

Co-constructing Theories of Language Learning During *Explorations* in a
French Immersion Classroom

by

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Abstract

This study focused on understanding French language learning from a perspective that began from the participating children's interests, experiences, and abilities. The study was significant in its use of a Reggio-inspired teaching philosophy and pedagogy in a French Immersion classroom (offering an alternative pedagogy to the more common transmission-oriented and skills-based models of language teaching). The research methodology embedded pedagogical documentation and classroom observation in an ethnographic research tradition. In the study, the teacher-researcher was positioned alongside children, as she learned about the ways in which they learn language through collaborative and authentic experiences, in a transactional setting. With an emphasis on the importance of meaningful learning, the study opens up new possibilities for French Immersion teachers and learners by examining the ways in which English scaffolds French learning, collaboration generates new understanding, and authentic experiences support engaged learning.

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The topic of my thesis has been an idea in my mind that has taken shape over many years. It connects everything that I love about being a teacher with everything that I believe and value about learning. I am grateful to the many people who have supported me throughout this process.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	3
Table of Contents.....	4
List of Figures.....	7
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	8
Setting the scene.....	8
Creating a Path: Discovering who I am as a Teacher.....	12
Purpose of Study.....	14
Research Focus and Guiding Questions	16
Significance of Study.....	17
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	18
Reggio Emilia.....	18
Image of the Child.....	20
Role of the Teacher.....	22
Environment as Third Teacher.....	25
French Immersion: Historical Context and Pedagogy	30
Language Instruction in French Immersion	32
English as a Support for French language Learning	33

Collaboration in the Classroom.....	35
Authentic Learning Opportunities.....	37
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	40
Pedagogical Documentation	41
Links with Ethnography	45
Context of Study.....	48
Explorations.....	48
Debriefing	49
Further Work Inspired by Explorations.....	51
Methods.....	52
Consent.....	53
Data Collection and shifts.....	54
Analyzing data.....	57
Chapter 4: Findings.....	61
English as a Scaffolding Tool for French.....	63
“Where does the water go?”: Mya, Sydney, and Erik.....	64
« Les os sont pas hollow » : Gavin, Erik, Isaiah, Danika, and Simran.....	68
“It would have to be “e-s-t” for est-ce que”: Simran, Ishdeep, Sydney, and Mya.....	76

The Benefits of Collaboration.....	78
« Pour la grenouille africaine, le male est plus grand » : Erik, Isaiah, Mme.....	78
« J'ai 20 dents »: Emily.....	86
« L'archaeopteryx ne peut pas voler il peut juste glide » : Simran, Gavin, Erik, and Isaiah.....	92
Informing Pedagogy through Authentic Learning.....	97
« Ça c'est le dimorphodon » : Gavin.....	98
« Comment est-ce que les canards savent où voler? » : Kate.....	105
« On sait plus de mots en Français que les enfants » : Mya, Sydney, Emily, and Danika.....	112
Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications.....	121
Challenges, Limitations, and Future Wonderings.....	121
Using Multiliteracies to Enrich Authentic Learning.....	124
Pedagogical Shifts in French Immersion.....	126
References.....	129
Appendices.....	140

List of Figures

Figure 1: Published books.....	11
Figure 2: Book launch.....	11
Figure 3: Facilitating movement, collaboration, and curiosity.....	27
Figure 4: Accessible layout and varied work spaces.....	28
Figure 5: Books baskets.....	29
Figure 6: Inviting, accessible and inspiring supplies.....	29
Figure 7: Science corner.....	30
Figure 8: Word Wall.....	51
Figure 9: Mya's plasticine model of baleen.....	68
Figure 10: Sydney's water colour portrait of baleen.....	68
Figure 11: Isaiah's Archaeopteryx and bird.....	73
Figure 12: Erik's plasticine model of the African Bullfrog.....	80
Figure 13: The African Bullfrog in written form.....	84
Figure 14: Gavin's drawing of the archaeopteryx.....	93
Figure 15: Constructing puppets	117
Figure 16: Creativity and language learning.....	117
Figure 17: Puppets for buddy reading.....	118

Chapter 1: Introduction

Setting the scene

The classroom is buzzing with activity. There is a continued hum of energy and excitement that floats around the room; it will continue throughout the 45 minutes of *Explorations* time. Explorations is a time built into the structure of our day in which children are encouraged to bring forward their interests, ideas, and theories to be further explored through collaborative small group research and questioning. It is an opportunity for child-initiated and teacher-supported learning where the teacher makes observations and provokes discussions to help further children's understanding on topics of interest.

When Explorations is over we will gather together as a group at the carpet to share about the interesting things that took place throughout the morning. Children will discuss challenges they faced, discoveries they made, questions they are pursuing, and their plans for seeking new information. Until then, the students are eagerly sketching, writing, talking, reading, painting, and building. Our Grade 3 and 4 French Immersion multi-age classroom is made up of children of a variety of abilities, diverse cultural backgrounds, and differing interests, but Explorations brings them together through a common passion for new knowledge and experiences.

At the small round table in the science area, a group of students is carefully examining a pile of rocks in front of them. A student slowly brings a magnifying glass to his eye and takes a long, hard look at the rock he holds. He crinkles his face in concentration. He leans over to his neighbour and shows him the rock. Together they turn to one of the rock field guides intentionally displayed on a classroom table. They discuss quietly until they have reached a decision about how to classify the rock. The boy reaches over and places the rock into one of the

three bowls to his left. The four children at the table continue going through similar steps. With each rock they pick up, they pensively determine in which of the three groups it best fits and then place their rock into that bowl.

Hard at work at a large table on the other side of the room, surrounded by non-fiction animal books, three children are huddled closely together deep in conversation about the book of whales they have selected. They have paused on a page showing the way that whales eat their food. They converse excitedly about the purpose of baleen and the whale's blowhole. They ask each other countless questions and divulge several of their own theories reflecting their understandings of whales.

Stretched out across the carpet at the back of the room, five children are eager to collect as much information as possible about the "first bird." They maintain an animated discussion about the archaeopteryx as they each go about gathering and representing information in their own ways. One child is drawing various prehistoric birds on small sheets of paper while his friend cuts them out and lays them on their bird timeline in the spots where he thinks they belong; two children are feverishly writing out all their new information in their French journals; and the fifth group member is sketching the skeleton of the archaeopteryx directly beside the skeleton of a barn swallow.

Working just beside the archaeopteryx group is a collection of students who are sculpting with plasticine. Each of their creations is very different. One boy is delicately crafting a male and a female bullfrog. On the ground in front of him he has two large computer printed images of the African bullfrog that he has brought from home. His neighbour beside him is busy constructing a plasticine model of an adult mouth. She forcefully smooths the gums of the replica, and then presses small white marshmallows in a crescent moon formation into the gums. She has brought

her Ziploc bag of marshmallows from home because she knew they would be the perfect size to serve as teeth for her model.

Beside the girl working with plasticine is another girl adding the final details to her diorama. She has decorated two small boxes in greens, browns, and blues using tissue paper, paint, and cardstock. One box represents the habitat of the Canada Goose in Manitoba and the other represents their habitat in Mexico where they migrate each winter. She is gingerly tracing lines on each side of the brown and black plasticine goose she has built. The lines show the outline of the bird's wings. The three of them speak intermittently commenting on what someone else is working on or seeking feedback on their own work.

Independently collecting the supplies they require, a small group of children gather at the art station. They prepare the nearby table by laying out a plastic tablecloth and fill a container with water. The children select the paintbrushes they need and the bottles of watercolour paint they want to use. A dark haired girl selects a thin paintbrush, leans over her sketched drawing, and begins adding colour to her work. One-by-one, the children sharing the table with this girl do the same. They are all hard at work painting the illustrations for their published French books. The children's published books are hardcover non-fiction books that are written and illustrated by each child about one of their Explorations topics pursued throughout the year (see Figure 1).

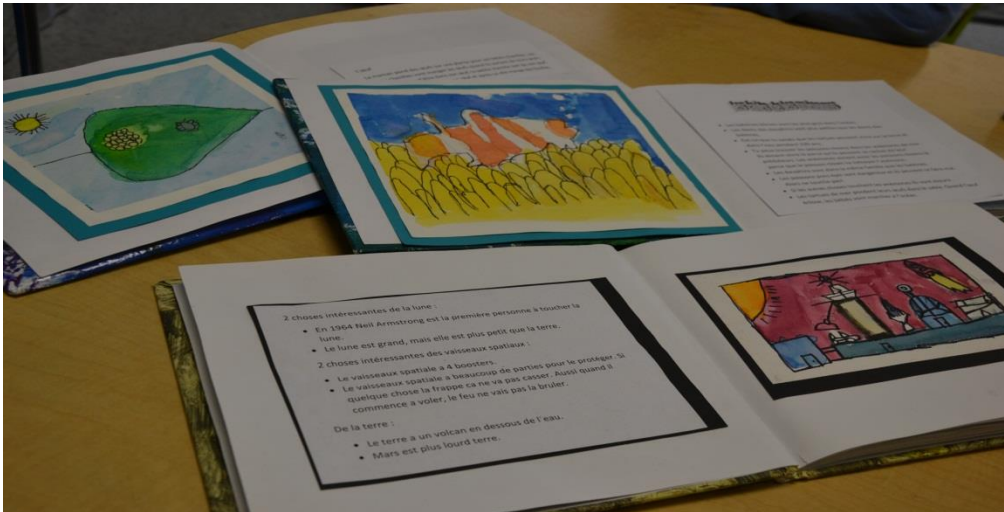


Figure 1: Published Books

The children spend several weeks writing, editing, typing, and illustrating their published books. Each book is a non-fiction depiction of the information they have learned during Explorations. This particular year there were books written about topics such as birds, planets, ocean animals, and amphibians.



Figure 2: Book launch

The children's published books are displayed in the library along with their handmade puppets in preparation for our annual book launch. The children's families join us after school offering an opportunity for the children to share their work with their families.

Explorations is such a busy time in our room and a time in which sophisticated and involved thinking and learning takes place. Over the years, Explorations has become one of the strongest pedagogical practices for helping children refine their research abilities, enrich their knowledge as critical thinkers, strengthen their communication skills, and develop a powerful love of learning.

Creating a Path: Discovering who I am as a Teacher

My connection to French Immersion began as a child. I was a French Immersion student from the day I was enrolled in Kindergarten until I graduated from Grade 12. Learning an additional language in the classroom had always been my reality and so it felt like a natural fit when I was taking on my first position as a classroom teacher. I began my career as a French Immersion teacher eight years ago in a *dual-track* school. In a dual-track school half of the population of students are enrolled in English classrooms and the other half of the students are in French Immersion classrooms. Each of my eight years of teaching has been spent in the same incredible and innovative school within a progressive school division. As I was just beginning my career, the English classrooms that surrounded my room fascinated me. The teachers in these rooms were devoted, capable, and experienced teachers. They breathed new life into what I knew about learning and what I thought I knew about teaching. Their classrooms were unlike anything I had ever seen before. They were spaces that invited movement and curiosity, urged collaboration and critical thinking, and above all else, valued children and the thinking of children by creating opportunities for ideas and theories to be shared. It was evident that the teachers in these rooms developed structures to support learners' independence and placed ownership with the children to become autonomous. I became enamoured with these classrooms. They represented all of the things I had always believed teaching and learning could be. Many of

the teachers in these English classrooms were informed, in part, by the philosophy and practices of Reggio Emilia education (which will be discussed in greater depth in the next section of this paper) as well as the theories of social constructivism. Reggio Emilia is a small city in Northern Italy and it is credited with the development of a pre-school educational approach that places tremendous value on the strengths and abilities of children. At the time I did not know what Reggio Emilia was, nor that this educational philosophy would go on to have a profound effect on my own practice.

Working in my French Immersion classroom, I quickly began to feel a “disconnect” between the traditional practices of French Immersion and the exciting potentials taking place in the English classrooms down the hall. French Immersion teaching practices seemed traditional and teacher driven. It looked very much the same as the teaching I had been exposed to many years prior as a French Immersion student. I believe that to remain current and up-to-date about teaching, language, and pedagogy, ongoing research is essential. However, there has been limited research examining effective classroom practices in French Immersion contexts (Lentz, Lyster, Netten & Tardif, 1994; Lyster, 1995). As previously mentioned, the teaching practices I have chosen have always been heavily influenced by the English classrooms in my school. Often I hear French Immersion teachers adamant in their stance that French Immersion rooms cannot look like English classrooms and that our practices have to be approached differently from one another because our responsibility is to immerse children during their school experience in French at all times except for the time spent in English language arts. I believe that by seeing the need to exclusively use French, we construct learning and language barriers for the children and for ourselves as French Immersion teachers. In support of my belief, Cummins (2011) presents practices to maximize engagement and extend language proficiency in classrooms including: the

scaffolding of learning through collaborative interactions, the activation of prior experiences and knowledge, and the acknowledgement of students' identities that may draw upon children's multiple ways of making and sharing meaning (beyond the French language alone). Considering these practices in our teaching acknowledges the commonalities that exist in effective language teaching among all classrooms.

I have always been motivated to imagine my practice as a French Immersion teacher by thinking about what might be possible rather than by unquestioningly accepting the status quo. By shifting one's mindset (seeing the children's meaning making and sharing palette as being more extensive than just the target language to be learned) suddenly the potentials for language learning appear quite different and the possibilities become endless. Over the past number of years I have been working to create a confluence of collaborative learning experiences, child-generated ideas, and French language learning. This journey has brought me to my current understanding of language learning and my ongoing study of French Immersion practice and pedagogy.

Purpose of study

The purpose of my study was to understand French language learning from a perspective that values the interests, experiences, and abilities children bring with them to school. My interest was to learn more about their engagement with learning, their perceptions of themselves as language learners, and their interactions as collaborative problem-solvers. I hoped to gain further insight from the children in my classroom regarding additional ways to foster active, capable, and involved learning. I wanted to explore more deeply how to support their collaborative participation and critical thinking while acquiring an additional language. My intention was to attend to the theories and thinking of young children, to provide authentic

learning experiences through which they could grow, and to use their perspectives to provoke change in French Immersion pedagogy. My study centred on times of our day in which children were most able to share their passions and wonderings with their peers.

I was interested in learning firsthand from children how they think they acquire language, and where and how they feel that learning through experience and collaboration supports their language development. Supporting children in developing insights into their own learning does not simply happen—it needs to be fostered, encouraged, and modelled. The structures of the classroom and the routines in the day demonstrate to children that their ideas and theories are valued. By approaching learning from a stance that values children's perspectives, ongoing classroom dialogue, and authentic learning these values become integral elements of the classroom culture. Such a shift in perspective repositions the teacher's use of dialogue “not as an exchange, but as a process of transformation where you lose absolutely the possibility of controlling the final result” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 184). Hence, learning becomes a process co-constructed by the teacher and the children, as each child contributes to making meaning of the world around him or her.

As understandings of language and learning shift such that we come to view children as capable and competent meaning-makers, accordingly understandings of teaching also shift to a recognition of teachers as collaborative co-learners and facilitators of authentic learning experiences. There is a complex interplay that exists between the *image of the child*, the role of the teacher, the learning environment, the *pedagogy of listening*, and the practices of collaborative experiences. The image of the child is the representation of what a person or a group of people believe, understand, or assume about children, their development, their capabilities, and their motivations (image of the child is explored in greater depth in the

Literature Review). Pedagogy of listening is the acknowledgement of listening as a powerful tool for learning. Meaning making and understanding of children's theories is achieved through reciprocal listening between teacher and children. The learning environment, the role of the teacher, the image of the child, the pedagogy of listening, and the practices of collaborative experiences are utterly interconnected, and if one of these dimensions is weakened or misaligned, the strength of the entire structure is diminished. Reggio Emilia provides a compelling illustration of the power of teaching and learning when each of these philosophical beliefs is conjoined.

Research Focus and Guiding Questions

The intent of my research was to enhance my understanding of children's perceptions of themselves as language learners. What is their engagement with French language learning? What are their theories about how they learn French? How do they help one another learn French? The context within which the students are learning French cannot be disregarded as it plays an integral role in how they view themselves as learners. For this reason, I have examined children's language learning in relation to the collaborative work they engaged in during Explorations. Because I believe that learning is a social and collaborative process, language learning cannot be separated from the experiences in which it develops. Consequently, I was interested in how the children engaged with others as collaborative group members, the role that collaboration played in their learning, and the role that collaboration played even more specifically in their language learning. My intention was to learn more about their engagement with French and how their interactions with me and with one another in French evolved throughout the course of the study. I wanted to observe the ways in which being part of sustained

classroom conversations about language learning influenced their self-awareness as learners and their relationship and engagement with the French language.

Significance of Study

To view the child as the central focus in our practice is a notion that remains virtually unexplored in the field of French Immersion (Cummins, 2000; Kukura & Lalonde, 1998). The way we communicate with children, design and organize our classroom spaces, and allot time for continued and sustained classroom dialogue, is a reflection of our beliefs about teaching and learning. Honouring children's interests and developing collaborative learning opportunities demonstrates a "commitment to educate the whole child rather than just teach the curriculum" (Cummins, 2000, p. 6). Therefore, this study represents an initial step towards research that examines pedagogical documentation and its potential in French Immersion pedagogy. Pedagogical documentation (which will be described in greater depth in the Methodology section) is a teacher research methodology that makes evident children's construction of knowledge, shifts in theories, evolving perspectives, and multiple identities. This study is intended to begin a conversation about the potential of a Reggio-inspired teaching philosophy and practices in a French language setting. I am unaware of any other study that brings Reggio-inspired teaching and learning into a French Immersion context. I hope that this research may provoke dialogue about the possibilities of French language pedagogy in an Immersion setting using relationships, dialogue, and collaborative learning as central focuses. This study positions the teacher's understandings of children's perspectives and the teacher's valuing of children's theories and their sense of their self-identities as pedagogically foundational.

Literature Review

Reggio Emilia

The philosophical underpinnings that guide much of my teaching practice are embedded in Reggio Emilia education. Reggio Emilia is an evolving educational philosophy with accompanying practices guided by ideas such as collaborative learning, student interest, authentic experiences, and an image of a competent child. This educational philosophy was initially conceptualized by Loris Malaguzzi in Italy, and brings together ideas and philosophies from many continents and historical periods of education (Edwards, 1993; Rinaldi, 2006). The early childhood education of Reggio Emilia was established in response to the fascist experience of World War II, which had “taught them that people who conformed and obeyed were dangerous . . . [and that] in building a new society it was imperative to safeguard and communicate that lesson and nurture and maintain a vision of children who can think and act for themselves” (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999, p. 8). Consequently, Reggio Emilia early childhood education centres strive to create authentic opportunities for children to engage in collaborative learning experiences that provoke them to think critically, question frequently, and dialogue continuously.

Reggio Emilia draws upon a rich history of postmodernist and social constructivist scholarship (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007). A postmodern perspective views all truths as partial, tentative, and fluid. It asserts that nothing is fixed; “there is no absolute knowledge, no absolute reality waiting ‘out there’ to be discovered” (p. 23). Instead, knowledge is seen to be a construction of our own perceptions and a compilation of the meanings we draw from experiences. Bauman (as cited in Dahlberg et al., 2007) presents a perspective of postmodernity that:

reverses the signs of the values central to modernity: singularity is preferred to universality; local knowledge to metanarratives; multiple perspectives and complexity to unity and coherence; diversity to consensus; ambivalence to certainty; meaning making to truth; the possibility of chance in history to natural progress to a preordained end. (p. 26)

Postmodern and social constructivist perspectives characterize culture and identity as being ever-changing and evolving constructions that are formed, reformed, and influenced by social interactions. Culture is a social construction “created, shared, and transformed by a group of people bound together by . . . a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and religion” (Nieto, 2009, p. 129). Just as knowledge, relationships, and understanding are always partial and fluid, culture too “is dynamic, active, changing, always on the move” (Nieto, 2009, p. 130). Our relationships with those around us, our perceptions of ourselves, and our perspectives of the world are influenced by our interactions with others.

The social constructivist perspective values the notion that knowledge is co-constructed. The world and our knowledge of it is socially constructed (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Lather, 1991). It is through relationship, dialogue, and interaction that we make meaning of the world around us. An image of a rich and capable child acknowledges that “children do not passively endure their experience but become active agents in their socialization, co-constructed with their peers” (Rinaldi, 1998, p. 105). Unlike a transmission model of knowledge that views knowledge as something predetermined which can be passed on in an unaltered form, a social constructivist perspective sees children as “co-constructors of knowledge and identity in relationship with other children and adults” (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 7). Viewing learners as capable, social thinkers reflects a belief that children arrive in classrooms

with their own collection of knowledge and significant previous learning experiences. The way children are viewed, in turn, affects the way the teacher constructs his or her role.

Image of the Child

As a teacher, I was regularly involved in conversations that caused me to consider, rethink, and extend my image of the child. Because one's image of the child is a construction, there are countless ways in which children can be viewed. My image of children plays a key role in the way I interact with, support, and teach children. Consider the following varied images of the child and the implications: "the child as an innocent" in need of sheltering and protection from a violent, oppressive and corrupt world; "the scientific child of biological stages" who matures and grows through stages of development, but is not influenced by social or cultural experiences; and "the child as knowledge, identity and culture reproducer" who begins life with nothing, gradually acquiring skills, understanding and autonomy (Dahlberg et al, 2007). If we believe in the perspective of "the child as knowledge, identity and culture reproducer," the implication is that we see learners as empty vessels waiting to be filled. This conjures up images of children obediently taking in information as they sit patiently and passively in rows of desks. In turn, this perspective constructs teachers as dispensers of knowledge. Reggio Emilia challenges the view of a meek and passive child, acknowledging the strengths and abilities that young children possess upon entering school. Rinaldi (2006) describes "a competent, active, critical child who is therefore 'challenging', because he [*sic*] produces change and dynamic movement in the systems in which he is involved, including the family, the society and the school" (p. 83). The child plays an active role in his or her learning.

This interpretation fits with the way that students are viewed in my classroom. Children are recognized as productive and capable members of our learning community. They arrive with

their own knowledge and understandings, and our time spent together is intended to extend and challenge their thinking. They are seen as a “co-constructor of knowledge, identity and culture” (Dahlberg et al., 2007)—the “child as active agent” (Sorin, 2005). From this perspective, as a teacher I do not see my primary responsibility being to fill children with information. Rather, I am responsible for providing learning opportunities that will value and build on children’s interest, knowledge, and abilities.

Envisioning an image of the child as a co-constructor has implications for my relationships with children. Children are active participants in learning and who take responsible ownership for their experiences. The teacher and child become co-learners in which interactions result in negotiations of understanding, collaboration among perspectives, and a continual reframing of possibilities. In line with a social constructivist perspective, the relationships, dialogues, and interactions taking place in the classroom provide the experiences through which knowledge may be constructed. From this perspective, schools are not perceived as institutions working to transmit quantities of information to future generations. Shifting this perspective has implications for all aspects of teaching. Suddenly, schools “are not places where teachers try to pass on information, but where teachers and children try reciprocally to understand each other” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 107). It is important to note that teachers maintain the responsibility of guiding students’ learning and challenging their current understanding. However, guidance is accessible and learning is achieved without reliance on a transmission model of teaching. When relationships are central in teaching, interactions between children, teacher, school, learning, and teaching are all affected. Who we teach becomes as important as what we teach and how we teach. Knowing students on a personal level becomes integral in order to teach effectively. In order to know children well it is necessary to invite them to share their unique identities and to

provide opportunities in which they are supported in becoming active participants in the co-construction of knowledge.

Role of the Teacher

Aligned with the image of the child as an active and engaged learner is a parallel image of the teacher as a co-constructor of knowledge rather than a transmitter of knowledge. Hammerness (2003) creates a distinction describing a teacher not as a “knowledge-provider”, but as a “resource-provider” (p. 48), guiding children through authentic learning experiences. My essential responsibilities as a teacher centre on my ability to relate to, understand, and listen to children. Therefore, my efforts shift from a desire to give information to a desire to hear the perspectives and understandings that students currently hold. As a result, “the important verbs in educational practice are no longer “to talk”, “to explain” or “to transmit”—but “to listen” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 126). The role of the teacher involves responsive consideration of how to extend children’s thinking and how to design experiences that will allow children to create knowledge. Listening exposes children’s theories and perspectives and provides new possibilities for where learning may lead. As postmodern and social constructivist perspectives acknowledge, understanding and knowledge are continually evolving and changing. Listening permits teachers to recognize where children currently are in their understanding and reveals possibilities with which to extend or challenge their thinking. A teacher becomes “a careful observer and listener, to provide generous and flexible allowances of time, and to provoke children’s thinking through higher level questions that encourage critical thinking and inference-making” (Wien, 2008, p. 108). The desire is to broaden children’s understanding beyond what they currently think and see.

Reggio Emilia refers to such experiences designed by teachers as *provocations*.

Provocations are learning opportunities generated with and for students with the intention of unsettling and challenging their current thinking. The resources a teacher provides takes many forms including a thoughtfully prepared environment, carefully posed questions, and purposefully designed provocations. A provocation is “the moment when teachers introduce a new element, carefully chosen to entice children into further inquiry, or to revisit so that the learner may revise their current theories” (Turner & Wilson, 2009, p. 12). Provocations could include a question, an experience or the introduction of new materials, all of which can come from the teacher or the children (Turner & Wilson, 2009). For example, if an interest in light and shadow emerged among students in my room, I might bring in materials and resources that could be used to extend their current thinking. This might include prisms, flashlights, mirrors, or water. Beyond supplying resources, I might also challenge particular theories the children were using. For instance, if the children were convinced that all shadows were black, I would create experiences that challenged this theorizing. This might involve setting up a shadow puppet screen and supplying coloured transparent objects, having the children take photos of different shadows and asking them to record observations of each shadow’s colouring, or laying out transparent, translucent, and opaque objects on an overhead projector to generate discussion. The intention of these teaching moves would be to create disequilibrium in children’s current theories and push them toward deeper understandings.

As a teacher, I sometimes struggle to maintain my desired position as a co-constructor amidst the demands and busy schedule of the school day. At times the best solution is to set aside my rigid schedule and pay attention to what is taking place in the room: “often we know what we would like for him or for her, but not who he or she really is and what he or she would

like” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 91). At times I find it difficult to achieve a successful balance between where I would like to take children and where they would like to go. However, I believe that the role of the teacher is to build connections among learners’ prior knowledge, interests, academic strengths, and needs. A way to achieve this delicate balance is through careful listening, collaborative reflection, and the building of educational relationships.

A willingness to relinquish the control of knowing precisely where I think learning should be headed can be a daunting task. By inviting and encouraging ongoing dialogue, learning engagements open into endless possibilities and often in uncharted directions. An example can be as simple as the effects that a child’s story during morning share can have over the course of a single day. A child may arrive in the morning eager to share about the tooth he or she lost the night before. This story might ignite excitement among other students wanting to share about their own experiences. There is potential for this unexpected anecdote to fuel possibilities for children’s writing during writer’s workshop or wonderings during Explorations as the day unfolds. The teacher’s decision-making process moves from being more content-driven to being more conversation-driven. Dialogue becomes an opportunity to share ideas, challenge assumptions, and question new possibilities. This perspective positions teachers as co-learners who are able to wonder and explore alongside their students, as they engage in an interchange of knowledge. Aligned with theories of social constructivism, the focus becomes building understanding rather than leading learners towards predetermined knowledge. In contrast, possibilities are stifled when the direction of learning is fixed: “the potential of children is stunted when the endpoint of their learning is formulated in advance” (Rinaldi, 1998, p. 118). By allowing children opportunities to participate in the design of their learning experiences, I place value in their theories, ideas, and abilities. Approaching teaching with “openness” to the

unexpected can be both liberating and overwhelming. It requires clear and overt expectations and well-established structures in which co-constructed learning can occur. There are countless visible and invisible structures that must be put in place. Developing opportunities for co-constructing learning means shifting priorities as a teacher and always working to engage the passions of the children in pedagogical decision-making.

If children's perspectives are truly valued and they are recognized as playing an essential part in co-constructing their own knowledge and identities, the question is "how and when can I promote and sustain these dialogues?" This is a delicate balancing act that requires that I am constantly making adjustments. When I am most effective as a teacher, I am often inundated with more questions and uncertainties than I have answers: "When should I answer and when should I question? . . . When should I act as a quiet observer and when should I act as a co-participant?" (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 246). Questioning my choices and re-examining my interactions with children is an effective way to ensure that I am always reflecting on my practice and supporting students. As a teacher, I play a multitude of roles: "we need a teacher who is sometimes the director, sometimes the set designer, sometimes the curtain and the backdrop, and sometimes the prompter" (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 73). The strength of the teacher lies in her or his ability to respond to a variety of ever-changing circumstances.

Environment as Third Teacher

To support students in becoming collaborative and engaged learners, my classroom is purposefully designed to foster these qualities. Spaces have been reconceptualized to offer opportunities, provocations, and furthering insights. This notion of the classroom design as a contributing factor for learning is referred to in Reggio Emilia as "environment as third teacher" (Strong-Wilson & Ellis, 2007; Wien, 2008). A well-organized and prepared classroom

environment has the power to initiate, enhance, and shape learning: “space and its objects-in-relation can be organized, designed, layered, and bounded” (Wien, 2008, p. 9) to provoke and invite rich experiences among learners. I view the classroom environment as an ecosystem; this is reflective of the way I view teaching and learning as a fluid, changing, and always altering process. I believe that the space in which we work needs to be an extension of the learning opportunities I strive to provide (see Figure 3 and 4). Much like a postmodern understanding of knowledge that shifts and evolves over time, the classroom is a complex ecosystem that “is not static and optimized ... it is a dynamic, diversified, robust, ever evolving, and constantly learning system” (Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2008, p.79). It shifts with time and alters as the work being conducted changes (see Figure 5). In the science materials area, for example, the year may start off with baskets of magnifying glasses, insect books, sketch pads, and pencils thoughtfully placed beside the stick bug aquarium. This provides an invitation for children to interact with new materials, observe, draw, wonder, or read about information in an authentic way. A few months into the school year, children’s interest in birds may surface and I would alter the materials and environment to reflect this shift in focus. The space could now be taken over by resources to support the students’ new wonderings, such as baskets of binoculars, bird questions and facts, discarded egg shells, materials for nest building, and so on (see figure 6). The classroom environment is not static as learning takes place within it; it changes in response to the learners.

From this perspective classrooms must be spaces in which students are able to function collaboratively without feeling dependent on an adult to identify and provide the learning materials necessary. To fulfill this vision, supplies, and materials are made readily accessible to students, giving students the responsibility of replacing them when they are finished using them

(see Figure 7). I see value, for example, in the decision-making processes required to determine the math manipulatives needed to solve a problem, the art material most suited to a work in progress, or a piece of stationery most appropriate for publishing a newly completed poem. If decision-making opportunities are removed from students, their creative expression is stifled and they are coaxed into a state of submission in which they are powerless to take ownership without constant adult support. Honouring students as constructors of knowledge requires that they have access to materials and resources that support their autonomy and encourage their creativity.



Figure 3: Facilitating movement, collaboration and Curiosity

The classroom is arranged in a way that encourages movement and collaboration. Throughout the day, children are frequently changing spaces and working with others. The use of tables of different heights, shapes, and sizes allows the spaces to be used effectively for the class's varying needs. Fiction and non-fiction books in English and French are placed around the room along with frequently used supplies that need to be readily available to all learners.



Figure 4: Accessible layout and varied work spaces

The layout is intended to provide accessibility and a variety of different work spaces. Supplies are mindfully positioned in close proximity to nearby workspaces. For instance, the puzzles, blocks, and construction materials are all organized near open areas in which they can be used. The paintbrushes, smocks, art paper, and paints are all positioned next to a tall round table that is regularly used for painting. The listening station and an assortment of books are all located beside our large bin of oversized cushions, which the children often like to lean on while reading. The low table in the photo is set up next to our science table that is always filled with new exciting materials to examine, such as plants, shells, rocks, or nests.



Figure 5: Book baskets

Book baskets are organized by the content topics in which children are currently engaged. The books are in constant use during Explorations. The baskets have been labeled and organized in a way that makes them easily accessible to students. In order to ensure that the books remain useful and relevant, our class reorganizes the books, topics, and labels on a monthly basis updating and replacing resources as needed.



Figure 6: Inviting, accessible, and inspiring supplies

Supplies are presented in an accessible and inviting manner. This thick cross section of log is used to display a collection of rocks and seashells with the intention of sparking interest and curiosity among the students. Displayed materials are often changed, moved, and updated throughout the years. For instance, earlier in the year the log was used to display a wasps' nest, a bird's nest, and a few broken pieces of Robin eggs. Children are encouraged to collect and organize their own resources to share with the class. It is common for children to bring in old nests, empty bird's eggs, rocks or leaves that they find near their homes.



Figure 7: Science corner

The science corner continually displays new and inviting materials with which students interact. Magnifying glasses, prisms and mirrors are popular supplies in our room. Pencils, erasers, paintbrushes, markers, rulers, glue sticks, and scissors are other examples of supplies that are shared, labeled, and made accessible for students to use as needed.

French Immersion: Historical Context and Pedagogy

French Immersion has existed in Canada since 1965. The first French Immersion School to open was in St. Lambert, Quebec. Manitoba opened École Sacre Coeur, its first Immersion school, in 1973. French Immersion is a program that provides at least 50% of instruction through the target language, in this case French (Cummins, 1998). In Manitoba, the French Immersion program provides three entry points: Early Immersion beginning in Kindergarten or Grade 1, Middle Immersion beginning in Grade 4, and Late Immersion beginning in Grade 7 (Manitoba, Education, Citizenship, and Youth, 2007). The French Immersion student population in Canada is often characterized as being comprised of children from middle-class, English-speaking homes (Dagenais & Berron, 2001). French Immersion has sometimes had the reputation of being a socio-economically “elitist” program. However, an increasing number of children enrolled in the

program are not from English-speaking families (Dagenais & Day, 1998; Hurd, 1993; Swain & Lapkin, 1991), and more and more classrooms over time have come to represent a rich diversity of children from multiple newcomer communities (Swain & Lapkin, 2005). While historically the original students in Immersion were Anglophone, today many of the students speak languages at home other than English and for them French is a third or fourth language (Swain & Lapkin, 2005). While the demographic literature demonstrates that for a growing number of students the language spoken at home is a language other than English, this study focuses on the acquisition of French and how this is supported by students' use of English in the classroom. This study focused solely on French and English as these are the languages currently spoken during school hours amongst the children in my classroom (hence, the participants in this research). In the French Immersion classrooms of this particular school, it was extremely rare that the children would interact and converse in their "home" languages¹.

Studies show that traditional French Immersion practices tended to be highly teacher-centered and transmission-oriented (Cummins, 1996). This has been explained as necessary teacher modelling of French for students so that they will absorb the new vocabulary or concept. Rarely, however, are students offered opportunities for problem-solving activities or creative outlets for oral and written French (Cummins, 1998; Harley, 1990). Learning experiences have been largely whole class, with each student following up this instruction with the completion of an individual task. Given new understandings about language learning, however, research presents the potential for a shift in French Immersion pedagogy. It is suggested that opportunities be developed for students to "communicate powerfully in the target language if they are going to

¹ I return to this observation in the section of the thesis subtitled "Challenges, Limitations, and Future Wonderings," where I question why additional languages are not more prevalent in the French Immersion classrooms the way they are in the English classrooms.

integrate their language and cognitive development with their growing personal identities” (Cummins, 1998, p. 40). Collaboration and dialogue are experiences in which children are engaged in shared learning experiences that demand communication to develop new understandings and ongoing dialogue to express ideas and possibilities. Therefore, by engaging in authentic and collaborative learning experiences, the French language could come to life and hold purpose in the interactions of the students.

Language Instruction in French Immersion

Since the late 1970s, researchers have been arguing for changes to French Immersion pedagogy (Crawford, 1989; Hares, 1979). There has long been advocacy for pedagogy that emphasizes dialogue and interaction in language learning; however, this would demand a pedagogical shift in the role of teacher. Hares indicated that, “to change from a teacher-based, front-of-the-class approach to that of groups working independently, with the teacher taking on a monitoring and servicing role for a large part of the lesson is a mammoth change” (Hares, 1979, p. 1). Advocating for a pedagogical shift that encourages the social construction of knowledge remains a rarely travelled path in contemporary French Immersion classrooms. Historically, “a lack of attention has been paid to immersion pedagogy as a topic of inquiry, in particular from a classroom-based, teacher-informed perspective” (Fortune, Tedick & Walker, 2008, p.72). In French Immersion education additional opportunities for dialogue could support learners’ language acquisition. However, the use of dialogue as a pedagogical tool is often overlooked. Crawford (1989) asserts that, although “our foreign-language instruction may produce passable reading and writing skills, rarely does it equip us to communicate” (p. 97). If communication is our main goal, classrooms should reflect this by being safe spaces in which children take risks with, experiment with, and enjoy language. This would mean creating classrooms that are

language-rich and discourse-rich (Allen, Swain, Harley & Cummins, 1990; Duff, 2001; Genesee, 1987; Lyster & Ballinger, 2011). Dialoguing in French would then need to become central to French Immersion practice, because it is through communication and collaboration that learners gain competency in language.

Netten and Germain (2012) highlight the necessity of interactive and collaborative learning experiences by examining language learning from a neurolinguistic approach. Neurolinguistics emphasizes the necessity of authentic communication as a tool to build both an ability to use language spontaneously and establish an awareness of how language works. The structures of language, namely an understanding of grammatical rules and vocabulary, are not sufficient to produce an ability to communicate. Both explicit competence (the ability to communicate accurately using written forms of language by activating our declarative memory) and implicit competence (the ability to communicate orally by activating our procedural memory) are required in order to achieve a capacity to communicate (Paradis, 2004). Interaction is a crucial element for language learning because “as students discuss . . . they not only negotiate meaning on a linguistic plane, contributing to the development of their language skills, they also engage in a sharing of ideas and understandings, which, it has been hypothesized, refines cognitive development” (Netten & Germain, 2012, p.103). Therefore, opportunities for dialogue as a pedagogical approach promote shared experiences of meaning-making and collaborative efforts in order to gain fluency in a second language.

English as a Support for French language Learning

English can be an advantageous tool to support language learning in French Immersion (Scott, 2010; Swain 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 2000). Developing ways that English can support French language learning removes the pressure to banish it from the classroom and instead to

employs English as a potential resource. Teachers often avoid collaborative and interactive practices because of a concern that children will interact in English while they work (Cummins, 1998). Researchers counter these arguments by promoting students' first language as a *scaffolding* tool to support acquisition of a second language (Anton & DiCamilla, 1998; Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996). Studies conclude that students have greater success with collaborative tasks by using their first language to support their thinking (Behan & Turnbull, 1997; Swain & Lapkin, 2000). Scaffolding is a learning process through which a learner is given support through modeling and authentic interactions to accomplish a task (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976). Scaffolding provides an informal framework that permits a learner to achieve a higher level of understanding than would have been acquired without support. Therefore, English can be recognized as a scaffolding tool to enhance learners' abilities in French.

In this study I explore how English can support the learning of a target language, in this case, French. As previously mentioned, however, English is not the first language of all the students that participated in this study, but it is a language in which all of the children communicate almost exclusively on a daily basis and it is the common language of the students in my classroom.

The potential for children's English to serve as a support for French language acquisition requires that time be made to initiate and sustain ongoing dialogue among learners. The use of collaborative dialogue among students, often in their first language, aids in their co-construction and building of knowledge in their second language (Swain 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 2000, 2005). Thus it is important to give students the opportunity to learn words, experiment with language, and to dialogue with others. In second language teaching it has long been recognized that

language should be permitted to develop naturally where “grammar is taught inductively rather than through the application of rules” (Crawford, 1989, p. 99). Therefore, in order for children to acquire French language and develop the ability to communicate comfortably in French, it is imperative that they have multiple opportunities to engage in dialogue. At times, this means that learners will resort to their language of most familiarity. However, as they shift between languages, children continue to move forward in their acquisition of the French language. They draw on their first language to gain understanding of challenging concepts and to process their thinking in an additional language (Scott, 2010). In order for learners to draw upon their understanding of English to support their learning of French, they need to be provided opportunities to collaborate, dialogue, and engage in authentic learning experiences.

Collaboration in the Classroom

French language learning is strengthened by experiences that promote dialogue and authentic communication. Similarly, Reggio Emilia education promotes opportunities in which learners are able to build knowledge by questioning, exploring, researching, and theorizing with others. The benefits of these learning opportunities are their ability to unite learners through collaborative meaning making. Berger & Luckman (1966) resolved that human beings are social creatures and learning is a social and cultural activity. Learning is viewed as a socio-cultural experience that is not done in isolation (Vygotsky, 1978). In fact, “all human experience is ultimately social . . . it involves contact and communication” (Dewey, 1938, p. 38). The opportunities provided in our classrooms for collaboration and dialogue reflect how we view learners in the room. Offering opportunities for collaboration and communication invites children to bring their identities with them into learning contexts. Collaboration encourages learners to share their ideas, theories, and wonderings and to build on the thinking of others.

Looking at children's abilities in relation to what they are unable to do creates "a notion of the developing child as incomplete, a jigsaw with parts missing" (Carr, 2001, p. 11).

Alternatively, it is possible to examine learning through a lens that celebrates and draws on the things that children are able to do rather than focusing on those that they cannot. An educational stance that positions learners as active and capable participants presupposes that students' prior experiences and current understandings will be honoured and given a significant place in the classroom. This stance permits us to see children's strengths and successes and acknowledges the capabilities and understandings that they bring with them to the classroom. Learning builds on children's experiences, understandings, needs, and desires. It is through conversations, the use of language approximations, and new learning challenges that understandings are formed. Ongoing dialogue provides students with "opportunities to lend and borrow ideas" (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 127). Such a stance encourages them to play an active role in the co-construction of knowledge and to build on the understandings of others.

In a French Immersion classroom, communication is an integral part of developing a relationship with language, gaining information, and sharing learning. Collaborative dialogue "is a useful concept for understanding L2 learning" (Swain & Lapkin, 2011, p. 333) and an important tool for building new knowledge. Education, built on a foundation of collaboration, is a "powerful force for social transformation" (van Gorder, 2007, p. 8). Such an educational stance urges learners to play an active role in the acquisition of knowledge, positions children as capable and valuable participants in the classroom, and encourages the use of authentic dialogue as a tool to promote higher-level thinking. As Vygotsky (1987) declared, "what the child is able to do in collaboration today, he will be able to do independently tomorrow" (p. 220). Rather than urging learners to work in isolation, classrooms should embrace the knowledge and

understanding that can be strengthened through collaboration. By working collaboratively, a student is often able to achieve more than he or she would individually.

Authentic Learning Opportunities

As children enter the classroom, they bring with them the many dimensions of themselves: “when you enter school in the morning, you carry with you pieces of your life—your happiness, your sadness, your hopes, your pleasures, the stresses from your life. You never come in an isolated way; you always come with pieces of the world attached to you” (Malaguzzi, 1994, p.53). By connecting a child’s school life and home life, more authentic and rich learning experiences can unfold. Children feel connected to their learning when they are able to see pieces of their “outside of school world” in the classroom. Creating space for children’s identities, ideas, and passions provides opportunity for them to enter actively into their learning. “Without motivation to learn we cannot move forward as learners. Skill-based learning does not motivate learners to extend themselves and challenge their thinking” (Cooper, 2009, p. 25); rather, it is natural interest and curiosity that excites learners to pursue a topic. A curriculum that develops from the understandings, misunderstandings, interests, and worries of children is termed as an *emergent curriculum* (Wien, 2008). Emergent curriculum is a way of planning curriculum based on students’ interests and ideas with the intention of creating authentic learning experiences. Using children’s theories and ideas as beginning points for curriculum construction builds positive relationships among students, teachers, and families. It also deepens and enhances children’s learning. Children’s involvement in an emergent curriculum implicates them in their learning. Such involvement allows children to serve as contributors to their education (Dewey, 1938). Experiencing a sense of value and worth gives purpose and meaning to what is learned.

The children begin to recognize that their voices are heard, their ideas hold merit, and their knowledge possesses a capacity to create change.

Authentic learning, particularly in a French Immersion context, melds together both language and content. There is an essential connection that links language and content when learning an additional language. Researchers suggest “that the way in which language and content are structured within the immersion classroom may well be the determining factor in reaching high expectations for language production as well as quality academic experiences” (Fortune et al., 2008, p.73). Content and language need to share significance in the classroom so that they can each contribute to rich and authentic learning (Fortune et al., 2008; Walker & Tedick, 2000). Language that is not based in purposeful and relevant content may be meaningless for students. The impetus for learning language is the purpose that the language serves in a learner’s life and the connection the learner feels towards what is being learned. Memorizing a list of arbitrary vocabulary words does little to enrich a learner’s skills in language if these words are unable to enhance the learner’s ability to communicate purposeful messages. Purpose is tied to content. If the topic being explored holds meaning for the learner, extending the learner’s language facility becomes indispensable. For French Immersion learners, the goal is that French will become an avenue through which information can be gathered, questions answered, excitement shared, and knowledge constructed. Children learn language and literacy best in contexts where they are able to explore language and ideas in real world contexts and where their language learning is highly supported through dialogue with peers, teachers, and in play (Gee, 2009). When experiences feel authentic and language learning is purposeful, children develop a desire to deepen their understanding.

The intention of this study is to explore ways in which Reggio Emilia education can support French Immersion pedagogy. French Immersion is shifting away from a transmission model of instruction and is seeking to construct a pedagogy that promotes communication and prepares learners to interact effectively in French. Reggio Emilia presents an image of the child who is capable and competent and a teacher who works alongside children as a co-constructor of knowledge. This research seeks to explore the ways in which giving value to children's theories and ideas, promoting the co-construction of knowledge, and providing authentic experiences can build learners' language skills and their perceptions of themselves as language learners.

Chapter 3: Methodology

My intention as a researcher was to support children to think critically about their role as collaborative group members and their identities as language learners. My desire throughout my study was to honour children's perspectives. As Greene & Hogan (2005) state, "children and young people have traditionally been positioned passively in research and have lacked the opportunity to analyse and represent their position" (p. 253). Therefore, to understand children's perspectives on a topic, insight can be gained by going directly to the children themselves. It is necessary that research that involves children maintain a stance of seeking to understand children and their situation, rather than imposing our own adult perceptions (Connolly & Ennew, 1996; Einarsdottir, 2010). Observing carefully and listening closely are effective tools to develop our understanding of children's perspectives. The goal of observational research is to "see the world through the eyes of the other" (Hessler, 1992, p. 202). This too, is the intention of pedagogical documentation. However, as a critical dialogue, pedagogical documentation also helps us to understand others and ourselves more deeply. Dahlberg et al. (1999) develop a distinction between child observation and pedagogical documentation:

As we understand it, the purpose of 'child observation' is to assess children's psychological development in relation to already predetermined categories produced from developmental psychology and which define what the normal child should be doing at a particular age . . . 'child observation' therefore is mainly about assessing whether a child is conforming to a set of standards. 'Pedagogical documentation' by contrast is mainly about trying to see and understand what is going on in the pedagogical work and what the child is capable of without any predetermined framework of expectations and norms. (p. 146)

Pedagogical documentation strives to achieve a different purpose than child observation.

Pedagogical documentation is intended to surface children's multiple identities, challenge their theories, broaden their knowledge and understanding, and shift teachers' perceptions of learners' capabilities. As a teacher, the most meaningful conversations I have in informing my pedagogy are with the children that I work with on a daily basis. It was appropriate that the study's methodology highlight these interactions and conversations and build on the perspectives of children.

Pedagogical Documentation

Pedagogical documentation is a teacher research methodology, which holds at its core an opportunities for teachers and learners to slow down, revisit, and make learning visible (Dalhberg et al., 1999; Wien, 2008). Wien (2008) presents documentation as "the process that allows a 'pedagogy of listening' to be place-held for consideration by others" (p. 154). It permits teachers to give value to children's perspectives through careful listening (Dalhberg et al., 1999; Rinaldi, 2006). Pedagogical documentation was an appropriate methodological fit for my research study because it aligned with my current teaching practice and also with the theories and research questions I sought to answer. Applying pedagogical documentation as a research methodology enabled me to continue with class structures already in place. The core elements of pedagogical documentation remain a sustainable part of my practice extending beyond the time frame of this study. I felt it was important that my research methodology highlight children and their thinking as the central focus. In addition, I wanted my research to serve a pedagogical purpose. The intent of the research was to figure out purposeful next steps for my teaching and children's learning as well as to seek insights into how children acquire language in collaborative and interactive settings. In turn, these insights were useful in becoming a more effective French

Immersion teacher. My methodology needed to be authentic and align with the theoretical underpinnings of this study. My methodology needed to honour the perspectives of my students and create opportunities during which they could share their opinions and experiences.

Pedagogical documentation met these criteria.

While pedagogical documentation is often written about and referred to as a classroom assessment tool rather than a methodology, I believe it is a powerful methodology for educational research. Hodgins (2011) provides an in-depth study “exploring the potentiality of pedagogical narrations as a methodology for child studies research” (p. 5). *Pedagogical narrations* is a term adopted in British Columbia’s early childhood curriculum documents and used by researchers such as Berger (2010) who have been exploring Reggio Emilia philosophy and practice in a Canadian context. The term pedagogical narrations is inspired by the concept of pedagogical documentation and is the “process by which educational experiences in early childhood settings are narrated and made visible in the public realm, thus becoming subject to political thought and dialogue” (Berger, 2010, p. 58). Pedagogical documentation is used as a pedagogical tool to strengthen early childhood practice (Kim, 2006; Wien, 2008) and, more recently, is being used as a research methodology within childhood studies (McLellan, 2010; Hodgins, 2011; Wien 2011). Working with pedagogical documentation is not a matter of “following a set of rules or fixed procedures, which if followed through will yield the desired result” (McQuillan, 2001, p. 3-4), rather it “is ‘methodological’ in the sense of an active will of complicating what we know about our practices, to put ourselves in motion to be in a process of change and invention, not knowing the end state” (Taguchi, 2009, p. 91). Pedagogical documentation creates space for unexpected possibilities and unpredictable shifts in understanding through both research and practices.

Child involved and informed research could have enormous implications for the ways in which we view children. Jean Piaget made it known that “children not only have thoughts and experiences worth knowing about,” but that their thoughts and experiences differ from those of adults (cited in Greene & Hogan, 2005, p. 199). We recognize that children are not passive receivers of socialization (Buckingham, 1994; Greene & Hogan, 2005; Jackson & Scott, 2000), rather they are “active agents managing their own experiences” (Greene & Hogan, 2005, p. 124). However, children have often been seen as adults in waiting and positioned passively in research (Jackson & Scott, 2000; Greene & Hogan, 2005). To understand the perspectives and positions of children there need to be opportunities in research through which children’s perspectives can be shared (Connolly & Ennew, 1996; Einarsdottir, 2010). Opportunity arises for children to share their theories and understandings when there is someone present and willing to listen in an open, sustained, and ongoing way.

The challenge for the teacher is “to be present without being intrusive, in order to best sustain cognitive and social dynamics while they are in progress” (Rinaldi, 1998, p. 118).

Documentation is to be reviewed, revisited, and reflected upon regularly (Wien, 2008).

Documentation consists of a variety of mediums through which a moment of learning can be preserved. Forms of documentation can include photographs, children’s words, drawings or writing, and transcribed conversations. The purpose of documentation is not the “reconstruction of a linear event” rather it is to “make sense of the events and processes” (Turner & Wilson, 2009, p. 8). The analysis of documentation provides a record upon which to interpret children’s theories, ideas, misconceptions, and perspectives.

The forms of documentation that our class revisited most frequently during Explorations were the children’s comments from the previous sharing session and the photographs of their

learning artifacts and of them in the process of learning. Prior to beginning each Explorations session, our class returned to the children's comments I had written in the Explorations Log. I also revisited various forms of documentation regularly when planning experiences for children and while working with a child or small group of learners. Documentation is intended to inform practice, and "if done properly, good documentation can serve all masters simultaneously, from individual assessment, to curriculum planning, to instructional accountability" (Edwards, 1993, p. 249). The appeal of pedagogical documentation as a methodology for my study was that it served a functional purpose because it is "both a methodology for teacher research to make children's thinking and learning visible and interpretable to others, *and* a methodology for planning emergent curriculum" (Wien, 2008, p.10) Pedagogical documentation permitted me to gain insight into children's perceptions of themselves as French language learners, it allowed me to document particular moments in time that highlighted their abilities with French language learning, and enabled me to use these insights to inform my practice in purposeful ways.

To recognize the benefits, challenges, and perceptions of French language learning in an Immersion setting, I needed to ensure that the classroom was a safe space in which children felt comfortable offering their ideas and I needed to create opportunities that helped them recognize that their theories were validated and accepted. Open dialogue and engaged collaborative experiences are essential because my desire was to understand the children's perspectives, their thoughts around language learning, and what they were "capable of without any predetermined framework of expectations and norms" (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p. 146). The purpose of my research was to place emphasis on the thinking of children rather than overshadowing their thoughts with a prescribed agenda or itinerary. To get a better sense of the children's perceptions and understandings, I chose pedagogical documentation and ongoing classroom observations that

are also central to Reggio Emilia education. I embed the use of pedagogical documentation and classroom observation in the ethnographic research tradition, positioning myself as both an observer and a teacher-researcher in the classroom.

Links with Ethnography

The use of pedagogical documentation as a research methodology has a strong connection with ethnographic research in education (Wien, 2011). Pedagogical documentation is similar to ethnographic research, which began appearing as an education research methodology in the 1970s (e.g. Best, 1983; Erickson, 1986). It too, makes use of observational data, field notes, and visual materials to build analysis and interpretation (Geertz, 1973). Field notes are a compilation of notes regarding observations or conversations that have taken place during qualitative research. The accounts often describe events and observations to be reread and revisited by the researcher. Ethnography is a qualitative methodology that explores and interprets the shared patterns or values, beliefs, behaviours, and language of a culture-sharing group (Creswell, 2007). In this study, the students in my classroom share a classroom culture. They collaborate and co-construct theories and understanding together; they engage in countless experiences of shared language, and they develop collective systems for meaning making within the learning experiences they encounter. From here, the aim of ethnographic research becomes “to understand people, and why people do the things they do” (Aubrey, David, Godfrey & Thompson, 2000, p. 111). Through their interactions, children develop identities of themselves as language learners. As a group they develop a sense of how society functions, and as individuals these social interactions frame their understanding of the world around them.

Some essential tools of ethnographic research are interviewing and observation (Fielding, 1993; Greene & Hogan, 2005). While I did not set up organized or structured

interviews with the children, our ongoing conversations in small and large group discussions held an essential place in my collection of data. My methodological documentation process supported my research focus and guiding questions. Below, I have developed a table that presents the three areas of focus of my research: French language learning, learning context, and French Immersion teacher pedagogy. I have listed my guiding questions and paired them with the methods used to collect data for each research question (see Table 1).

Ethnography is a key research method used to explore the social world of children (Greene & Hogan, 2005; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). The ethnographic researcher can be positioned anywhere along a continuum from complete observer to involved participant (Hessler, 1992). Most often the position of the researcher involves participant observation wherein the researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of the participants (Creswell, 2007).

Ethnographers possess many of the same qualities that an effective documenter requires—specifically, “visual acuity, keen listening skills, tolerance for detail” (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 57). In addition, trust and acceptance are necessary for a researcher to join the world of those they are studying, similar to a teacher engaging in pedagogical documentation with his or her classroom.

While ethnography and pedagogical documentation build on similar foundational research perspectives, in order to engage in a critical postmodern study, I required particular pedagogical values that only pedagogical documentation could provide. It was important to me that my research would also serve as an extension of my teaching practice. Pedagogical documentation is built around concepts such as the co-construction of culture, the fluidity of identity, and the collaborative development of knowledge. These concepts align with social

constructivist and postmodern perspectives of teaching and learning; they also represent the beliefs and philosophy that underlie my practice.

Guiding Questions and Data Collection

Research Focus	Guiding Questions	Method of Data Collection
French Language Learning	How do children perceive themselves as language learners?	Teacher observations, documented and audio recorded classroom conversations and engagements
	What are children's theories about how they learn French and how they help one another learn French?	Student work samples, photos, documented and audio recorded classroom conversations and engagements
Context	How do children perceive themselves as collaborative learners?	Teacher observations, documented and audio recorded classroom conversations and engagements
	What role does collaboration play in children's Explorations' learning and their language learning?	Student work samples, photos, documented and audio recorded classroom conversations and engagements
Pedagogy	How can children's perspectives of themselves as language learners and collaborators inform my practice?	Field notes journal, documented student interactions and conversations

Table 1. Data Matrix

Context of Study

My research was conducted during particular periods of our school day. The three periods included: Explorations, debriefing conversations, and further work inspired by Explorations work. Explorations involved times in which the children were engaged in independent and small group inquiries guided by their own interests and invitations I proposed based on these interests. The debriefing conversations were the large group sharing conversations that occurred after Explorations to discuss events, discoveries, and challenges of the day's session. Further work inspired by Explorations was comprised of those moments in which the children's Explorations' work resurfaced at various points of the day. Often students' personal learning questions reoccurred during French or English reading and writing times. Their choices of writing topics were often influenced by the work they had been doing in Explorations, and their book selections during reading were often an extension of their current Explorations wonderings.

Explorations. Explorations is an extended period of class time devoted to students' pursuit of personal learning experiences that occur both individually and in small groups. It is an opportunity for children to explore, research, and extend their understanding of topics or questions about which they feel passionate. Children often work collaboratively with their peers when gathered in small groups based on common interests. Collaborative groups also emerge organically as children become interested in topics that others are working on, when they feel they can contribute expertise to a peer in need, when they discover similarities between the ideas they wish to explore and what others are interested in exploring, or based on common social interests and friendships.

During a 6-day cycle our class had three 1.5-hour sessions of Explorations. Generally this meant Explorations sessions occurred every second day. I chose to place Explorations at the

beginning of our day when the children were most focused and fresh. It demanded a great deal of their effort to navigate collaborative group discussions, pose questions, consult necessary research materials, design and revisit plans, and extend their current understandings. The structure of each session began with a brief revisiting of what they had been working on during the previous session. Pedagogical documentation served to capture moments in time, budding theories, and meaningful interactions that might be revisited and reflected upon at a later time. As children set off to work, they used their experiences and discoveries, as well as those of their peers, to guide their thinking and move their understandings forward. As the teacher, I was responsible for developing provocations that ignited curiosity and urged children to delve deeper into their questioning and researching. Offering provocations required careful attention, listening to children's wonderings, recognizing dissonances in their theories, and developing experiences that would provide experiences in which they could construct meaning and knowledge. As a co-creator of learning experiences and facilitator of ongoing dialogue, I listened carefully to the needs, ideas, interests, and theories of the children to guide the directions of their learning. I balanced this responsive role with a conscious of the need to create provocations, to make connections to curriculum, and to broaden and deepen learning possibilities. This required me to be responsible for bringing in new materials, planning experiences, challenging ideas, supporting the expansion of hypotheses, and inviting children to participate in these processes.

Debriefing. Another essential structure that supported children's French language acquisition during Explorations was the regular opportunity for sharing. Each Explorations time included several group sharing and planning sessions involving a small group of children and me, in addition to a large group share time wherein we further explored that day's Explorations time. My participation in the children's small group inquiries provided valuable time for me to

meet with them in a more intimate setting, especially when they were unsure of how to proceed with their work, when children were eager to describe their ideas and theories more fully, and when children were ready to delve more deeply into a topic. Following each 45-minute Explorations session, the class came together as a large group to debrief the experiences of the day. I documented the children's thinking by recording their comments in an Explorations Log. The Explorations Log was a hardcover journal in which I transcribed the words of each child as that child shared during our debriefing session. Commonly, children talked about what they were working on during Explorations that day. They might share new information they acquired, discuss a challenge they faced, provide feedback to another group, or explain their plans for the following Explorations session. This log was made accessible to children throughout the day and they would often refer to it for new vocabulary that arose during the debriefing. The main purpose of the Explorations Log was to serve as a placeholder for the children's thinking. The Log was a tool to "preserve, and stimulate their memories of significant experiences, thereby further enhancing their learning related to the topics investigated" (Katz & Chard, 1996, p. 2). The children's comments in the Log served as a springboard that initiated their following day's work. I would read back their comments to the whole class to remind them where their thinking was during the previous session, in an effort to support them in moving forward with focus and purpose. This permitted them to "pick up" from exactly where they had left off the previous day, should they choose to do so.

New French vocabulary that had arisen during our Explorations time or our debriefing was displayed on our classroom's "mur d'Exploration" on small squares of paper. Beneath each new word on our "Explorations Wall", a child developed an illustration to show the meaning of the word. The word wall served an important purpose in supporting the children's French

painting, building, or talking, just to name a few of their forms of representation. In Reggio Emilia education the many ways that children communicate understanding are referred to as “the hundred languages of children” (Edwards, 1993). The Reggio Emilia influence opened my mind to the possibility of sharing knowledge through dramatic play, visual art, construction, movement, story-telling, or drawing, in contrast to North American schools’ heavy reliance on only sharing learning verbally and visually (Edwards, 1993). The idea of the “hundred languages of children” affirms the understanding that children use “graphic, verbal, literate, symbolic, and imaginative play and a hundred hundred hundred more languages in making meaning of the world” (Fraser, 2000, p. 193). For children to express themselves effectively they need to be provided with sufficient outlets to do so.

Methods

In order to observe children most effectively, I needed to find my place in the classroom as a researcher and as a teacher during Explorations time. It was necessary that I also reserve time for stepping back and documenting the experiences taking place. The methods I used to collect data were field notes, our Explorations Log, observation notes, journaling, video and audio recordings, teacher interactions, and conversations between and with students. This included data generated from my handwritten notes, photographs, snippets of children’s spoken theories and questions, transcripts of conversations with me and with each other, and their work samples (Wien, 2008). My field notes and the Explorations Log each served a similar purpose. The Explorations Log permitted me to look back on the children’s comments, questions, and plans. It provided a representation of the way they expressed themselves, their ability to communicate in French, and their involvement and participation while others were sharing. My field notes generally consisted of unspoken experiences occurring among children. For instance,

if a group of children was struggling to collaborate as they worked towards a common goal, I might make note of these challenges. Alerted to the struggles of this particular group I could make choices about how best to support them, be it by providing additional resources, supporting them in mending their interpersonal relationships, or allowing them the time and space to work through their struggles as group members. By working alongside the children, opportunities developed for honest and authentic dialogue as they engaged in discussions with one another and with me about their current understandings and potential solutions to challenges they faced during their Explorations studies.

Consent. The participants were students from my Grade 3 and 4 classroom. Before beginning my research, I obtained written assent from the students and consent from their parents/guardians (see Appendices A-D). I also obtained written permission from my school administrator and school division (see Appendices E and F). In February 2013, the families of the children in my classroom for that school year received a letter of consent/assent regarding my research study. Only the children of families enrolled in my classroom during the data collection period were involved in the study. Steps were taken to ensure all students and their guardians understood the process in which they were engaged, including why their participation and freely informed and voluntary consent was being requested, how the data would be used, and how and with whom findings of the study might be shared. As an additional way of informing families about my research, I held an evening information session during which parents and guardians were invited to ask questions and seek additional clarification (see Appendix G for information session invitation).

To assure parents that there were no consequences that would arise from giving or withholding permission, I asked that all Informed Consent Forms be sent to the school office

addressed to the school secretary rather than to me. The secretary stored the consent letters in a sealed envelope in a locked cabinet in the office. The names of participants were not to be revealed to me until the last day of the school year, June 28th, 2013. The reason for this was to ensure the confidentiality of the families and students who had given or declined consent or assent to participate in the study (with me in a potential “power over” relationship as the children’s teacher). On June 28th, I opened the envelope and began to compile the documentation of the students for whom I had received consent. From the twenty-three students in my classroom, I received twenty-one signed consent and assent forms. Of the twenty-one completed forms, one family declined the use of photographs, five declined the use of video recordings, two declined the use of transcribed conversations, and two declined the use of their child’s work samples.

Families were informed that if at any time they decided to withdraw their consent, or their child decided to withdraw their assent, they were free to do so by contacting the school secretary. If permission was not given or was withdrawn, no documentation regarding the child was used or referred to in my written thesis, nor will it be used in subsequent presentations or publications. I have used pseudonyms when referring to students in my thesis and will continue to do so in future presentations or publications. All documentation will be kept in a locked cabinet in my home until the completion of my thesis. Any information that would include identification of the children will be destroyed at the conclusion of the research. A copy of my completed thesis will be made available at the school, and the school secretary and Parent Council will be informed when it is available to be viewed by interested individuals.

Data collection and shifts. Observations, recorded conversations, field note data, photographs, and children’s work samples were collected through regular on-going classroom

activities. The field note data that I collected consisted of observations that I wrote down in my journal and segments of conversations I scribed while an interaction was taking place between a group of children or between a child and me. Between the months of March and June 2013, I photographed experiences and recorded conversations that arose during our Explorations sessions to purposefully collect data about the children's experiences as collaborative group members, their engagement as French language learners, and their relationship with the French language. During the 16-week time block I focused on small groups of children as they worked through successes and challenges during Exploration.

I paid careful attention to "shifts" in their abilities and perceptions as French language learners, and sought out moments throughout the school day where their Explorations work resurfaced in other forms. The criteria I used when thinking about shifts involved paying careful attention to moments such as: when children would get stuck, when they would need to redraw or think further about an idea, when their theories failed, when they were able to note that their theory was incomplete, when their theory changed, where there was a change in their ability to explain their thinking, where I could see changes in their thinking, or where there was an increase in their French vocabulary. Developing criteria for the shifts I was seeking provided a concrete structure to my documentation and a consistent focus for my conversations with children.

The conversations they had with me and with their peers during Explorations provided insight into their identities as French language learners. The ways in which they interacted with their groups provided insight into the ways they viewed themselves as collaborative group members. And their desire to revisit and extend their theories from Explorations over time provided insight into the ways that they recognized and valued their own abilities, understanding,

and ideas. By being present and attentive to and documenting shifts in the children's abilities, confidence, and risk-taking related to French language learning and collaborative work, I was able to derive a great deal of insight into who they were, how they engaged with language, and how they collaborated with others. Developing a heightened understanding of the children's multiple identities helped inform my pedagogical decision making as the children progressed in their French language acquisition. Children were also provided opportunities to develop new insight into who they were as learners.

The recorded conversations took place over the course of several weeks of Explorations. I recorded countless whole group share times, small group discussions, and exchanges that took place between my students and me. I recorded these conversations using a digital recorder and transcribed them. While transcribing the conversations, it was important to me that the transcriptions preserve the language as the children had produced it. To be faithful to the children's articulation, I did not correct or alter any grammatical errors and the conversations alternated between French and English precisely as their interactions do. I kept a detailed log of each of the moments I recorded, including: date, time, length of conversation, individuals involved, and a brief description of the situation. I also kept detailed field notes over the course of the research, writing down comments the children were making, their interests, their struggles, and notable events during Explorations. I paid careful attention to the notion of shifts that I was using to direct my documentation. I would take note of times when children would get stuck, where their theories would fail, or when they recognized that they would need to re-examine or think further on a topic. Moments such as these often indicated the need for me to support a child or the group's work by helping them to redirect their thinking, by supplying additional resources, or by developing new learning opportunities to challenge their current ideas. I would also take

note of times where children's theories were altered, when there was a change in their ability to explain their thinking, when there was a transformation in their confidence as a learner, or when there was a change in their ability to express themselves in French. A transformation in a child's confidence or ability to express his or herself was often signified by a child's willingness to share during our debriefing sessions, his or her active involvement in seeking out new information, or the child's eagerness to lend support and to problem solve with peers. These moments would lead me to elicit more information from the children by asking questions, listening carefully, and watching their interactions with others to understand some of the reasons underlying these shifts. Recording, journaling, and photographing these many shifts provided me with extensive data upon which to draw in my analysis.

Analyzing data. Quantitative coding can be approached deductively where “the goal becomes to fit responses into already established categories” (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2010, p. 151). Qualitative coding, on the other hand, can involve seeking out similar thoughts, feelings, events or ideas to form categories; it is “a way of opening up avenues of inquiry” (Emerson et al., 2010, p. 151). Because some qualitative researchers do not analyze data with preconceived notions or prepared categories, the process is often a kind of “learn by doing” endeavour (Dey, 2003, p.6). With open coding, the hope is to discover new or unexpected information, rather than to generate prescribed results; with the intention being to build new knowledge. My plan was to initiate perspectives that might challenge or shift our current understandings. As Taguchi (2009) explains:

We are not psychologists, doctors or scientists as we practice pedagogical documentation; rather, we are collaborative creators and inventors of learning events with children and our colleagues. We are whole-heartedly engaged in a

collaborative process of constructing new knowledge with and about specific phenomena and children and ourselves as teachers. (p. 94)

The power of pedagogical documentation is its ability to help us make meaning and build understanding in new ways. Discoveries made through ongoing research are able to be applied to our practice and make a tangible difference in our pedagogy.

When it came time to analyze my data, I did a great deal of rereading of my field notes and transcribing of classroom conversations. After reading them over several times, I felt ready to identify some recurring themes. As an initial coding system, I divided my documentation into categories. These included moments when a child: joined a group, offered his or her help, spoke in English, asked a question either to seek help or to push someone's thinking further, gave a suggestion, acquired new vocabulary, or made a connection with someone else's learning. Amongst the many shifts that appeared throughout my field notes, I paid careful attention to shifts in thinking that were powerful enough to initiate change in a child's identity or self-perception as a learner. An example of this kind of shift in identity might describe children who were initially reluctant to share their theories in large or small groups, but who through encouragement and experience from their group members or me gained the confidence and skills to communicate their ideas and share their wonderings. I was interested in the ways in which collaborative experiences and co-constructed knowledge provided the children with a sense of belonging and security that, in turn, bolstered their confidence in talking about their understandings and discoveries.

Having coded events into multiple categories, I organized the highlighted events into topic groups, meaning the content that the children were studying, which consisted of: whales, African Bullfrogs, adult teeth, archaeopteryx, and Canadian Geese. The reason that I focused on

topics and group experiences rather than individual children was based on the social constructivist underpinnings of this research. Specifically, I was interested in examining the thinking that could be achieved when learners came together. It is by joining together and thinking with others that knowledge is built and extended. From here, with my coded field notes divided into various content topics, I returned once again to my original thesis questions regarding French, context, and pedagogy. I read through my field notes once more, this time with the intention of seeking significant moments that responded to my initial questions. I found many significant moments to demonstrate the ways that children engage with language learning and how they help one another learn French. The themes I was working with appeared to be broad enough to give space to the unique meanings in the children's responses, actions, and interactions (Descombe, 2010; Mukherji & Albon, 2009). The moments that held the most significance or reappeared most frequently throughout the children's interactions were: their use of English as a support for strengthening their French; their reliance on collaborative experiences to enhance their understanding of content and language; the significant role of authentic engagement in their willingness to challenge and extend their learning; and the ways in which my involvement in, or documentation of these experiences, informed my practice. The significance and poignancy of these moments provided valuable research insights. In certain cases, it was the frequency with which the behaviours reappeared, with others it was the notable effect that the experience had on the children's learning. It was these findings that I delved into further as I organized my documentation.

The learning experiences that I selected to illustrate each of my findings were chosen because they presented a tangible way of recognizing and determining growth in a learner's abilities. Each of the stories presented demonstrates an experience that led to or instigated shifts

in children's abilities or their perception of themselves as learners. I also considered my own learning as I analyzed my documentation. I have included children's stories that represent, not only a shift in the child's thinking, but also moments that led me to think differently about my practice or my pedagogical beliefs.

Chapter 4: Findings

Through my data analysis I chose three themes that surfaced through experiences and interactions during Explorations; specifically, English as a scaffolding tool for French, the benefits of collaboration, and pedagogy as informed through authentic learning. Each of these findings examined elements of the children's evolving identities as learners in a French Immersion classroom, as well as their involvement as co-constructors of knowledge with others. For each of the three findings I selected three examples that exemplify the behaviours and events I observed. These moments are presented as brief vignettes including conversations between a student and me or between groups of students, my own observations, and an analysis of the ways in which each experience impacted the children's learning or my own learning.

As the children engaged collaboratively in the generation of new ideas or shared their theories with their peers, they needed to know that their thoughts mattered and that their ideas were valued. Children began to see themselves as capable and knowledgeable when they recognized that there was a place for their theories and perspectives. Classroom interactions were tied to issues of identity: children began to see themselves differently as a result of their collaborative experiences and social interactions. DeKeyser (2010) recognized that the culture and tone of a classroom was an extension of the interactions amongst its members:

Culture is a social construction shaped by those within it. Schools and their classrooms comprise their own specific culture developed by the varied makeup of its members and their interactions. Classroom culture must embody the characteristics that we value for our students: deeply engaged interactions with their environment, inquiries driven by their own wonderings, and collaborative

opportunities to integrate their own unique prior knowledge and experiences.

(p.26)

Collaborating with their peers and sharing their uncertainties and wonderings was an opportunity for the children to see the world differently. Their perspectives and thoughts shifted as they dialogued and shared ideas with others. At the same time, their identities also shifted and evolved. They began to recognize capabilities, thoughts, and skills that they had never before noticed or utilized. Documentation served as a powerful tool that helped them to reflect on changing aspects of their knowledge and understanding over time, which they might not otherwise have noticed.

The children regularly interacted with and reflected on various elements of our documentation. For example, one writing session of each school day cycle was reserved for writing about one of the photos taken during Explorations. On a regular basis I printed out the many photographs taken of the children as they worked during Explorations. These photographs captured the children's work as it progressed over time, interactions between their peers and them, and quiet moments of independent contemplation. The children selected a photograph to add to their "Journal de Photos" and used their writing time to reflect on the experiences that occurred in the moment captured in the photograph. Often the children wrote about materials they used, peers they collaborated with, challenges they faced, new information they learned, and plans to extend their learning. Over time their "Journal de photos" became a visual and written representation of their evolving thinking and understanding.

English as a Scaffolding Tool for French

A challenge of the French Immersion program is that students “exposure to the immersion language is largely confined to the classroom” (Swain & Lapkin, 2005, p.172). Children’s opportunities to socialize, communicate, and experience French is most often limited to their time at school (Johnson & Swain, 1997; Swain & Lapkin, 2005). This places a great deal of responsibility on French Immersion teachers to ensure that children are immersed in ongoing, language-rich experiences in the classroom that permit them to hear and speak French as much as possible. I agree with the importance of encouraging children to communicate in French in a variety of ways. However, there is an additional layer that is often overlooked when we take for granted the importance of providing learners with exposure to the French language; it is essential that the experiences in which learners are engaged be authentic and purposeful. I believe that the biggest challenge that French Immersion teachers face is the daunting task of developing and facilitating valuable French experiences that will enrich children’s relationship with language during the school day. Providing students with more time in French does not necessarily mean time well used; the quality of the interactions, the value of the experiences, and the purposefulness of the tasks taking place during that time all matter a great deal.

Listening carefully to the students enabled me to slow down and recognize the various learning resources that they used to support their understanding of concepts and their ability to formulate their thinking into French. A resource that the children utilized frequently while working together was English. The frequency with which the children reverted back to English during their private conversations was undeniable. Recognizing and acknowledging this led me to wonder if, rather than stifling their speech while they are working privately in small partnerships, as teachers perhaps we might recognize instead that these interactions are a support

for their French language learning. I have selected three collaborative interactions among students that highlighted the ways in which the children were able to communicate using both French and English, and the supportive role that English played in enhancing the students' understanding of concepts and French language learning.

“Where does the water go?”: Mya, Sydney, and Erik. During Explorations, Mya² and Sydney had both developed an interest in whales. As their inquiry continued both of these children were very curiosities about how whales eat if they have no teeth. During one Explorations session they sat together with a stack of whale books written in French and worked to gather some answers to their questions. On this particular day, to support their learning they had recruited, Erik, a classmate who was known for being passionate and knowledgeable about all kinds of animals. As they conversed, their conversation flowed between French and English:

Mya: “Wait, I’m just trying to tell the question³.”

Erik: « Je sais. Le solide va dans un tube et le liquide va dans un autre⁴. »

Sydney: “No, Erik. Just wait. Elle dit la question.”

Mya: “They swallow lots of water but then where does the water go?”

Sydney: “I know, I know!”

² Pseudonyms have been used in all of the stories shared in this thesis.

³ Use of quotation marks indicating discussion in French or English is intended to draw readers' attention to the interplay between the two languages during classroom conversations.

⁴ Transcriptions of the children's French conversations reflect an authentic demonstration of their language abilities and preserve the interactions as they occurred.

Erik: “Oh. It will just go into the...il juste va dans le...like the blowhole probably, I think so.”

Sydney: « Il fait ça [mimes swallowing]. They will eat something and if it tastes good they swallow it and the rest comes out their évent»

Erik: “That’s what I said.”

Sydney: « Et la nourriture, les fanons vont attraper la nourriture. Les choses dans les fanons, elles mangent. »

Mya: “wait, I’m just trying to tell the question⁵”

Erik: “I know. The solid goes in one tube and the liquid goes in the other.”

Sydney: “No, Erik. Just wait. She’s saying the question.”

Mya: “they swallow lots of water but then where does the water go?”

Sydney: “I know, I know!”

Erik: “Oh. It will just go into the...it just goes into the...like the blowhole probably, I think so.”

Sydney: “It does this [mimes swallowing]. They will eat something and if it tastes good they swallow it and the rest comes out their blowhole.”

Erik: “That’s what I said.”

Sydney: “And the food, the baleen will trap the food. The things in the baleen, they eat.”

⁵ French conversations have been translated in to English. To create a distinction between transcribed conversations and their translations, the English translations have been written in Italics.

Mya had been patiently listening to their theories and ideas, but she brought Erik and Sydney back to the initial question hoping for a more succinct response.

Mya: “Yeah, but where does it go?”

Erik: “It goes into the intestines. Where else does it go? We have intestines.”

Sydney: « Non, c’est le évent. The blow hole est sur le top de its head. Alors il va dans ce petit tube. Il a un tube pour breathing et il come suck it up et comme . . . »

Erik: « La raison que la baleine a un blowhole c’est parce que il va breathe. That’s why they blow the water out cause if they don’t they can’t breathe without plugging it up. »

Mya: “Yeah, but where does it go?”

Erik: “It goes into the intestines. Where else does it go? We have intestines.”

Sydney: “No, it’s the blowhole. The blowhole is on top of its head. So it goes in this little tube. It has a tube for breathing and it like sucks it up and like . . .”

Erik: “The reason that the whale has a blowhole is because it needs to breathe. That’s why they blow the water out cause if they don’t they can’t breathe without plugging it up.”

When we met back as a class later that morning, it was evident that Mya and Sydney were feeling more confident about their understanding of the way that whales eat and where the water goes after they eat. Mya shared with the class in French about what she had discovered about whales.

Mya: « On a regardé un livre des baleines. Ils n'ont pas de dents. Ils utilisent les fanons pour attraper leur diner ou breakfast. Quand il fait ça, il swallow beaucoup de l'eau. C'est pour ça qu'il a un blowhole. C'est un événement pour blow son eau de son corps. »

Mya: "We looked at a book about whales. They don't have teeth. They use their baleen to catch their lunch or breakfast. When they do that, they swallow a lot of water. That's why they have a blowhole. It's a blowhole to blow the water out of their body."

Mya and Sydney had clearly moved forward in their understanding about whales and baleen. An effective resource to help develop their comprehension of how whales eat proved to be the informal English conversation they had as they flipped through books together. While their conversation unfolded almost entirely in English, when they joined in our large group session, Mya was able to eloquently explain the eating process of the whale to her classmates in French. Her English conversations with her peers permitted Mya to organize her thinking and develop a more thorough understanding of the uses of baleen. Research demonstrates that students' L1 can help to strengthen their understanding of L2 (Anton & DiCamilla, 1998; Swain & Lapkin, 2000). Behan & Turnbull (1997), demonstrate in a French Immersion classroom study that "L1 use can both support and enhance L2 development, functioning simultaneously as an effective tool for dealing with cognitively demanding content" (p. 41). The girls were able to apply their gathered information about whales and demonstrate their knowledge through other languages as well, in this case plasticine (see Figure 9) and water colour painting (see Figure 10).

The reality at this stage was that Mya and Sydney had come to an incorrect conclusion believing that the whale's blowhole is used to expel excess water from their body. In this particular example, the intention was to honour the students' collaboration and theorizing as they strove to gain information and understanding. To undermine their efforts of developing ideas,

questioning information, and revisiting knowledge by telling them that their conclusions were incorrect would have defeated the notion that knowledge is flexible, fluid, and ever-evolving. Instead, it would reinforce a belief that information can be transmitted. (The concept of permitting children to revisit and rework their theories over time is explored in greater depth in the section « comment est-ce que les canards savent où voler? »: Kate).



Figure 9: Mya's plasticine model of baleen

Mya shared her understanding of baleen by building a plasticine model with the support of an illustration she found in a book.



Figure 10: Sydney's water colour portrait of baleen

Sydney illustrated her understanding of how whales eat by producing a water colour portrait.

« Les os sont pas hollow » : Gavin, Erik, Isaiah, Danika, and Simran. A similar exchange involving French and English occurred during another small group interaction. In this next example, Gavin, Erik, Isaiah, Danika, and Simran came together because of a shared interest

about the archaeopteryx. Together they conversed at great length about their wonderings, knowledge, and theories related to the evolution of dinosaurs into birds. For several months as a class there had been a great deal of interest in birds. We examined birds in considerable depth, exploring their habitats, their migration patterns, their nesting processes, and the broad variety of species found in Manitoba. Recently Gavin had become interested in the very “first bird” and how birds evolved from prehistoric times. Two days prior, Gavin had generated a lot of excitement among four other peers when he shared his discovery that the archaeopteryx, a prehistoric bird, was unable to fly. Following a group discussion at share time during the previous Explorations session, the group of five students had agreed to meet together the next chance they had to continue their dialogue:

Gavin: « Il ne peut pas voler. »

Mme: « Il ne peut pas voler. Ensuite on a commencé une conversation des raisons qu’il ne pouvait pas voler. »

Erk: « Je pense parce que les os sont pas hollow. »

Mme: « Et qu’est-ce qui te fais penser comme ça? »

Erik: « Parce que je pense que Gavin a dit que c’est comme un ostrich et ça c’est un oiseau qui ne peut pas voler. Si c’est trop grand, il ne peut pas voler. Il peut juste glide. »

Simran: « Moi et Danika on a study ça. Ici il y a une page du premier oiseau. Ça ne montre pas l’archéoptéryx mais il dit que l’archéoptéryx vit 150 million years ago. Aussi ils ont trouvé des archæoptéryx fossiles. »

Mme: « Des fossiles! Hmm, quoi d’autre? Isaiah, que travail-tu là-bas? »

Isaiah: « Je fais les différences entre les squelettes. »

Mme: « Entre quelles squelettes? Qu'est-ce qu'on voit ici? »

Erik: « Archéoptéryx! »

Isaiah: « L'autre c'est un oiseau. Ça c'est un petit trou et ça c'est un petit trou- ici et ici. (sur les os du portrait du oiseau). L'air peut rentrer dans les os. Ici c'est le eye hole et un trou pour le bec. Un archéoptéryx non pas de ceci [les trous dans les os]. Ils ont des claws sur ses ailes (voir Figure 11). »

Danika: « Des griffes. »

Isaiah: « Des griffes sur ses ailes et une plus longue queue et son corps n'a pas de trou et sa tête n'a pas de trou. Son legs- ça c'est le top de le leg bone et ça c'est le bottom de le leg bone jusqu'à son pied. Ça (les jambes) c'est couvert avec des feathers dans le portrait de Gavin. Les os sur les pieds sorts dans trois petites griffes. »

Gavin: *"He cannot fly."*

Mme: *"He cannot fly. Then we started a conversation about why he could not fly. "*

Erk: *"I think it's because its bones are hollow."*

Mme: *"And what makes you think that?"*

Erik: *"Because I think that Gavin said that it is like an ostrich and that is a bird that cannot fly. If it is too big, it cannot fly. It can only glide."*

Simran: “Me and Danika studies that. Here is a page about the first bird. It doesn’t show the archaeopteryx, but it says that the archaeopteryx lived 150 million years ago. Also they found archaeopteryx fossils.”

Mme: “Fossils! Hmmm, what else? Isaiah, what are you working on over there?”

Isaiah: “I am showing the difference between the skeletons.”

Mme: “Between which skeletons? What are we seeing here?”

Erik: “Archaeopteryx!”

Isaiah: “The other is a bird. This is a little hole and this is a hole— here and here (on the bones of the bird picture). The air can get into the bones. Here is the eye hole and a hole for the beak. An archaeopteryx doesn’t have this [the holes in the bones], They have claws on their wing (see Figure 11).”

Danika: “Claws.”

Isaiah: “Claws on their wings and a longer tail and their body doesn’t have holes and their head doesn’t have holes. Their legs—this is the top of the leg bone and this is the bottom of the leg bone right to its foot. This (the legs) is covered with feathers in Gavin’s picture. The bones on the feet spread out into three small claws.”

As the conversation went on, Danika and Simran parted from the group explaining that they needed to get back to their own Explorations work. Gavin, Erik, and Isaiah stayed together becoming more engrossed in the books, sketches, and photocopies about the archaeopteryx that lay in front of them. Since their conversation was running smoothly and their excitement about

the topic seemed powerful enough to sustain their French conversation without me, I quietly left the group leaving only the audio recorder behind.

As soon as I was out of ear shot the conversation abruptly shifted from French to English as the boys conversed:

Erik: « Je pense le bone structure de les ailes, j'ai vu une photo de les ailes d'un oiseau et ils vont comme ça de petit a grand [montre un exemple avec ses mains]. »

Isaiah: "So what you are saying is a nice way of saying that the archaeopteryx is fat!"

Erik: « (rit) Non pas comme ça. Mais je pense les wings sont plus petits. »

Isaiah: "And the body's bigger. So their wings are skinnier and the bird's wings are fatter."

Erik: "I think, yeah. Oui."

Erik: "I think the bone structure of the wings. I saw a picture of a bird's wings and they move like this from smaller to bigger (shows an example with his hands)."

Isaiah: "So what you are saying is a nice way of saying that the archaeopteryx is fat!"

Erik: "(laughs) No, not like that. But I think the wings are smaller."

Isaiah: "And the body's bigger. So their wings are skinnier and the bird's wings are fatter."

Erik: "I think, yeah. Yes."

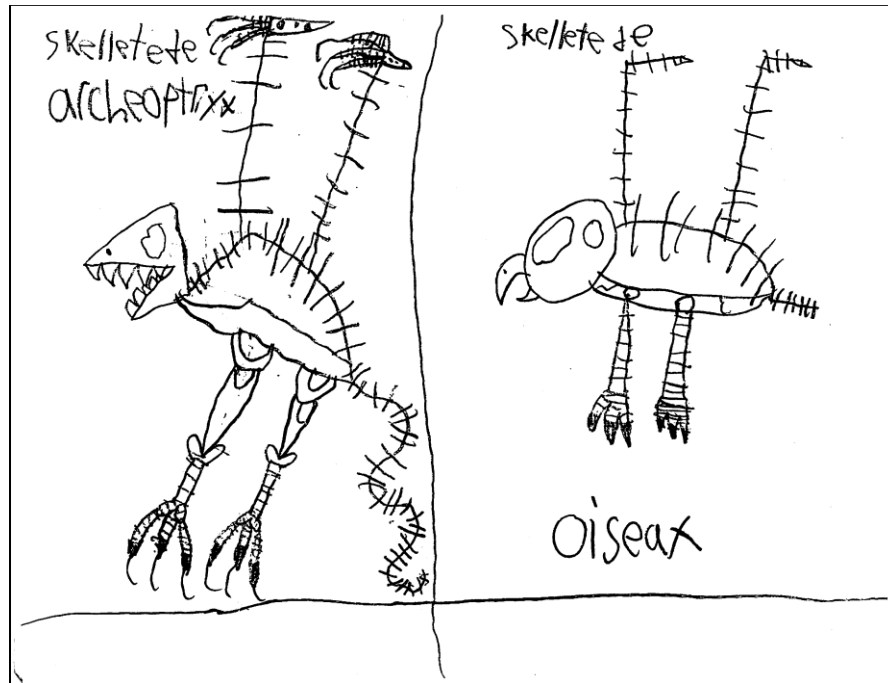


Figure 11: Isaiah's archaeopteryx and bird

Isaiah's drawing depicted the interior and exterior of the archaeopteryx and a bird.

Up until this point, Erik had been making an effort to maintain some French in the conversation. It is difficult to know if it was because he felt a sense of responsibility to sustain the French that the group was speaking just moments earlier or if he still felt as if there was a teacher still listening and checking in since I had left the audio recorder running when I moved off to another group (and it was still there lying on the ground in front of the three of them). Regardless, while Erik initially tried to maintain the use of French, over time he conformed to the habits of his peers and communicated with them in English.

Isaiah: “So why can’t archaeopteryx fly? Is it because it’s prehistoric and the birds developed?”

Gavin: “I think it’s because the holes in the birds.”

Isaiah: “They’re hollow.”

Gavin: “Yeah, like the wind goes through.”

Isaiah: “Like they keep their mouth open and the wind goes into them.”

Erik: “Do you want to go get some paper so that we can draw this?”

Gavin: “Yeah!”

Interestingly, the conversation the three children had in English serves as more of a review of the ideas we had previously discussed altogether in French than it was an opportunity to generate new ideas. Their use of English seemed to be their technique for organizing the French information they had just worked through. The children seemed quite prepared to “draw on the ways first and second (and third) languages can be involved in promoting second language competence” (Scott, 2010, p. 4).

As their confidence grew through interactions with their peers in French, their identities as French speakers were also transforming. Where once the French language loomed as an obstacle that separated them from authentic and engaged learning, over time French became a means through which the children were able to express discoveries and present new perspectives. Erik's active participation in this conversation served as a clear example of the ways in which his perception of himself as a French learner was changing. Early on in the school year, Erik's concerns about presenting his ideas in French had sometimes partially or completely "shut him down". He would offer brief remarks, limit his observations, or choose not to share his insights at all, even when it was evident that he was interested in taking part in the conversation. Frequently throughout the year when beginning to share an idea, Erik would stop mid-sentence to ask, "can I just say this in English?" Consistently Erik was reminded that the only expectation of him was that he put forward his best effort in sharing his perspective in French and we would all support him if he needed some additional vocabulary. Listening to Erik confidently offer theories as to why the archaeopteryx could not fly, hearing him make connections with information that Gavin had previously shared, while attempting to continue the conversation in French even when his peers responded in English signalled a shift in Erik's perception of himself as a language learner and indicated a change in his relationship with the French language. The children's use of both French and English to organize their thoughts or deepen their understanding of an idea reappeared frequently in their collaborative discussions.

This pattern resurfaced once again in this next example. In this situation, Simran, Ishdeep, Sydney, and Mya interacted in English as they worked to edit their French writing.

“It would have to be “e-s-t” for est-ce que”: Simran, Ishdeep, Sydney, and Mya. As part of the process of publishing their own French book about the topics they had been working on during Explorations, each student had produced a rough copy of their writing. They had typed their thoughts on the computer and printed off an initial copy. Their job at this point was to read through their piece of writing and find 10 to 15 things they could correct. This might involve correcting misspelled words, adding punctuation, reworking sentence structure, or circling English words and changing them to French. They were invited to do their editing independently or with their neighbours. A group of five girls were seated at a table together. Each student was focused on her own page, but from time to time one of the girls turned to someone working beside her in search of support:

Mya: “How do you spell modèle? [She originally wrote model and then added an “e” after the “l” on her page].”

Simran: “Yeah, like that, but there is an accent right there [pointing to the first “e”].”

(Time passes as each student works on her own page)

Kate: “How do you say North America in French?”

Simran: “I don’t know. Manuela, how do you say North America in French again?”

Mya: “Well there is le nord.”

Anastasia: « Amerique du Nord. »

Kate: “What? ”

Anastacia: « Amerique du Nord. It’s North America. »

Each time a student sought support they instinctively asked their question in English. Yet, through the dialogue that followed they were able to enhance their French vocabulary and their abilities as a writer in French. In this particular interaction, Ishdeep was able to offer Sydney feedback that will continue to support Sydney in her future French writing.

Sydney: “Mine makes no sense. Can you read this?”

Ishdeep: (Looks over her shoulder and starts reading) « Combien et-ce que...It would have to be ‘e-s-t’ for est-ce que». (The letters *e-s-t* are said in French)

Sydney: “When is it e-t?” (The letters *e-t* are said in French)

Ishdeep: “That’s for “and”. You want “is” so it has to be e-s-t.” (The letters *e-s-t* are said in French).

This example illustrates that conversing with peers, asking questions, and reviewing their own work were powerful strategies for learning. In this case, the children were refining their understanding of what it meant to be a language learner. Scott (2010) acknowledges that “students can benefit from understanding that their two languages can work in collaboration to increase their vocabulary in the second language” (p.107). Rather than focusing on the times when children were not speaking French, I was trying to focus in on the experiences that allowed them to engage with French authentically. The children’s use of English in their learning was not a demonstration of their inability to speak French, it was a tool used to enhance their skills and understanding in an additional language. There is quite a difference in stance between lamenting the French that children did not have and celebrating the French that they did have. I believe children’s efforts in language learning needed to be recognized if I were to “begin envisioning learners not as ineffective and imperfect monolingual speakers of the target language, but as

aspiring bilinguals” (Turnbull & Dailey-O’Cain, 2009, p. 186). Approaching learning in a manner that acknowledges children as valued and capable was very much in keeping with my philosophical beliefs as a teacher. Children have valuable information to share and working collaboratively with others offered them an effective way to share this knowledge.

The Benefits of Collaboration

Studies indicate that immersion students lack opportunities for extended dialogue in French (Swain, 1987; Day & Shapson, 1996). With this in mind, establishing spaces in which discourse can take place freely, comfortably, and purposefully is important for children to develop their abilities in French. Collaboration and communication are paramount for learners to generate new ideas and gain new insights. Learning is a social practice and, as an extension, language learning is a social experience. Examined from a “socio-cultural perspective, the language of the individual develops in relation to its functions within the socio-cultural activity in which the individual participates” (Johnson, 2009, p. 44). In our classroom opportunities were provided for students to interact, share their knowledge, and build on the ideas of others. For instance, Mya and Sydney discovered new information about whales and baleen through conversations with each other and their peers. Gavin encouraged his classmates to begin theorizing about the archaeopteryx by piquing their curiosity with his discovery that the archaeopteryx could not fly.

The examples below that I have selected to illustrate the benefits of collaboration demonstrated moments of children learning from one another. The three interactions that I describe highlight the value and necessity of collaboration for all learners and were unique in the way that the partnerships came together. One interaction unfolded from the careful work of one sculptor and the insatiable interest and curiosity of his neighbour, another arose unexpectedly

during our Explorations sharing session, and the third brought together five passionate researchers who set a meeting time to continue a discussion they had started earlier. The characteristic that they all had in common was that the students' ability to communicate their thinking in French was enhanced, and the sophistication of their theories and wonderings was heightened as a result of the children coming together.

« Pour la grenouille africaine, le male est plus grand » : Erik, Isaiah, Mme. As Erik sculpted a plasticine frog, a classmate became fascinated with the process. Isaiah moved in beside him and began making insightful observations as the two looked closely at the printed colour photo of an African Bullfrog that Erik was using to guide his sculpting (see Figure 12). Their conversation unfolded in English.

Erik: "I'm going to add some eyes."

Isaiah: "The eyes have a little stripe in them, see. It's black" (pointing at the eyes in the photocopy).

Erik: "Yeah, I know."

Isaiah: "Remember the nostrils have to be smaller than the eyes."

Erik: "Really? Why?"

Isaiah: "Cause look at the picture and you'll need a little bit of white under his chin."

Erik: "How am I going to do the mouth?"

Isaiah: "I know! You could make the head shaped differently. Make it like a triangle."

Erik: "Does that mean that I have to restart everything?"

Isaiah: “No just take it off from other places.”

Erik: “Ok good. The nostrils will be ok. See. Look, look at the picture (pause). This is good. Much better now. Thank you Isaiah. It actually looks good, really good.”



Figure 12: Erik's plasticine model of the African bullfrog

Erik demonstrated the intricate details of the African bullfrog using plasticine with the support of his classmate and a detailed photograph.

Erik's excitement and intrigue about the African Bullfrog supported his desire to communicate. He was eager to share his knowledge; so much so that he was not at all concerned by the notion that he would need to share all of his discoveries in French. Readers will remember that Erik was often overwhelmed at the prospect of having to share his understanding in French and would share minimally, if at all, in an effort to avoid having to formulate his thoughts into French. It was also evident that his prior conversation with Isaiah helped him to feel better prepared and more focused about the things he would like to share.

Erik: « J'ai fait un mâle et un female. Le femelle a le cocoon et le male n'a pas. Les both . . . comment est-ce qu'on dit both? »

Mme: « Les deux. »

Erik: « Les deux peut faire le cocoon mais j'ai fait la femelle juste parce que je voulais. Et le mâle a des . . . je ne sais pas quoi le nom mais c'est le digging toes mais la femelle n'a pas. Isaiah a dit ça. »

Mme: « Et quelque chose d'autre. Il y avait une raison pour laquelle t'avais hâte d'étudier le mâle et la femelle de la grenouille africaine. »

Erik: « Parce que la grenouille africaine c'est unique parce que d'autre grenouille et amphibien, c'est comme le femelle est plus grande. Mais pour la grenouille africaine, le mâle est plus grand. »

Mme: « Wow! D'autres choses? »

Erik: « Well . . . j'ai fait les yeux avec le pupil et il y a comme deux lines comme ici et ici. »

Mme: « Oui, oui. »

Erik: « Parce que si il a ça dans le forêt, il . . . je pense il give it better eye sight. »

Mme: « Pour être capable de voir des côtés. »

Erik: « Oui et also dans les, comment est-ce qu'on dit night? »

Mme: « Durant la [pause] . . . nuit. »

Erik: « Nuit. Je pense qu'ils ont kind of night vision. »

Erik: *"I made a male and a female. The female has a cocoon and the male does not. They both . . . how do you say both in French?"*

Mme: *"Both."*

Erik: *"They both can make a cocoon, but I only made the female's because I wanted to. And the male has . . . I don't know the name in French. It's a digging toe, but the female doesn't have one. Isaiah told me that. "*

Mme: *"And another thing. There was another reason that you were excited about the male and female African Bullfrog."*

Erik: *"Because the African Bullfrog is unique because other frogs and amphibians, it's like the female is bigger. But for the African Bullfrog, the male is bigger."*

Mme: *"Wow! Anything else?"*

Erik: *"Well . . . I made the eyes with a pupil and there are two lines right here and here."*

Mme: *"Yes, yes."*

Erik: *"Because if it is in the forest, it . . . I think it gives it better eye sight."*

Mme: *"To be able to see in all directions."*

Erik: *"Yes and also, how do you say night in French?"*

Mme: *"During the [pause] . . . night."*

Erik: *"Night. I think they kind of have night vision."*

Erik's final observations about the frogs' eyes made reference once again to the support that Isaiah offered. It was through Isaiah's urging that Erik began looking more discerningly at the eyes of the bullfrog while he was sculpting. It became evident that Erik had gained a great deal of self-confidence as an expert about the African Bullfrog. Erik was normally a fairly reluctant writer. However, during Explorations on the days that followed his conversation with Isaiah and his sharing with me, Erik found a quiet space in the room and was determined to add a page of information that could accompany his plasticine sculpture. To support his writing he would use my cell phone on which the conversation between him and me had been recorded. He would listen attentively to the ideas he had shared and the French words I had provided. From there he was able to produce a piece of writing that represented all of the details he felt were important about his frog (see Figure 13). Documentation proved to be an integral tool that helped Erik recognize his potential as a writer and storyteller, which assisted him in formulating his understanding into French.

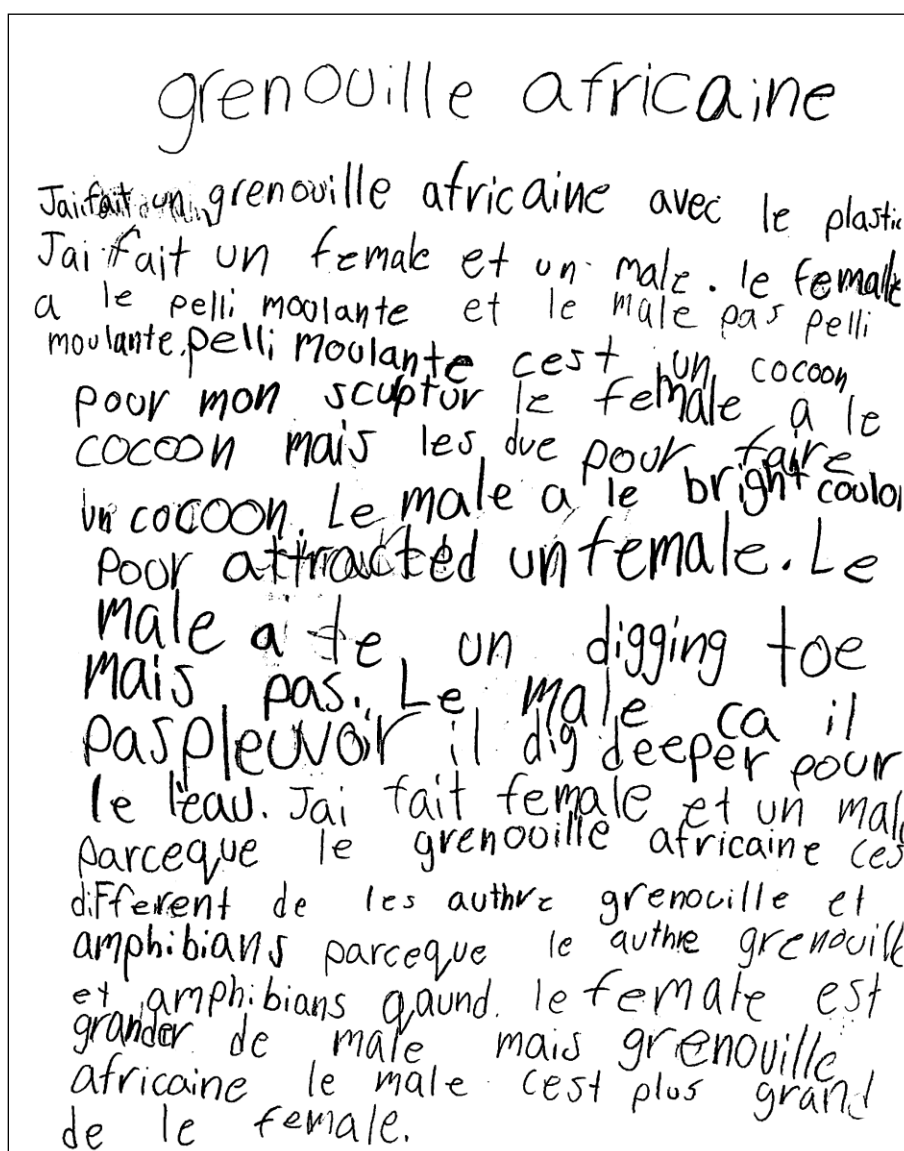


Figure 13: The African bullfrog in written form

Erik was able to put his knowledge of the male and female African Bullfrog into written form.

Aujourd'hui j'ai finir mon information de la grenouille africaine pour aller avec mon plasticine sculpture. J'ai fini, I mean, j'ai fait une grenouille africaine avec le plasticine. J'ai fait un female et un mâle. Le female a le pelli moulante et le pas pelli moulante. Pelli moulante c'est un cocoon pour mon sculpture. Le female a le cocoon mais les deux peuvent faire un cocoon. Le mâle a le bright

colour pour attract un female. Le mâle a le digging toe mais pas le female. Le mâle, s'il peut pas pleuvoir il dig deeper pour le l'eau. J'ai fait une female et un mâle parce que le grenouille africaine est différent de les autres grenouilles et amphibiens parce que le autre grenouilles et amphibiens, le female est [plus grand] de le mâle mais la grenouille africaine, le mâle c'est plus grand de le female.

Today I finished my information about the African Bullfrog to go with my plasticine sculptures. I finished, I mean I made an African Bullfrog out of plasticine. I made the female and the male. The female has Saran Wrap and the Saran Wrap is a cocoon around my sculpture. The female has the cocoon, but they both can make a cocoon. The male is a bright colour to attract the female. The male has a digging toe, but not the female. The male, when it will not rain, he digs deeper for water. I made a female and a male because the African Bullfrog is different from other frogs and amphibians because other frogs and amphibians, the female is larger than the male. But the African Bullfrog, the male is bigger than the female.

Meaning making takes shape by participating in a variety of types of learning opportunities including collaborative discussions and various forms of literacy, including reading and writing (Duff, 2001). Erik's experience is very much an illustration of Reggio Emilia's "hundred languages of children". It was through sculpting, listening, storytelling and writing that he was able to bring his African Bullfrogs to life. As a result of his shared interactions and experiences, Erik's perception of himself as a learner began to change. His identity was altered. He began to see himself as capable, important, and valuable. This was evident in his newly found willingness

to share his knowledge with the class and his eagerness to support his peers with their interests and wonderings. The use of documentation enabled Erik to see his abilities and growth reflected back to him. While, at the beginning of the year, Erik perceived the French language as a barrier to communicating his ideas, as the year progressed and his confidence grew he was able to alter his relationship and comfort level with the language. He came to appreciate the French language not as an obstacle but as a structure within which to work.

« J'ai 20 dents »: Emily. Emily had been quite interested in parts of the human body. She had already completed research on the brain and the eyes. She then became interested in learning more about teeth. This was the first day that she had shared this curiosity with the group and her wonderings produced considerable intrigue among her classmates. The enthusiasm that erupted unexpectedly as a result of Emily's question is an effective example of the powerful nature of discourse. Over the course of the children's conversation, new information surfaced, theories evolved, and ideas were challenged. Creating space for collaborative learning and authentic dialogue allows learners "to generate new knowledge rather than just consume information" (Cummins, 1998, p. 39). By posing a single question, Emily was able to elicit passion and curiosity among her classmates.

Emily: « Aujourd'hui j'ai fait quatre questions. Mais je n'ai pas trouvé les réponses à mes questions. Une de ces questions étaient : Combien de dents a les enfants? »

Emily: "Today I wrote four questions. But I did not find the answers to my questions. One of my questions was: How many teeth do children have?"

While our share time continued, Mya stood up and walked over to one of our book baskets. It was clear she knew precisely what she was looking for and when she returned she was holding a

book. She quietly flipped it open to the page she has been thinking about, raised her hand and waited for a pause in conversation so that she could share her discovery.

Mme « Mya tu voulais ajouter quelque chose? »

Mya: « C'est une connexion à Emily. Ici le livre dit qu'on a 32 dents. » (En montrant une page du livre qu'elle a cherché au sujet des dents.)

Mme: « Hmm, est-ce que c'est une adulte ou un enfant? »

Mya: « C'est pas dit »

Elizabeth: « J'ai 20 dents »

Mme: « Dans ta propre bouche. As-tu compté ? »

Elizabeth: « Oui. »

Mme: « Bonne idée. As-tu déjà perdu des dents? Je me demande si les autres ont plus ou moins que ça? Est-ce que tout le monde a 20? »

Mme: « Oui Hunter combien as-tu? »

Hunter: « Je veux dire que les enfants ont plus de dents que les adultes »

Mme: « Comment sais-tu? »

Hunter: « Je l'ai vu à la télévision. Il parlait des dents. On a 32 »

Mme: "Mya did you want to add something?"

Mya: "It's a connection to Emily. Here this book says that we have 32 teeth" (showing a page in a book that she just brought over about teeth).

Mme: "Hmm, is it an adult or a child?"

Mya: "It doesn't say."

Elizabeth: "I have 20 teeth."

Mme: "In your own mouth? Did you count?"

Elizabeth: "Yes."

Mme: "Great idea. Have you ever lost any teeth? I'm wondering if others have more or less than that? Does everyone have 20 teeth?"

Mme: "Yes Hunter, how many do you have?"

Hunter: "I just wanted to say that children have more teeth than adults."

Mme: "How do you know?"

Hunter: "I saw it on television. They were talking about teeth. We have 32."

The children continued to surface their theories. They were eager to share their knowledge and comfortable questioning the thinking of their peers. As they constructed knowledge together, the children were also constructing a classroom culture. A culture was established in which the children respected, challenged, questioned, and encouraged each other's learning.

Ishdeep: « Oui, on a 32 dents »

Mme: « Trente-deux tu dis, est-ce que ça c'est pour les adultes? »

William: (À son voisin) "That's what I thought: 32."

Ishdeep: « Il y a 16 dents sur le top 16 sur le bottom »

Mme: « C'est ça que toi tu as? As-tu compté aussi? »

Ishdeep: « Non, mon cousin a dit. Elle est une dental hygienist. Elle dit si tu as tous tes teeth tu vas avoir 32»

Kate: « J'ai a »

Verchiel: « J'ai » (en lui corrigeant)

Kate: « J'ai 29 et un demi »

Mme: « Ha, un demi parce qu'une repousse ? »

Kate: « Oui »

Mme: « On a tellement de choses à dire! Sydney oui »

Sydney: « Je voulais dire que les adultes ont des wisdom teeth »

Kate: "What's wisdom teeth?"

Sydney: « C'est parce que tu as des empty gums en arrière. C'est behind tes molars.

Quand tu es older tu vas grow des wisdom teeth comme des molars. Tous ici, tous ici, tout ici et tout ici » (pointant à ses gencives pour montrer la classe).

Kate: "Oh wow"

Ishdeep: "Yes, we have 31 teeth."

Mme: "Thirty-two you say, is that for adults. "

William: (*Quietly to his neighbour*) "*That's what I thought: 32.*"

Ishdeep: “There are 16 teeth on the top and 16 on the bottom.”

Mme: “That’s what you have? Did you count also?”

Ishdeep: “No, my cousin told me. She is a dental hygienist. She says that if you have all of your teeth you will have thirty-two.”

Kate: “I have have.”

Verchiel: “I have.” (*corrects her*)

Kate: “I have 29 and a half.”

Mme: “Ha, a half because one is growing back?”

Kate: “Yes.”

Mme: “We have so many things to say! Sydney, yes.”

Sydney: “I wanted to say that adults have wisdom teeth.”

Kate: “*What’s wisdom teeth?*”

Sydney: “It’s because you have empty gums in the back. It’s behind your molars. When you are older you will grow wisdom teeth like molars. Right here, right here, right here, and right here.” (*pointing to the back of her gums to show her classmates*).

Kate: “*Oh wow*”

The interest amongst the students continued and before long several children were counting their own teeth.

Ryu: « J’ai 24. »

Mme: « Tu as 24 dents? »

Verchiel: « J'ai 25. »

Daljit: « J'ai 27. »

Mme: « Quel autre numéro est-ce que j'ai entendu? Ryu dit qu'il a 28. »

Therese: « J'ai 28. »

Sydney: « J'ai 26. »

Erik: « Moi aussi »

Ryu: "I have 24."

Mme: "You have 24 teeth?"

Verchiel: "I have 25."

Daljit: "I have 27."

Mme: "What other numbers did I hear? Ryu said that he has 24."

Therese: "I have 28."

Sydney: "I have 26."

Erik: "Me too."

Earlier in the conversation Kate shared that she has 29 and a half teeth. She felt confident about her statement though later she began to reformulate her understanding about how many teeth children have based on the fluctuating number of teeth amongst her classmates. She had come to

recognize that the number for each child could vary depending on how many they had lost and how many adult teeth had grown in.

Kate: « Des fois les adultes ont plus de dents parce que quand tu es petit tu perds des dents. Tu as des baby teeth, mais quand tu es un adulte tu as des adult teeth. Ça dépend si tu as des adult teeth; ça dépend du jour »

Kate: "Sometimes adults have more teeth because when you are little you lose your teeth. You have baby teeth, but when you are an adult you have adult teeth. It depends if you have your adult teeth; it depends on the day."

The children were far from finished exploring this topic when our sharing time concluded that morning. The following Explorations Emily tabulated a list and a graph displaying the number of teeth of each of her classmates. There was such value in providing students opportunities to “do discourse” (Genesee, 1987, p. 192). By bringing together their thinking, the children were able to refine their understanding and develop new theories.

« L’archéoptéryx ne peut pas voler il peut juste glide » : Simran, Gavin, Erik, and Isaiah. The archaeopteryx conversation shared earlier actually began two days prior to the discussion that has already been shared. For one of the first times during the school year, Gavin raised his hand to share about the work he had been doing during Explorations. Ordinarily he would participate only if requested to or because one of his group members had decided they would like to share with the class. In both of those circumstances, Gavin’s information would normally be minimal and brief, though he always made an effort to speak in French when he shared. On this particular day he came prepared with a hand-drawn page (see Figure 14) and seemed genuinely eager to share his most recent discoveries with his peers. Gavin cleaned up his

working space and arrived at the carpet in a hurry as our sharing time began. His hand was one of the first to go up when I asked who would be interested in sharing. He waited respectfully as the first group shared; as he sat he restlessly shifted on the carpet crossing and uncrossing his legs. From time to time, he peered down at his paper that lay face down on the carpet in front of him, ensuring it didn't move. Finally his opportunity to share arrived:

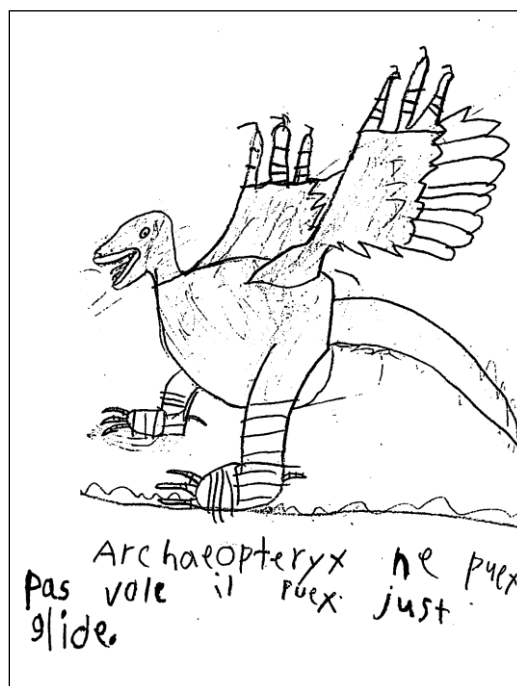


Figure 14: Gavin's archaeopteryx

Gavin's drawing of the archaeopteryx explains that the archaeopteryx could not fly it could only glide.

Gavin: « Durant exploration j'ai fait un dessin du premier oiseau. C'est un archéoptéryx.

Et j'ai aussi écrit un fait. Ici. »

Mme: « Voulais-tu le lire? »

Gavin: « L'archaeopteryx ne peut pas voler il peut juste glide. »

Mme: « Intéressant. Qu'est-ce que tu veux qu'on apprenne de ça? As-tu pensé à ta prochaine étape? Pourquoi est-ce que lui il ne pouvait pas voler et les oiseaux maintenant peuvent? »

Gavin: « Je pense qu'il ne peut pas voler parce qu'il est heavy. »

Mme: « Il est trop lourd. Qu'est ce qui le fait si lourd? »

Gavin: "During Explorations I drew a picture of the first bird. It's an archaeopteryx. And I also wrote a fact. Here."

Mme: "Did you want to read it?"

Gavin: "The archaeopteryx cannot fly, it can only glide."

Mme: "Interesting. What are you hoping we will learn from this? Have you thought about your next step? Why couldn't he fly and birds today can fly?"

Gavin: "I think that it cannot fly because it is heavy."

Mme: "It is too heavy. What makes it so heavy?"

As Gavin thought about how to formulate his response his classmates began theorizing and sharing their opinions with their neighbours.

Anastasia: "He's bigger"

Ryu: "He's so big. Birds are so small."

Gavin: « Je pense parce que les bones dans il. »

Mme: « Les os sont plus lourds. »

Anastasia: “He’s bigger”

Ryu: “He’s so big. Birds are so small.”

Gavin: “I think because of the bones in it.”

Mme: “The bones are heavier.”

Gavin had generated interest from a handful of peers who wanted to share their own theories with the whole group.

Mme: « Erik, tu voulais ajouter à ça? »

Erik: « Oui! Je pense que les os de les oiseaux sont hollow et je pense que c’est quelque chose avec developing avec les – comment est-ce qu’on dit wings? »

Simran: « Les ailes. »

Erik: « Oui, les ailes. »

Isaiah: « Je pense que parce que le archéoptéryx a ces bones mais ils ne sont pas hollow et il a des griffes sur ses ailes et il est plus gros alors il est trop lourd pour voler. Il ne peut pas voler il peut juste jump et glide. Les oiseaux ont des bones qui sont hollow, ils n’ont pas les griffes sur les ailes, et ils sont plus léger alors ils peuvent voler parce que le development. Les archéoptéryx sont prehistoric. »

Simran: « C’est comme les manchots. Ils ne peuvent pas voler, mais ils peuvent glisser. »

Mme: “Erik, you wanted to add to this?”

Erik: “yes! I think that the bird bones are hollow and I think that it’s something about developing its—how do you say wings [in French]?”

Simran: “Its wings.”

Erik: “Yeah. Its wings.”

Isaiah: “I think that because the archaeopteryx has bones but they are not hollow and it has claws on its wings and it is bigger so it is too heavy to fly. It cannot fly, it can only jump and glide. Birds have bones that are hollow, they don’t have claws on their wings, and they are lighter so they can fly because of their development. The archaeopteryx is prehistoric.”

Simran: “It’s like the penguins. They cannot fly, but they can glide.”

The children were working diligently to express their understanding in French. Developing their understanding in French is a process of higher level thinking: the “process of rendering thinking into speech is not simply a matter of memory retrieval, but a process through which thinking reaches a new level of articulation” (Smagorinsky, 1998, p.173). As students took the time to rethink their understandings and share them in French, they had an opportunity to think deeply about their learning in a new way. Sharing understandings out loud often helps refine ideas. It is Gavin’s observations about the archaeopteryx’s bones that lead Erik and Isaiah to think about the difference in density between the bones of a bird and those of the archaeopteryx. It is Erik’s mention of bird wings that leads Simran to connect this discussion with her work on penguins. As children communicate their thinking in small groups of peers or with the whole class, they sharpen their understanding of concepts and of language. To understand a concept more deeply, talking it over with others is a helpful technique. It can change their perspective, offer new

insights, and challenge our current theories. However, when learning an additional language, communication becomes more than simply a means of support; it is a necessary practice that urges the learner to formulate his or her thinking into words. It also underscores the social nature of learning; the children don't talk to each other just as a language development "technique", but rather because they are social beings.

Informing Pedagogy through Authentic Learning

Pedagogical documentation is a process for teacher research that has a profound influence on professional development (Wien, 2011). Well-collected and effectively shared documentation has the capacity to help children recognize their own identities, theories, uncertainties, and growth. It also helps me as a teacher to expand my understanding of who the children are as learners and how I can best support them. Carefully examining the learning of children through pedagogical documentation is a lens through which I am able to examine my own practice more discerningly. As I read through my documentation, I began concentrating on the ways that my practice was changing, my understandings were being challenged, and my awareness of children's identities was broadening.

The three examples that I present below have impacted my practice in different ways. The first example returns to Gavin's journey towards becoming an active collaborator. It follows his beginnings as a quiet observer, his percolating curiosity related to a variety of interests, his passion for researching and sharing about the archaeopteryx, and the challenges each situation posed for me as a teacher. The second example follows Kate as she uncovers information about the Canada Goose. I focus on particular moments of her journey, examining the times that her theories were challenged, rebuilt, or extended. While I explore Kate's growth as a learner, I also pay careful attention to the way this learning experience urged me to rethink, deepen, and re-

examine my approaches to and beliefs about providing support for children's learning. The third example focuses on an unexpected and playful conversation among a group of students with puppets, which provided insight into the ways that the children were thinking about learning French. Their articulate theories and discoveries have had a lasting impact on my understanding of language and language learning.

« Ça c'est le dimorphodon » : Gavin. Becoming a passionate, engaged learner, knowing how to ask powerful questions, and being able to collect effective resources are not skills that build gradually over time. These skills flourish in supportive learning environments in which children are encouraged to engage actively with their surroundings and think critically about information. Gavin has already appeared twice in this paper, each time as a quiet, reflective, yet highly engaged and inquisitive learner. However, his journey to become an active collaborator, eager to create knowledge for himself, took time, encouragement, and support. Earlier in the school year, Gavin was a bit of a "floater". He enjoyed watching what his peers were working on and listening to the theories and ideas of others. Gavin is in Grade 3, which makes him a "younger" in our Grade 3 and Grade 4 class. As such, Gavin often preferred to observe the work of others from a safe distance rather than diving in too quickly. Eventually, he would join up with small groups of peers and contentedly pursue whatever questions or inquiries they were already engaged in. My hope for Gavin was that he would discover a topic about which he was truly inspired and feel safe enough in the classroom to risk sharing his own thoughts and theories with others. I frequently questioned the ways in which I could better support Gavin in pursuing his own ideas and building his confidence as a researcher. One morning, several months into school, we sat down together to reflect on how his research about

rocks was going. He had shared with the class more than once that his intention was to discover what types of rocks could be found in the different Canadian provinces.

Mme: « Alors tu as trouvé des livres? »

Gavin: « . . . Ummm, oui . . . »

Mme: « Bien et tu as trouvé des roches du Canada? »

Gavin: « Umm, peut-être . . . »

Mme: « . . . Est-ce qu'il y a une page qui va t'aider? »

Gavin: (Il cherche dans son livre) « Celle-là »

Mme: « Oh oui, pourquoi? »

Gavin: « Parce que il tells you how to tell which one is a mineral and which one isn't »

Mme: « Ah, oui et est-ce que ça peut te dire . . . toi tu voulais savoir au sujet du Canada. C'est ça qui t'intéresse n'est pas? »

Gavin: « Umm, oui''. »

Mme: « Alors, si je te demande : [je prends une carte du Canada qui se trouve à côté de nous autre] 'Quel type de roche est-ce qu'on trouve ici en Colombie-Britannique?' Est-ce que tu peux me dire? »

(Longue pause)

Mme: « Où, on est au Manitoba. Quel type de roches est-ce qu'on pourrait trouver au Manitoba? »

(Longue pause encore).

Gavin: « Ummm, diamant je pense. »

Mme: “So you found some books?”

Gavin: “ . . . Ummm, yes . . . ”

Mme: “Good and you found rocks from Canada?”

Gavin: “Ummm, maybe . . . ”

Mme: “Is there a page that will help you?”

Gavin: (He looks in the book) “This one.”

Mme: “Oh yeah, why?”

Gavin: “Because it tells you how to tell which one is a mineral and which one isn’t.”

Mme: “Ah, yes and can it tell you . . . you wanted to know about Canda. That’s what interests you, right?”

Gavin: “Umm, yes.”

Mme: “So if I ask you: [I take a map of Canada that is lying right beside us] ‘What type of rocks can we find in British Columbia?’ Are you able to tell me?”

(Long pause)

Mme: “Or, we’re in Manitoba. What type of rocks can we find in Manitoba?”

(Another long pause)

Gavin: "Ummm, diamonds I think."

It was evident that Gavin was struggling with his research about rocks. Was it a shortage of resources that was causing him trouble? Was working in French discouraging him? Or was he simply losing interest in his topic? He was having a difficult time collecting helpful resources and benefited from frequent adult feedback, guidance, and encouragement. As Gavin's research continued his learning progressed at a gradual pace. Each Explorations session he would work alongside two boys who were deeply engaged and interested in learning about rocks. He would read rock books with them and sometimes help as they worked to separate rocks samples into various categories. However, it was not until a classmate, who had been learning about birds, shared her most recent curiosity about prehistoric birds that Gavin became truly engaged as a learner.

One day during Explorations share time, Simran announced that she thought she had found an interesting link to the work she had been doing about birds. She shared that there was a dinosaur that was considered to be the first bird ever discovered. Instantly Gavin's eyes lit up. As long as we had known him, the class had known that Gavin was a dinosaur lover. Gavin raised his hand to respond to Simran's observations. He informed the class that he and his brothers had a book at home with information about the archaeopteryx. I asked if he might be willing to help Simran find more information on the topic. They agreed to meet together during the next Explorations session to look through some of the dinosaur books in class. Finally Gavin had discovered a way to bring his passionate interest into the classroom. From the moment he began his research about prehistoric birds, Gavin shared much more frequently with the class, engaged in many more collaborative discussions with peers, and had firmer ideas, opinions, and directional plans for pursuing his inquiries. Gavin had been studying rocks for nearly a month

with little demonstrated excitement or engagement. It was mid-March when he changed his focus and began researching the archaeopteryx. Within a week of researching, Gavin was anxious to share his discoveries with his peers. His initial discovery was that the archaeopteryx could not fly but instead that it could only glide (referred to earlier along with Figure 14). A week after sharing his illustration of the archaeopteryx, Gavin excitedly shared with me about the dimorphodon:

Gavin: « Ça c'est le dimorphodon. »

Mme: « Ça c'est lui avant qu'il devienne ce type d'oiseau [pointe à son dessin d'un archéoptéryx]. Wow. Alors, tu penses que ça va dans cet ordre: numéro un, numéro deux, numéro trois? » (Je les place dans une ligne avec dimorphodon, archéoptéryx et un gaie bleu).

Gavin: « Je pense que ces deux [l'archéoptéryx et le dimorphodon] sont de le même period. »

Mme: « Oh, ok. On va le lire ensemble. Une autre fois : tu dis que tu penses que ça va numéro 1, numéro 2? » (Je place encore le dimorphodon avant l'archéoptéryx).

Gavin: « Non, je pense qu'ils vivent dans le same period. Je pense que cela [le dimorphodon] vit durant le Jurassic period et ici [en pointant vers la page qu'il lisait] sa dit que l'archeoptryx vit durant le Jurassic period. »

Mme: « Alors, est-ce qu'ils pourraient être les mêmes ou c'est simplement qu'ils vivent en même temps? »

Gavin: « Ils vivent en même temps. »

Mme: « Alors, ils ne sont pas les mêmes. »

Gavin: « Non, parce qu'il dit le nom ici. » (En montrant son autre page où le nom du dimorphodon est écrit sous l'illustration).

Mme: « Quel est le connexion que tu vois entre les deux d'abord? »

Gavin: « Je pense qu'il both evolve dans des oiseaux. »

Mme: « Oui? »

Gavin: *"This is the dimorphodon."*

Mme: *"This is it before it becomes a bird (pointing to his picture of the archaeopteryx).*

Wow. So you think it goes in this order: number one, number two, number three?" (I place the dimorphodon, archaeopteryx, and blue jay into a line).

Gavin: *"I think that these two [the archaeopteryx and the dimorphodon] are from the same period."*

Mme: *"Oh, ok. We'll read it together. One more time: you're saying that you think that it goes number one, number two." (I again place the dimorphodon before the archaeopteryx).*

Gavin: *"No, I think that they come from the same period. I think that this one [the dimorphodon] lives during the Jurassic period and here [pointing to the page that he is reading] it says that the archaeopteryx lived during the Jurassic period."*

Mme: *"So could they be the same or just that they lived at the same time?"*

Gavin: *"They lived at the same time."*

Mme: “So they are not the same.”

Gavin: “No, because it says the name here.”(Points to his other page where the dimorphodon’s name is written under the illustration)].

Mme: “What is the connection that you see between these two then?”

Gavin: “I think that they both evolved into birds.”

Mme: “Yeah?”

Gavin was theorizing about the archaeopteryx and the dimorphodon based on information that he already knew about ostriches.

Gavin: « Je connais que l’archaeopteryx evolve dans un ostrich parce que un ostrich, les deux ont des longues feet et des longues legs. »

Gavin: “I know that the archaeopteryx evolved into an ostrich because an ostrich, they both have long feet and long legs.”

Gavin’s identity as a learner was shifting. He no longer viewed himself as a quiet observer who could only gain understanding through listening to the theories of others. This was evident in his willingness to correct my misunderstanding by clarifying more than once that the dimorphodon and the archaeopteryx both lived during the Jurassic period. He felt confident enough in his understanding to defend his theory. He had become an active participant with observations and ideas that he felt courageous enough to share with others. Gavin’s passion for his research topic fuelled his motivation to share more willingly, think more critically, and theorize more boldly. For instance, when making a claim that the archaeopteryx evolved into an ostrich, Gavin recognized the importance of having evidence to support his arguments. His recognition of the

need for personal research to support his theorizing represented a notable shift from the earlier conversation he and I had shared about Canadian rocks, during which he offered vague responses and uncertainty in his conclusions. Having the freedom to engage in authentic learning helped Gavin cultivate new learning skills and build greater self-confidence.

Gavin's experience illustrates the ways in which French Immersion students need to feel involved and implicated in their learning by using language in authentic ways right from the very beginning (Rivers, Allen, Savignon & Scanlan, 1972). By interacting and engaging with language in authentic ways, French language gains value and function in children's learning. Children's thinking cannot be distilled into repetitive and prescribed vocabulary words and phrases; instead, they need opportunities to discover their interests, share their passions, and create meaning as a way of giving purpose to language learning. For instance, as Gavin worked to discover his passion and gain the confidence to share his theories, he needed to feel that his ideas mattered and that his opinions were valued. It became evident that researching rocks was not a topic about which Gavin felt passionate. Most likely he had taken it on initially because two of his friends were interested in rocks and they had begun researching together. Gavin's immersion in questions, discussions, research relating to the archaeopteryx—a topic he was passionate about—illustrates the significance of providing authentic engagements for learners.

« **Comment est-ce que les canards savent où voler?** » : **Kate.** An essential dimension of the classroom environment was the development of a culture in which the children felt at ease taking risks and encouraged to offer their best effort. Their comments and insights were valued and their efforts to express themselves in French were supported because “a student who is made to feel that *how* he [sic] says something is more important than *what* he says will soon give up trying to make novel or personal statements” (Rivers et al., 1972, p.271). Value needs to be

placed on listening closely to children's ideas while refraining from overcorrecting their efforts to communicate in French. The same can be said for providing experiences through which children's theories can grow, be altered, and reshaped. If a learning environment leads a child to believe that being inaccurate or incorrect will lead to ridicule, scolding, or feelings of inferiority, they will very quickly stop sharing their theories. Rather, emphasis needs to be placed on what is said rather than how it is said (Calvé & Mollica, 1987). , Greater importance is, therefore, placed on supporting learners risk taking as they create theories, challenge their own hypotheses, and rethink their understanding.

Kate possessed a willingness to share, theorize, and reformulate her hypotheses because she recognized that her processes of acquiring information were as valued as the discoveries themselves. Kate was interested in learning about the Canada Goose because she often saw them in the pond near her home during the spring and early fall. She was curious about where they went during the winter months and how they knew where to go. During a sharing time at the end of Explorations she shared her wondering with the class and offered an explanation of how Canada Geese are able to migrate each winter.

Kate: « Ma question est : comment est-ce que les canards savent où voler? Ils vont follow le . . . comment est-ce que tu dis wind? »

Danika: « Vent. »

Kate: « Le vent. Si le vent va à la gauche ils vont à la gauche. »

Mya: "No they have to go to warmer places."

Kate: "My question is: How do birds know where to fly? They will follow the . . . how do you say wind in French?"

Danika: "Wind."

Kate: "The wind. If the wind is going left they will go left."

Mya: "No they have to go to warmer places."

Mya's comment would stay with Kate over the next few days, challenging her to seek further information about the wind and the migration patterns of geese. It was evident that her classmate's comment was causing her to rethink her initial theories about geese. She and I agreed to meet together at the end of the next Explorations so that she could share any potential discoveries or changes in her thinking. She spent the next Explorations leafing through and studying the several bird books that she found in the class.

Kate: « Durant Exploration j'ai figuré que le vent toujours allé dans la même direction quand c'est le temps de migrer pour les canards. Les canards sont des oiseaux et les oiseaux ont des choses pour aider à voler. Les oiseaux ont une chose dans leur tête. J'oublie ce qu'il est called, mais il le laisse feel où l'oiseau s'en va. Parce que un canard et proche à un oiseau, je pense que c'est la même chose. »

Kate: "During Explorations I figured out that the wind always goes in the same direction when it is time for ducks to migrate. Ducks are birds and birds have things to help them fly. Birds have something in their heads. I forget what it is called, but it is able to feel where the bird is going. Because a duck is like a bird, I think that it is the same thing."

Kate was bringing together details that she had read in her books and connecting them with information that the class had learned a few days prior during our visit with a local bird expert. Our visitor had explained that birds have a form of compass in their brain that assists them with their sense of direction during migration.

Kate: « Dans le livre je vois que le umm, le, comment est-ce qu'on dit wind en français? »

Mme: « Le ...vent »

Kate: « Le vent va toujours aller dans la même direction »

Kate: "In the book I see that the umm, the, how do you say wind in French?"

Mme: "The . . . wind"

Kate: "The wind always goes in the same direction."

As I glanced at the page Kate had been reading, it was clear that she was "reading" the illustrations in the book rather than the written French paragraphs. There was a large illustration of a bird with several arrows demonstrating the direction in which the wind moved above and beneath their wings when they soar through the air. The written text in the book was too challenging for Kate to read, which was a common difficulty with the French resources available. As she hypothesized about the meaning of the illustration, she believed that the directionality of the arrows was intended to demonstrate the direction in which the bird would migrate, which was evident in her current theory.

Mme: (Je répète ses mots pendant que je les écris dans mes notes) « Le vent va toujours dans la même direction. Alors, dans quelle direction? »

Kate: « Dans, umm . . . dans . . . »

Mme: « Comme où est-ce que ces canards veulent aller? »

Kate: « En . . . je pense maintenant aux oies canadiennes parce que je ne sais pas si toutes les canards vont à la même place. Ils va à l'ouest parce que ça c'est où Colombie-Britannique est. »

Mme: (I repeat her words as I am writing them in my notes) “The wind always goes in the same direction.’ So what direction?”

Kate: “To the, umm . . . , to the . . . ”

Mme: “As in, where do the ducks want to fly”

Kate: “To . . . I’m thinking now about Canadian Geese because I don’t know if all birds go to the same place. They go to the west because that is where British Columbia is.”

My mind was already racing about how I might extend Kate’s thinking further and dispel some of her misconceptions. It was important to me that I not stifle any of the theorizing she was doing, rather, my intention was to help her collect resources that would be more accessible. I work diligently in my practice to recognize and support meaning making as an ongoing process. I have encountered many moments where, in the past, I felt the need to jump in and correct inaccurate theories. However, as I develop as a teacher, I have come to realize that understanding is seldom static. As learners encounter new situations “theories are continuously elaborated, reworked, and thus evolve over the course of a project as children search for clarity; such theories are provisional, not fixed” (Wien, 2006, p. 99). Learning does not stop at the end of the school day or as the school year culminates; understanding deepens and grows continuously over time. The experience of collecting and interacting with new information has a more profound effect on learning than the act finding the “right” answer.

Here Kate demonstrates a strong degree of determination and perseverance in her quest to learn more about Canada Geese. She most frequently chose to work independently to gather information; however, I had noted that many of her breakthroughs and discoveries had come as a result of the questions that her peers or I posed. I wanted to provide Kate with an opportunity to discern information alongside a peer so that she was able to talk about her own understandings and listen to the perspectives of another. I determined that I would put together a short reading package to address some of Kate's misconceptions. Drawing upon the Internet, I sought out brief French readings about birds and migration that would be comprehensible to the students in my class. During reading time the following day, I brought together several of the students who had been studying birds. Though many of them had different questions that were guiding their Explorations inquiries, I tried to provide information that would be pertinent to all of their wonderings. I envisioned the experience as a purposeful way to help these small groups with reading comprehension and an effective way to help Kate gather more accessible information that would provoke her theorizing. I paired Kate with one of the stronger readers in the class and they worked through the text together. After each group had had an opportunity to read and dialogue about the texts, we came together to debrief. I asked the group what the reading explained about birds.

Kate: « Je lire ça et je connais quelque chose de les oies. »

Mme: « Qu'est-ce que tu as lu? »

Kate: « Il dit que quand les bébés ils ont neuf ans ou semaine ils volent. Et aussi ils voler au Mexico. »

Mme: « Au Mexique. Alors, ils ne vont pas aller en Colombie-Britannique? »

Kate: « Non. »

Kate: "I read this and I know something about geese."

Mme: "What did you read?"

Kate: "It says that when the babies are nine years or nine weeks they can fly. And also that they fly to Mexico."

Mme: "To Mexico. So they don't go to British Columbia?"

Kate: "No."

While Rivers, et al. (1972) and Calvé & Mollica (1987) worried that an over-emphasis was placed on language rather than meaning, Cammarata & Tedick (2012) fear that the pendulum has now swung too far in the other direction. They argue that the emphasis in current immersion practice tends to be on subject matter content, which occurs at the expense of language teaching (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012). I believe that a balance needs to be struck in order to give value to content and language. As the children engaged in Explorations, it was the content that breathed life into the children's language learning. When children are motivated and engaged they seek ways to collect knowledge, they take pride in communicating their understandings, and they recognize the value of constructing meaning. For instance, Gavin's desire to collect information about the archaeopteryx, Erik's eagerness to share the carefully thought out details of his plasticine Bullfrogs, and Kate's curiosity about Canada Geese each balance the focal tension between language and content. In each of these cases, the subject matter was an extension of the children's French language learning. The vocabulary the children acquired was relevant to the concept they were studying and the real purposefulness of their

learning was manifested through their ability to communicate their interests and share their knowledge with others in French.

« On sait plus de mots en Français que les enfants » : Mya, Sydney, Emily, and Danika. The final example examines the children's perceptions of language learning, however, unlike the classroom scenarios that have preceded this one, this example does not take place during Explorations. It occurs after a session of "Jeux de Théâtre". On one day of each school cycle we had a block of time devoted to playing French theatre games. We spent this time engaging in improvisational skits. We might begin with a warm-up of charades and then lead into a Freeze Scene (two people begin the scene and when an audience member shouts "freeze" they hold their positions and are replaced by two new actors). Or we might participate in Talking Hands (there are four actors on stage. Two actors sit with their hands tucked behind their backs; they will do the speaking throughout the scene. Two other actors provide the arms of each character by making gestures that accompany what is being said). Or we might engage in Scene Replay (the actors on stage create a scene involving suggestions from the audience such as searching for hidden treasure, visiting the moon, or attending a rock concert). Our theatre times always provide so much fun and laughter; they are a wonderful way for children to interact in French in a joyful and entertaining way. Creating such a rich learning environment is a huge asset for language acquisition (Krashen, 1981) and I felt that our theatre time helped the children to see a playful side to language learning. As Netten and Germain (2012) assert essential supports for language acquisition include the "creation of authentic communicative situations in the classroom" and "interaction between students" (p. 93). The theatre games served as a medium for self-expression, reduced the children's language anxiety, and provided opportunity for the students to interact comfortably in French.

Several months into the school year, I decided to expand our theatre game repertoire. I brought out the many hand puppets that had spent much of the year stuffed at the bottom of our toy trunk. We had often spoken about the importance of practicing our French during our theatre games and I made a point of emphasizing that the puppets we were playing with could only speak French. The children were eager to begin playing so I quickly divided them up into partners and they found a space in the room to work together. I was impressed to hear all of the children interacting excitedly and enthusiastically in French with one another using their puppets. I was so intrigued by the interactions that had taken place that I brought the children together at the end to debrief about their experiences playing with the puppets.

Mme: « Est-ce que c'était plus facile parce que tout le monde parlait en français! »

Quelques enfants répondent : « oui, » « je pense. »

Mme: « Tu peux nous dire ou ta marionnette peut répondre. »

Simran: « Oui! » (dans la petite voix d'une souris).

Danika: « Oui, parce que . . . (change sa voix à celle de sa marionnette) parce que nous parle pas. Elle parle. »

Mme: "Was this easier? Because everyone was speaking in French!"

A few children respond: "Yes," "I think so."

Mme: "You can tell us or your puppet can answer."

Simran: "Yes!" (little squeaky voice of a mouse).

Danika: “Yes, because . . . (changes her voice to be that of her puppet’s) because it’s not us that are speaking. It’s her.”

Danika’s comment made it clear that in her play there was a distinction between herself and the character she was portraying through the puppet. As our discussion went on it was evident that several other children had established the same sense of separation between themselves and their puppet:

Sydney: « Je pense que nous sommes ici pour aider les enfants en quatrième et troisième année pour parler en français. Et beaucoup de nous dit oui, on peut parler en français meilleur avec les marionnettes comme moi, les chats et les vaches . . . »

Hunter: « Et les cochons! » (En levant sa marionnette de cochon).

Ryu: « Et écureuils. » (En levant sa marionnette d’écureuil).

Mme: « Qui d’autres? Emily. La reine. »

Emily: (Dans la voix d’une reine pour accompagner sa marionnette royale) « Je pense que c’est plus facile de parler en français avec nous autres parce qu’on sait plus de mots en français que les enfants. »

Sydney: “I think that we are here to help the kids in Grade 4 and Grade 3 to speak in French. And lots of us say yes, we can speak in French better with puppets like me, the cats and the cows . . .”

Hunter: “And the pigs!” (Holding up his pig puppet).

Ryu: “And the squirrels.” (Holding up his squirrel puppet).

Mme: “Anyone else? Emily. The queen.”

Emily: (In the mature voice of a queen to accompany her queen puppet) “I think that it is easier to speak in French with us because we know more words in French than the kids.”

It was fascinating to recognize that the children benefited so greatly from being provided with a creative and playful outlet through which to communicate in French. It was also evident that the children felt a sense of relief and safety in being able to “hand over” the responsibility for speaking French to their puppet. These playful interactions provided the students with the freedom to express themselves through the persona of their hand puppet; the experience allowed for risk taking. I was intrigued by Emily’s interpretation that the puppets have a more extensive vocabulary than the children. I asked the class if there were any other thoughts about how and why they were able to communicate in French so effectively using their puppets.

Mya: « Parce que avec la marionnette je peux remember toutes les mots en français. »

Mme: « Alors, Mya a tous ces mots mais avec la marionnette elle peut se souvenir des mots? Ça c’est intéressant. »

Mya: “Because with the puppet I can remember all of the words in French.”

Mme: “So, Mya has all of the words, but with the puppet she can remember the words? That’s interesting.”

A recurring consensus seemed to be that the puppets provided the children with a sense of security. They did not feel pressure to remember an endless supply of vocabulary words or to formulate their ideas into French alone because they believed that their puppet was there to help them. It seemed that their “mistakes” belonged to the puppets and not to themselves. As an

extension of their imaginative storytelling, the children were able to offer an accessible commentary about their identities as learners and perspective of themselves as French language learners. The children saw themselves as capable French communicators when immersed in the persona of their puppets. Interacting as their puppets helped them to recognize the vocabulary and language skills that they did not necessarily realize they had. The imaginative interactions allowed the children to feel that the experiences were unfolding not between them, but between their puppets. The safety of feeling somewhat distanced from the interactions enhanced the children's ease and comfort and permitted them to immerse themselves in playful storytelling. Storytelling that is brought to life through play allows children's thinking to be made:

public and available in the moment . . . [It] gives teachers a laboratory to study what they need to learn next . . . The teacher must relinquish control over what the children *should be* thinking and actively embrace what they *are* thinking. (Genishi & Dyson, 2009, p. 50)

Listening to the children's perspectives on playful language learning was valuable for me to hear. Their message seemed to be that they valued the language learning support that the hand puppets offered in their efforts to communicate in French. The children's play and collaboration with puppets provided a light-hearted space in which they were able to experiment with language, develop imaginary scenes, and interact together in French.

The success of the children's initial French interactions with the puppets led me to consider other ways in which the puppets might be able to support the children's language learning. It seemed that providing time for the children to construct their own puppets might lead to additional learning experiences in which the puppets could be present (see Figure 15 and 16). To draw a connection between the children's handmade puppets and their Explorations work, I

asked the children to create a puppet that would fit with what they were currently researching during their Explorations time. The puppet became an extension of their collaborative experiences and their level of comfort while communicating.

French Immersion pedagogy seeks to enhance students' communication skills in an additional language. Teachers highlight understanding and communication as central goals in Immersion classrooms (Krashen, 1985). Therefore when children are provided with opportunities to formulate their thoughts, gain vocabulary, and have experiences that encourage them to articulate their thinking, their ability to communicate their understanding in French increases. While playing with the puppets, the children were able to express their own theories of language acquisition. They were able to recognize that the puppets supported their language development by increasing their confidence and willingness to take risks. From the children's perspective, the puppets were responsible for the children's increased abilities in French. The disassociation the children were able to establish between themselves and their puppets permitted them to feel successful in their attempts to communicate in French. The level of comfort the puppets provided was helpful in generating the ease with which the children were able to express themselves during our theatre times and reading sessions (see Figure 17). In addition, as was made clear from the children's perceptions, experiences, and understandings of language learning, play is an essential underpinning of communication that is too often forgotten in the classroom. As Vygotsky (1978) declares, "in play, a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself" (p. 102). Puppet play created space for children to interact with others in different ways and permitted them time to explore the world from a new perspective.



Figure 15: Constructing puppets

Puppets became such an integral part of the children's learning that they decided to construct their own. Using socks, fabric, and found materials, the children constructed puppets that connected with the work that they had been doing during Explorations. Children created bird, frog, whale, and dinosaur puppets, just to name a few.



Figure 16: Creativity and language learning

The children's puppets became an outlet for creativity and a resource for language learning. Initially the children played with our store bought classroom puppets during our theatre times. As the children began playing with the puppets more and more frequently, it seemed appropriate that the children invest time to construct their own puppets. I imagined that creating puppets that related to their Explorations work might open up new possibilities and uses for the puppets and support their language skills in additional situations.



Figure 17: Puppets for buddy reading

Their puppets were often used when we were buddy reading with younger classrooms. The students preferred to have their puppets share the story. Children who found reading challenging particularly appreciated the sense of security that the puppets provided. These children were more willing to take risks and attempt unfamiliar texts when it was their puppets reading the story.

The analysis of my pedagogical documentation was an important process that helped me recognize the growth and development of the students in my classroom. This process helped me pay careful attention to the shifts in their learning, the collaborative support that they provided one another, their willingness to take risks, the importance of authentic experiences, and their motivation to creating meaning from new information. The process of analysis was also an opportunity for me to reflect on my own practice by observing the ways in which I supported the collaboration of learners, sometimes through active participation, sometimes through the posing of questions, and sometimes in the provision of provocations. The documentation I collected offered an illustrated demonstration of the evolving identities of the children. Examples of this included Kate's ongoing efforts to answer her own wonderings about the migration patterns of geese and Gavin's growing confidence in his ability to express his knowledge in French. I was able to see the ways in which the children began to recognize their own abilities, identify their own misunderstandings, and immerse themselves in the co-construction of new ways of knowing. Watching the shifts in their identities as learners and their recognition of themselves as

integral members of our learning community helped me to view the children in new ways. It enabled me to see aspects of the children's lives and learning processes that may not otherwise have surfaced, from the children's vantage point. Our class discussion about speaking French with puppets was demonstrative of the children's understandings of language learning. The children articulated the value of collaboration, interaction, and play helping me to see the ways in which authentic learning experiences supported their French communication skills.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

Challenges, Limitations, and Future Wonderings

A challenge my study posed was the creation of authentic documentation during Explorations. I was interested in gaining a sense of how often and in what contexts the children interacted together in French, yet it was difficult to collect documentation that reflected typical classroom interactions and experiences. I quickly recognized that the children consistently spoke to me in French because they knew this was the expectation of a French Immersion classroom. This also meant that French was consistently spoken during Explorations when I was a member of their large or small group discussions. The children made a more extensive effort to speak French when I was nearby and when they were aware that I could hear their conversations. To alleviate the artificial tendencies the children had to speak more French in my presence as an act of “pleasing the teacher”, I tried to be quite discrete during the times I was documenting. This might mean keeping my back to a small group and trying to keep detailed notes of their conversation without them feeling that they were being observed. I also went to great efforts to make the use of recording devices (my cell phone and a handheld digital voice recorder) common practice during Explorations. These tools were in use throughout the school year and not simply during the months of my study. Unlike having their photograph taken while they were engaged in a group or focused on a piece of work, the children seemed to have difficulty carrying on as usual when they were aware that their conversation was being recorded. As a result, the transcribed conversations from the recorders often reflected the children’s heightened efforts to speak French while the recorder was running. This reality made it quite difficult to develop a sense of when the children most often speak French to one another and how to help them feel more intrinsically motivated to interact with their peers in French.

Developing a classroom culture that encourages and motivates children to interact in French is challenging. Cammarata & Teddick (2012) write of additional challenges faced by French Immersion teachers stating that they can often feel isolated given that there are fewer resources available than in English, there are limited professional development opportunities, and there is a smaller group of mentors on whom to rely. The responsibilities of being a French Immersion teacher can also feel overwhelming as there are numerous stakeholders with deeply-rooted opinions of how additional language teachers should teach. In teaching, like in research, challenges are unavoidable, but by looking beyond the limitations I faced as a French Immersion teacher, the potentials and possibilities in language learning became more visible. Acknowledging some of these new possibilities has prompted new professional learning and wondering for me as a teacher.

Reflecting on the data I have collected and the multiple languages present in the classroom, including French, English, dramatic play, writing, story-telling, sculpting, sketching, and painting, I find it surprising that the children's various "home" languages do not appear in the classroom. As mentioned, a large percentage of our school population and a handful of students in my classroom speak languages other than English at home. The children's varied "home" languages are frequently audible in our school's English classrooms, however, they are very rarely present in the French Immersion classrooms. This realization has caused me to wonder: Am I doing enough to encourage the children's use of their "home" language in the classroom? The recognition that the children's "home" languages are not present in French Immersion makes me question if there is an expectation enforced in which learners feel that they need to speak only in French and, when unable to do so, they can draw from the classroom's other common language, English. If so, is this an expectation perpetuated by children, families,

or teachers? The importance of emphasizing and promoting the French language in a French Immersion classroom is undeniable; however, it would be interesting to consider the ways in which other languages can support the learning of an additional language.

I wonder also if there is any correlation between the amount of English spoken at school and the number of years the child has lived in Canada? Over the years I have noted a growing trend among newcomer families in our dual track school in which the oldest sibling of a family will be in an English classroom and the younger siblings will be in French Immersion. Often when these families first arrived the oldest child was beginning Kindergarten or Grade 1. A year or two later when their next child is entering Kindergarten, the family will place them in French Immersion. Could it be that the family is feeling more at ease with their English and, therefore, feels comfortable providing their younger children with an additional language challenge at school? If this were the case, it would mean that the majority of students entering the French Immersion program have already lived in Canada for at least a year or two and by the time I meet them in Grade 3, they have lived in Canada for nearly five years. In these five years in Canada, it can be presumed that the child has been exposed to a fair number of experiences and interactions occurring in English. Regardless of the families' reasons for selecting an English or French classroom, there does seem to be a link that exists between the length of time a child has lived in Canada and the diminished use of the "home" language in the classroom. As a teacher, I would like to think more deeply about helping the children find a space for their "home" language at school and recognizing the ways in which these languages can support their French learning. This is critically important in terms of issues of cultural identity and home language preservation.

Using Multiliteracies to Enrich Authentic Learning

Embracing the use of multiple languages is referenced in Reggio Emilia education as “the hundred languages of children” (Edwards, 1993). It is the sharing of knowledge through the use of multiple languages, which can include sketching, building, painting, dramatic play, as well as many other languages. Taylor, Bernard, Garg, & Cummins (2008) refer to this concept as *multiliteracies*. The aim of multiliteracies is to “design innovative learning environments that engage all students in an expanded range of literacy practices” (p. 274) reaching beyond the traditional definition of literacy that privileges reading and writing. Erik’s experience as he learned about the African Bullfrog illustrates the use of multiliteracies as tools for demonstrating his knowledge. He relied on languages such as sculpting, listening, storytelling, reading, and writing, working collectively to develop new conceptual understandings. Initially Erik saw himself as a capable artist, but he felt insecure about his abilities to read, write, and communicate in French. He was able to find an entry point into his learning by building on the language in which he felt most at ease—sculpting. Erik’s plasticine model of the African Bullfrog led him into a collaborative dialogue with a peer in which he felt comfortable sharing discoveries, challenges, and understandings. Together they crafted a male and female African Bullfrog that reflected the information that they had learned together. Despite the conversation with his classmate having taken place in English, Erik’s enthusiasm to share his work allowed him to share with me about his bullfrogs in French. Once again, the opportunity to share his thinking with others supported his growth as a learner. This time it was Erik’s oral storytelling that aided his sharing knowledge in another way. With the help of our recorded conversation, Erik was able to create a piece of French writing that reflected his understandings of the bullfrogs by listening to the conversation again and putting his own words into writing. Erik’s various experiences

assisted him in gaining knowledge about a topic in which he was interested. These same experiences also helped him to see himself as a capable learner and permitted him to reframe his perception of himself as a French language learner. Language learning is broader than the acquisition of vocabulary, it reaches beyond the repetition of simple familiar phrases, and it includes a richer repertoire of literacy than just reading and writing. Language learning is the engagement in purposeful and authentic learning experiences that allow learners to make meaning, build understanding, express ideas, and question theories. Approaching teaching as an exercise of transmission reduces the significance of learners' identities, abilities, and curiosities. Teaching cannot fill children with meaningful knowledge, rather language learning and understanding are built through the negotiation and melding of prior knowledge, current theories, and collaborative discourse.

Drawing on students' passions, experiences, and engagements is both a catalyst and a support for making French language use authentic and purposeful. In this study, the children's experiences were significant because they were manifestations of their own curiosities and gave the French language purpose as a means through which to express their curiosities and discoveries. Explorations and language learning were intertwined as experiences through which the children created meaning and extended their understandings of content and language processes. For example, the richness of Gavin's learning would have been stunted had he been obligated to pursue his research about rocks. The passion and determination that developed from his work about the archaeopteryx was generated by Gavin's engagement and interest in the topic. He began to take initiative in his learning as he came to recognize himself as a capable learner. Utilizing children's questions, ideas, and theories as a starting point for curriculum design allows them to recognize that their thoughts and opinions are respected. As they build their identities as

learners it is important that they believe that when they have an idea it will be honoured; when they have a question it will be heard; and when they have a theory it will be valued.

Pedagogical Shifts in French Immersion

Much research was guided by careful attention paid to shifts. I documented shifts in children's theories, interests, abilities, and understandings. I took note of shifts occurring within my own practice and interactions with children, and I shifted the use of pedagogical documentation from a research tool to a research methodology. As I reflect on my practice, my research, and my findings, I believe that one more shift is required. The field of French Immersion is in need of a pedagogical shift that takes into account the centrality of learners' identities, theories, and understandings and creates opportunities for authentic and collaborative learning experiences.

The three findings that I explored: English as a scaffolding tool for French, the benefits of collaboration, and the use of authentic learning to inform pedagogy each played a role in shifting the children's abilities, engagement, and confidence as French learners. Engaging in authentic and collaborative dialogues and experiences with others permitted the students to perceive themselves as capable, knowledgeable, and resourceful language learners. Having opportunities to work closely with the children by taking the time to consider, challenge, and support their theories allowed me to shift my understanding of who the children were and what they were capable of. Listening carefully to children challenged me to rethink assumptions and misconceptions I held and to value the strengths and abilities of each child that I had not yet recognized. To truly understand the perspectives of another, an opportunity must be extended for them to share who they are and how they make meaning of the world around them.

Research that invites the perspectives and contributions of children's ideas promotes the "interplay between adults' and children's perspectives on social relations and culture. . . . Rather than looking only at how children are formed by social life, children are seen as social actors whose actions can both shape and change social life" (Greene & Hogan, 2005, p. 50).

Pedagogical documentation permitted me to delve deeply into the ideas and thinking of the children. My work in the classroom urged me to listen carefully and observe closely as the children worked and developed their understandings so that I might "see the world through the eyes of the other" (Hessler, 1992, p. 202). Pedagogical documentation is an expansive process and its powerful role in classroom research is only just beginning to be recognized.

This study represents a glimpse into a methodology and French Immersion teaching pedagogy that I have been constructing over many years. It draws together my beliefs about authentic language learning and purposeful teaching by embedding my classroom work in the educational values and philosophy of Reggio Emilia. Malaguzzi proclaims that "learning and teaching should not stand on opposite banks and just watch the river flow by . . . they should embark together on a journey down the water" (Edwards, 1993, p. 83). My knowledge of teaching and my understanding of learning are aligned; they function jointly to support and inform my work with children. This research is a first step in a new pedagogical direction—a stepping stone toward new possibilities in additional language learning. I believe it is:

not the application of some finalized model, universal in scope and definitive in nature, but rather the adoption of a process of questioning, dialogue, reflection and meaning making which leads we know not where and has no obvious end point: it is work continuously in progress." (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 16)

Just as documentation is motivated not by “finding answers, but generating questions,” (Turner & Wilson, 2009, p. 9) so too is my research. The intention of this research is to provoke thinking and challenge current practices. Exploring the ways in which authentic, collaborative learning experiences influence children’s abilities and identities as French language learners may offer a shift in pedagogy in French Immersion classrooms. This work steers French Immersion teaching away from traditional instructional approaches and towards pedagogy that embraces new possibilities in language learning.

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Appendix A



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Telephone (204) 474-9014

Fax (204) 474-7550

February 2013

Dear Parents/Guardians:

I am writing to you to share some information about a teacher-research I am pursuing. It is my belief that children are competent, capable individuals who are eager to learn. It is our responsibility as teachers is to provide experiences in the classroom that motivate and inspire them. Honouring children's interests and developing collaborative learning opportunities in French Immersion helps children see purpose in learning French by engaging them and giving them chances to communicate with others. I would like to learn more about the ways that children learn French and how I can best support them as an educator. I would like to give children a place to share about their theories and perspectives about language learning in the classroom. This research is part of the requirements for a Masters of Education, at the University of Manitoba. It is being conducted under the supervision of my research supervisor, Dr. Wayne Serebrin. You may contact my research supervisor at 204-474-9024 or Wayne.Serebrin@ad.umanitoba.ca regarding this study.

The purpose of this research study is to understand language learning from a perspective that values children's interests, experiences, and abilities. I am interested in learning more about their perceptions of themselves as language learners and the effect that this has on their identities as French Immersion students and collaborative problem-solvers. I would like to gain insight from the children in my classroom regarding the importance of fostering active, capable and involved learners. I will explore how they are able to participate collaboratively and think critically while acquiring an additional language. My intention is to give voice to the theories and thinking of young children and to use their perspectives to bring forth change in French Immersion pedagogy. I would like to learn firsthand from children how they

think they acquire language, and where and how they feel that learning through experience and collaboration can support their language skills.

In February 2013, I will begin my research. From February to May, I will collect documentation that will be used for my research. Documentation is the gathering of learning experiences. It can include recorded conversations, photographs, children's work samples or written reflections. I am seeking your permission and your child's assent to use the documentation I collect to guide my study. A condition of conducting research for any Masters of Education at the University of Manitoba is that I must request permission to use any information about your child for the purposes of my research. At the end of the consent letter you will find a checklist highlighting the types of documentation on which I would like to focus. You may select which specific types of documentation you and your child are giving consent/assent for me to draw from for the purpose of this research. In the written report of this project, my thesis, I intend to refer to children's theories, comments, work samples, artifacts and photographs represented in specific pieces of documentation that may provide insight into children's theories about language learning and their perceptions of themselves as learners.

Please note that any photographs of children, video or audio recordings will only be reviewed by me and will not appear in the final thesis. The documentation I will be revisiting may contain photographs, videotaped images or audio recordings of your child. All conversations will be recorded and written out only by me, as well. These forms of documentation will be used to help illustrate the children's language learning theories and may be described in my thesis. When I refer to children I will use 'made-up' names to keep any copies of work, examples of conversations or descriptions anonymous. *The actual pieces of documentation, photographs of children or audio/video recordings will not be shared with others in any way.* The content of the written thesis may be shared in later presentations and publications. The thesis and later presentations and publications will not contain anything beyond what I was given permission to share in the written thesis. All of the documentation used for the research will be kept in a locked cabinet in my home office until the completion of my thesis. At this time I anticipate completing my thesis by April 2014. At the conclusion of the research, no one other than me will have access to any information which might include any identification of the child.

Your permission to use as data documentation reflecting your child must be given voluntarily. I want to assure you that there are no consequences that will arise from giving or withholding your permission.

To ease any pressure you might feel because I was your child's teacher, I am asking that all returned consent forms be sent to the school office, addressed to [REDACTED], the school secretary, not to me. [REDACTED] will store the consent letters in a sealed envelope in a locked cabinet in the office. She will not reveal the names to me until June 28th 2013, the last day of school. On this date I will open the

envelope and then compile only the documentation for the students for whom I have received assent. I will then begin the process I have described above of using the documentation gathered to provide insight into students' perceptions of themselves as language learners and collaborative problem-solvers.

If you decide to withdraw your consent, or your child decides to withdraw his/her assent you are free to do so at any time by contacting [REDACTED]. If permission is not given or is withdrawn, no documentation regarding your child will be used or referred to in my written thesis or subsequent presentations or publications. There are no known or anticipated risks to your child associated with giving consent for documentation to be reviewed in my research study.

I have informed the school principal, [REDACTED], and [REDACTED] Division Assistant Superintendent, [REDACTED], of my intended research, which they have granted me permission to complete. Should you feel that there are pressures or unanticipated consequences as a result of participating or not, you are free to contact [REDACTED], Dr. Wayne Serebrin, my research supervisor (204-474-9024), or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 204-474-7122. This research may benefit my own professional practice and contribute to an educational dialogue around advocating for 'meaningful curriculum' that recognizes the strengths, ideas, and interests children bring with them to school. If you decide to give consent/assent for me to use documentation and copies of work pertaining to your child for the purposes of my study, I will provide a summary of the results available to you electronically or in paper copy. If you wish to receive a summary, please indicate this by filling out the provided section of the consent form. A copy of my completed thesis will be left at the school and the secretary, [REDACTED], and Parent Council will be informed when it is available to be viewed by interested parties. At this point I anticipate completing my thesis by April 2014.

I will be available at your convenience to answer any questions you may have. I may be reached at school [REDACTED] or via email [REDACTED]. In addition to contacting me or my research supervisor, you may verify the ethical approval for this study or raise any concerns you might have by contacting the University of Manitoba Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 204-474-7122.

Please discuss this letter with your child and determine whether he or she agrees to give assent. I have attached a simplified bulleted list of what this research entails to assist in explaining this process to your child. Your signature of consent and your child's assent as indicated by his/her printed name, indicate that you and your child understand the above conditions of participation in this study and agree to allow your child to participate. You and your child are free to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice or consequence. Please return one copy of the signed consent/assent form in the

attached envelope directly to [REDACTED] at the office by February 28th 2013, and keep the other for your records. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Heather Graham

[REDACTED]

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board(s) and a representative(s) of the University of Manitoba Research Quality Management / Assurance office may also require access to your research records for safety and quality assurance purposes.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB).

If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

I give consent to Heather Graham to revisit examples of documentation referring to my child for the purpose of her study, which may include:

(please check all boxes that apply) to indicate your consent)

- ☐ Photographs (photographs will not include children's faces)
- ☐ Video recordings
- ☐ Conversations that have been written out (by Heather)
- ☐ Copies of work samples or artifacts without student's names (i.e. artwork, writing, story maps)

I give consent for Heather Graham to refer to anonymous samples of documentation about my child in her Master's Thesis in the Faculty of Education, at the University of Manitoba. I understand that Heather's written thesis may include written out conversations using 'made-up' names, and copies of my child's work without identifying names (if I checked off those boxes). I understand that Heather's written thesis will not include photographs or audio/video recordings identifying my child, nor any written out conversations or copies of my child's work that indicate his/her name.

(Name of Participant's Parent/Guardian)

(Signature)

(Date)

Check the box below if you wish to receive a summary of the results of the study. A summary of results will be available by December 2013.

Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the results ()

No, thanks ()

If you check yes above, please let me know how you would prefer to receive the summary of results

Email () Canada Post ()

Sent home with my child ()

If you have indicated email or Canada Post, please include the necessary information.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Postal Code: _____

Email address: _____

Appendix C

Student Assent Form

Please talk about this with your child and if they assent, have *her/him* sign the form by printing their name on the line.

I have asked my child, _____ who has indicated assent to have Mme Graham revisit examples of documentation about her/him to be used anonymously in Mme Graham's Master's Thesis for the Faculty of Education, at the University of Manitoba. My child understands Mme Graham's written thesis may include written out conversations using 'made-up' names, and anonymous copies of his/her work. My child understands that Mme Graham's written thesis will not include photographs, audio/video recordings identifying him/her.

(Name of student)

(Student print name here)

(Date)

(Researcher's Signature)

(Date)

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 204-474-7173, or email Margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and references.

Appendix D

Possible Script for Parents of Grade Three and Four Participants

- Mme Graham is doing a project called a study. This study is part of her University course, her ‘teacher school’.
- Mme Graham’s study is about creating learning experiences in the classroom that are interesting to children and helping children feel that they are important in the classroom. Mme Graham is interested in how better understanding who children are can help her make decisions about what the class will learn together. She is interested in many different ways that children can help others learn about who they are in the classroom.
- Mme Graham is interested in looking back over the school year you have all had together in Grade 3 and 4. She is thinking about important moments that happened that helped her to get to know you better and how those moments helped her to make decisions about what you could all learn together.
- Mme Graham is asking if she can look back at the documentation used in class, pictures of your work, and the notes she wrote down in her notebook. She wants to look back again on some of the work that you did together that you used to think about your learning, or that you shared with your family at conferences.
- In her study, Mme Graham might like to use some of the documentation about you to help her understand how to be a better teacher.
- In order to use some of your work for her project, Mme Graham needs your permission. You can say yes or no, either is fine. You will not be ‘in trouble’ if you say that you don’t want her to use your work, or to write about your ideas. You are going to give your answer to [REDACTED], in the office.
- If you give Mme Graham permission use documentation that you were a part of, and you change your mind later, that is okay too. We will just call [REDACTED] and tell her you don’t want Mme Graham to use your work, and [REDACTED] will take your name off the list of children whose documentation Mme Graham can use.
- If this sounds okay to you and you want to give Mme Graham permission to use some of the documentation that you were a part of for her project you have to sign the assent form by printing your name on the line on the form. I have to sign the consent form too, and then we have to mail it to [REDACTED].

Appendix E

Department of Curriculum,
Teaching and Learning

262 Education Building

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg, Manitoba

Canada R3T 2N2

Telephone (204) 474-9014

Fax (204) 474-7550



Faculty of Education

UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

January 16, 2013



Dear [REDACTED],

I am a teacher at [REDACTED] and I am currently working towards completing the Masters of Education program in Curriculum, Teaching and Learning. I am working to complete my qualitative research thesis entitled Co-constructing Theories of Language Learning During Explorations in a French Immersion Classroom. In order to do this, the University of Manitoba requires I receive permission from you and [REDACTED] (the principal of [REDACTED]) for my research to take place in this division.

The purpose of my study is to understand language learning from a perspective that values children's interests, experiences, and abilities. I am interested in learning more about their perceptions of themselves as language learners and the effect that this has on their identities as French Immersion students and collaborative problem-solvers. I would like to gain insight from the children in my classroom regarding the importance of fostering active, capable and involved learners. I will explore how they are able to participate collaboratively and think critically while acquiring an additional language. My intention is to give voice to the theories and thinking of young children and to use their perspectives to provoke change in my French Immersion pedagogy. I would like to learn firsthand from children how they think they acquire language, and where and how they feel that learning through experience and collaboration can support their language skills. By approaching their learning in this way, student voice, ongoing classroom dialogue, and authentic learning experiences become integral elements of the classroom. As a teacher, this would require that I shift my perspective to frame my "dialogue not as an exchange, but as a process of transformation where you lose absolutely the possibility of controlling the final result" (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 184). Through this lens, learning becomes a process co-constructed between teacher and student, as the child makes meaning of the world around him or her.

I would like to draw from the work taking place in my own French Immersion classroom to inform my research. In this qualitative study I will use pedagogical documentation to gain insight into the thinking of children in order to understand how they perceive their abilities to think critically, their positions as collaborative group members, and their identities as language learners. Pedagogical documentation is a teacher research methodology, which holds at its core an opportunity for researchers and learners to slow down, revisit, and make learning visible (Dalhberg et al., 1999; Wien, 2008). It permits us to give value to children's perspectives through careful listening (Dalhberg et al., 1999; Rinaldi, 2003). Pedagogical documentation is a logical fit for my research study because it aligns with my current teaching practice. This will allow my grade 3 and 4 classroom to carry on with its already established structures while I am collecting data and will be a sustainable part of my practice extending beyond the time frame of this study. The time frame for data collection for this research will be between February and May 2013.

The methods that I will use to collect data include: field notes, observation, documentation, journaling, video and audio recordings, and teacher interactions and conversations with students. This includes data generated from children, teacher's handwritten notes, photos, snippets of children's theories and questions, the transcripts, and their sample works (Wien, 2008). The analysis of my data will be to develop an understanding regarding my main research questions:

- How do children perceive themselves as language learners?
- What are children's theories about how they learn French and how they help one another learn French?
- How do children perceive themselves as collaborative learners?
- What role does collaboration play in children's Explorations' learning and their language learning?
- How can children's perspectives of themselves as language learners and collaborators inform my practice?

Written consent will be obtained from the parents/guardians of the students participating in this study as well as assent from the children themselves in the form of a detailed consent form. Although the creation of documentation is part of my regular practice as a teacher over the course of the school year, I will obtain consent in order to review documentation in a manner that will support my research questions. In recognition of my position of power, parents/guardians and students will have the opportunity to give consent/assent by returning their consent/assent form to the school secretary, [REDACTED] who will keep them in a sealed envelope in a locked cabinet in the office. I will receive the consent forms from the school secretary after June 28th 2013, the last day of school. The consent form explains that I will only be reviewing documentation pertaining to children for whom I have received consent. The consent form also outlines how I will use the documentation in my written thesis. Please see the attached consent form for more details.

Parents who have given consent for the documentation of their child to be used in the study will be informed that the results may also be used in published reports and journal articles. The consent letter provides parents and guardians the opportunity to request a summary of the research results. A copy of my completed thesis will be left at the school and the secretary and Parent Council will be informed when it is available to be viewed by interested parties.

This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). If you have any questions or comments relating to this study please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED] or via e-mail: [REDACTED]. You may

also contact the Human Ethics Secretariat at 204-474-7173, or email Margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and references.

Your signature below indicates that you provide permission for the described research to take place in [REDACTED]. Please return one copy of the signed consent form in the attached envelope directly to me at [REDACTED] and keep the other for your records. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Heather Graham

I give my consent for Heather Graham to conduct her research study beginning in February 2013 at [REDACTED] for her Masters' Thesis for the Faculty of Education: Curriculum and Instruction, at the University of Manitoba.

Signature of Superintendent

Date

Appendix F



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Education

Department of Curriculum,
Teaching and Learning

262 Education Building

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg, Manitoba

Canada R3T 2N2

Telephone (204) 474-9014

Fax (204) 474-7550



January 16, 2013



Dear [REDACTED],

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The purpose of my study is to understand language learning from a perspective that values children's interests, experiences, and abilities. I am interested in learning more about their perceptions of themselves as language learners and the effect that this has on their identities as French Immersion students and collaborative problem-solvers. I would like to gain insight from the children in my classroom regarding the importance of fostering active, capable and involved learners. I will explore how they are able to participate collaboratively and think critically while acquiring an additional language. My intention is to give voice to the theories and thinking of young children and to use their perspectives to provoke change in my French Immersion pedagogy. I would like to learn firsthand from children how they think they acquire language, and where and how they feel that learning through experience and collaboration can support their language skills. By approaching their learning in this way, student voice, ongoing classroom dialogue, and authentic learning experiences become integral elements of the classroom. As a teacher, this would require that I shift my perspective to frame my "dialogue not as an exchange, but as a process of transformation where you lose absolutely the possibility of controlling the final result" (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 184). Through this lens, learning becomes a process co-constructed between teacher and student, as the child makes meaning of the world around him or her.

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The methods that I will use to collect data include: field notes, observation, documentation, journaling, video and audio recordings, and teacher interactions and conversations with students. This includes data generated from children, teacher's handwritten notes, photos, snippets of children's theories and questions, the transcripts, and their sample works (Wien, 2008). The analysis of my data will be to develop an understanding regarding my main research questions:

- How do children perceive themselves as language learners?
- What are children's theories about how they learn French and how they help one another learn French?
- How do children perceive themselves as collaborative learners?
- What role does collaboration play in children's Explorations' learning and their language learning?
- How can children's perspectives of themselves as language learners and collaborators inform my practice?

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Parents who have given consent for the documentation of their child to be used in the study will be informed that the results may also be used in published reports and journal articles. The consent letter provides parents and guardians the opportunity to request a summary of the research results. A copy of my completed thesis will be left at the school and the secretary and Parent Council will be informed when it is available to be viewed by interested parties.

This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). If you have any questions or comments relating to this study please feel free to ask or contact me via e-mail: [REDACTED]. You may also contact the Human Ethics Secretariat at 204-474-7173, or email Margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and references.

Your signature below indicates that you provide permission for the described research to take place in [REDACTED]. Please return one copy of the signed consent form in the attached envelope directly to me at [REDACTED] and keep the other for your records. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Heather Graham

I give my consent for Heather Graham to conduct her research study beginning in February 2013 at [REDACTED] for her Masters' Thesis for the Faculty of Education: Curriculum and Instruction, at the University of Manitoba.

Signature of Administrator

Date

Appendix G

Information Session Invitation

Dear Room 9 Parents and Guardians,

I am currently working on my Masters of Education at the University of Manitoba. I have successfully defended my thesis proposal and am now preparing to begin my research for my thesis. The title of my thesis is: Co-constructing Theories of Language Learning during Explorations in a French Immersion Classroom. I will examine how children learn French and the ways in which they collaborate to learn language during Explorations. Essentially, the learning in the classroom will continue to run just as it always has and I will document experiences and moments of learning to inform my research.

I am attaching several sheets that are intended to provide information regarding my study. I have also included consent forms which I am hoping you will read over, sign, and return to the school office in the envelope provided. This is a great deal of information to read through. I imagine you may have questions. Please call me at school ([REDACTED]), email me ([REDACTED]) or join me for a brief evening information session in which I can answer questions and provide further information.

Information session will be held

Monday, February 11th 2013

6:00 pm

[REDACTED]

Thank you for your interest and consideration,

Heather Graham

Appendix H

Recording Sheet for Classroom Conversations

[illegible]