophy of education and its support of parents as the primary educators of their children.

KIRSTEN

Kirsten a les cheveux bruns et les yeux gris-verts.

Elle _ _ _ _ jouer avec les poupées "Barbie."

Kirsten _ _ _ une grande fille qui _ _ _ _ jouer au basketball.

Elle _ _ _ _ _ les biscuits.

Dans sa famille, _ _ _ quatre personnes: un papa, _ _ _ maman, une petite soeur _ Kirsten.

Elle aime jouer _ _ _ _ son chat Simba.

Kirsten _ _ _ une bonne amie.

Elle est _ _ _ fille qui a _ _ _ ans.

L _ fin.

NOM_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

Les aventures de Teddy

Teddy est l'ourson de la classe 1K. Il a eu beaucoup d'aventures.

est allé voir les cousins de _____ à Rimbey. _____ a donné du chocolat.

La deuxième semaine, a fait un autre voyage à Rimbey avec _____. est allé à un "sleep-over" chez l'ami à _____ qui s'appelle Brady.

est allé avec _____ chez sa grand-maman. Chez _____, a fait du surfing et il a aussi joué au hockey. Ils ont gagné.

Avec ___ est allé à Calgary. Là, il a visité la tante à ___.

Avec _____, est retourné à Calgary. Il est même allé à un parc d'eau.

La petite soeur à Francis a donné une bouteille d'eau à . Il s'est fait arroser.

Chez _____ a dormi avec elle chaque soir. Il a joué avec toute la famille.

- 2 -

Avec _____ a eu beaucoup d'aventures. Il est même allé à Rockey Avec elle rendre visite à sa grand-maman.

_____ est allé à un hôtel avec . Il les a regarder nager.

Notre ourson est allé à l'église avec _____ On a joué le nerf avec lui.

a fait un voyage à Calgary avec _____ P. Les enfants ont joué avec lui.

La semaine après, est retourné à Calgary avec _____ H. Son petit frère l'a mis dans sa chambre.

Avec _____, a joué au Super Heroes et au camping. Il a eu son lit à lui-même.

_____ a joué au baseball avec Il est aussi allé nager avec lui. a porté le vieux maillot à _____.

____ a apporté voir Fantasyland. Elle a joué avec à la maison.

124

- 3 -

_____ a beaucoup joué avec aussi.   a sauté sur le tramplin et il en est tombé. Mais il va encore bien.

 est maintenant de retour en classe. Il se repose.

La fin

Les noms des élèves

Adam	Matthew
Alexandre	Ngan
Alyssa	Philip
Caitlin	Samantha
Connor	Seth
Francis	Stephen
Ian	
Jennifer	
Kristen	

-4-

1. Ecris le nom des élèves à la bonne place.

2. Encercle en rouge toutes les lettres qui donnent le son "é" comme é, et, ez, er, ai.

3. Souligne les sons "ou".

4. Combien de fois Teddy est-il allé à Calgary?_____

5. Qui a donné un lit à Teddy pour lui-même? _____

6. Ecris ce que tu as aimé le plus de ton aventure avec Teddy.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

GRADE ONE EVALUATION
Appendix 4

1. Have you any positive items to share about this past year or about the classroom?

2. Have you any suggestions for changes within the classroom?

3. Any comments about class discipline?

4. Is your child happy about going to school?

5. Did you find the supplementary reading program (books with tapes) helpful? Was the reading material adequate and appropriate? Would you change it? How? Why?

- 2 -

6. We would appreciate your input regarding our mentorship program. This involved "Teddy & his journal" and "Etoile de la semaine."

    a) Was the self-esteem enhancement successful?

    b) Were the language arts activities (the student story) appropriate and valid?

    c) Was parent participation, coming in to share a special time in the classroom helpful?

7. Do you have any other comment or suggestion for us which would be helpful in enhancing the Grade 1 French Immersion program?

THANKS! We do appreciate you taking the time to respond to our questionnaire and we do value your input!
Mme Claudette   Mme Kukura