Supporting Parents and Teachers in Additional Language Learning

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A Literature Review Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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Abstract

This Masters’ project will examine the need for support in learning French as an additional language in elementary schools. Through both French Immersion and Core French programs, we have identified gaps in knowledge for teachers and parents. Firstly, teachers of Core French programs often lack the knowledge and confidence to adequately teach the Prescribed Learning Outcomes from the British Columbia Ministry of Education curriculum. This project will address why some teachers do not feel confident or prepared to teach Core French and what type of resources are needed to support Core French teachers. Secondly, we explore the home/school relationship of French Immersion students coming from an English background. Parents who enrol their child in French Immersion without possessing French skills themselves may face challenges when helping their child with schoolwork at home. We investigate ways to create a positive home literacy environment that incorporates French learning with the child and parents. Throughout our research, three core topics developed. Firstly, the value of additional language learning shows the importance and usefulness of learning an additional language. These key values demonstrate why French education is and should be included in British Columbia curriculum. Secondly, the gaps in knowledge in both Core French teachers and French Immersion parents show a need for additional resources and support. Finally, we assess how the home literacy environment impacts students in French programs.
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Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge our fellow teachers and colleagues for their support and encouragement through our project. In particular, Karen Prendergast for sharing her French resources and expertise for our website. This project would not have been possible without the support and patience of our families and friends.
Chapter 1

Introduction

Our final Masters project focuses on additional language learning in elementary schools. We, Jacqueline Prince and Stephanie Hamel, completed our undergraduate degree at the University of Victoria together and had very similar experiences throughout the program. We were in many of the same classes and completed several group projects together. Having worked together during our undergraduate degree, as well as during our graduate degree, we learned that we work well together. Through our course work and professional experience we decided that we wanted to create a Masters’ project focusing on French language learning. During our practica we both had successful experiences working with children in the primary and intermediate grades. After graduating, our careers have gone in different directions although we both work for the Greater Victoria School District. Stephanie teaches French Immersion and Jacqueline teaches in English. Both these experiences have highlighted challenges in teaching an additional language in a predominantly English culture. Through our project, we created a website of resources that will help support teachers and parents with French language learning. This introduction will explain who we are, as well as our experiences as beginning teachers in the public school system.

Stephanie Hamel is currently teaching Grade 1 French Immersion in the Greater Victoria School District. Teaching French is an enjoyable experience for her because she loves to see children develop their knowledge of another language. Stephanie believes that learning an additional language is beneficial in opening doors for different career and travel paths. She also believes that learning an additional language is beneficial for
cognitive development. Stephanie grew up with a French Canadian parent and was educated in the French Immersion program for the majority of her school years. Throughout her years as an undergraduate student, she planned on completing a degree in French language until she found a passion for teaching. Stephanie then decided to take the skills that she learned from her French courses and apply them to her teaching career, thus making her a teacher in the French Immersion program.

One of the greatest challenges that Stephanie has faced in teaching French Immersion is being able to help parents support their children at home. She has found that many parents face anxiety over not being able to support their child’s learning at home because they do not possess the necessary French language skills. Through her professional experience, she has witnessed parents who fear that as their child’s French skills improve, the gap in their knowledge will widen and they will no longer be able to help support their child at home. Parents often turn to Stephanie for advice on how to support their child’s French language learning. For example, at the beginning of this school year Stephanie had a parent approach her about the home reading program. The parent mentioned that they do not speak French and as a result could not help their child with home reading. Stephanie wanted to provide support for this parent, as this program is a large part of language development in her classroom. However, she was not able to because she had limited knowledge of appropriate resources for parents. Stephanie’s resources are developed for students who spend six hours a day with her immersed in French language and are fairly hands-on in their learning. The students are exposed to the language at school whereas the parents are not. In Stephanie’s classroom she places importance on exposing students to the French language through activities that encourage
interaction and play. As Stephanie is a Grade 1 French Immersion teacher with a background in teaching Kindergarten French Immersion she has never been one to approach language learning from the aspect of worksheets and individual work time. She has always approached language learning through collaborative activities and sharing experiences that allow students to learn French from those around them. Since Victoria is a predominantly English culture, she did not have much knowledge of French resources outside of the classroom that were age appropriate for parents. Stephanie’s background in French learning was geared towards University level French literature and is not useful for parents in her classroom. She suggested to parents that they read books and talk with their child in French as much as possible. This was the best solution that Stephanie could think of that would allow parents to be hands-on in their child’s learning of an additional language.

Throughout Stephanie’s educational and professional experiences, she has seen the importance of a strong connection between home and school environments. With support of families at home, students tend to be more successful in their academic learning, are more motivated to learn and they see the value in additional language learning. When developing language and literacy skills, it is important for the child to be exposed to language experiences at home and at school. Working together to support student’s learning in both environments will give the child the best possible educational experience. However, due to her lack of knowledge with regards to age appropriate French resources for parents, Stephanie feels ill equipped when parents approach her for help. This is an area that she is still exploring through her own teaching practice and she
hopes that this project will develop ideas for how to support French Immersion parents and students in their home learning environments.

Jacqueline Prince is a teacher in the Greater Victoria School District. She is currently a Kindergarten teacher and a teacher teaching on call. Last year, Jacqueline taught Core Grade 5 French as outlined in the Ministry of Education curriculum guide as part of her contract in a Grade 4/5 class. She found this was very challenging, as she did not have the background French knowledge needed to teach the prescribed learning outcomes. This made her feel nervous and anxious when teaching French lessons. Jacqueline taught in a dual track school that had both French Immersion and English programs. When she taught lessons she would often shut the doors of her classroom because she feared that French Immersion teachers might hear her trying to pronounce French words incorrectly. Jacqueline did not feel she had the skills or knowledge to teach her students how to pronounce words. Because of this, Jacqueline tended to use a lot fill in the blank worksheets that did not involve speaking in the classroom. Growing up in Victoria, her education was in English but she took French as an additional language subject until Grade 11. When Jacqueline entered University, she was not required to take an additional language during her undergraduate degree. She believes that this shows a gap in her University education program that will be addressed later in the critique portion of this literature review. When Jacqueline was a child, there were specialist teachers who came into English classrooms and taught French for a few hours per week. Due to a lack of funding, these specialist teachers no longer exist in Greater Victoria School District. The responsibility of teaching French, starting in Grade 5, falls onto regular classroom teachers even if the teacher does not have French language skills.
Regardless of a teacher’s background in the language, the Ministry of Education requires that Grade 5 English teachers teach an additional language. In Greater Victoria, French is the additional language that is taught. In Jacqueline’s opinion, the expectations of the Ministry of Education are unrealistic. Without adequate educational preparation, Core French programs will not be successful. Through this project, Jacqueline and Stephanie will collect and develop resources to help support Core French teachers who do not have a French background.

**Rationale**

Stephanie and Jacqueline chose to do their project together because they feel they will benefit from each other’s strengths and limitations. They each provide unique perspectives on French Education and yet they find similarities in the issues they face related to additional language learning. Stephanie is fluent in French and will provide insight into working with children and parents in a French Immersion environment. She will be able to identify appropriate French reading material as well as other French resources for parents, teachers and students. When examining French resources she will be able to critically analyze the accuracy and content of the resources. Parents of the children in her classroom often do not have strong French skills of their own. Stephanie and Jacqueline will create a website that will provide hands-on and authentic resources for parents to develop their own knowledge of French as well as activities for them to complete with their child at home. The website will focus on accessible French literacy materials that emphasize vocabulary, reading and grammar to be used for home language development for both students and parents.
Jacqueline will be able to evaluate resources from an English point of view. Because she does not speak French, she will be able to assess the effectiveness and ease of resources from the perspective of a non-French speaker. Stephanie and Jacqueline believe that the resources needed to support Early French Immersion parents and Core French Grade 5 teachers will be at a similar level. The students in both Kindergarten French Immersion and Grade 5 Core French are learning French for the first time. While their learning needs may be similar, age appropriateness will be taken into consideration for the two groups. The age appropriateness will be based on content, subject and graphics in the resource. The website will be developed through this process to create an effective learning resource for students, parents and teachers.

Throughout Stephanie and Jacqueline’s research and discussion with parents and colleagues they have found a significant difference between Core French and French Immersion programs. Choice plays a significant role in both immersion programs and Core French programs. In immersion programs both students and teachers choose to participate in the program. In contrast, teachers and students in Core French programs do not have the choice to opt-out of the program. Core French is a requirement in the Greater Victoria School District. The BC Ministry of Education curriculum states that all students must participate in an additional language program. As a result, Grade 5-8 teachers in Greater Victoria must teach French as an additional language regardless of their level of knowledge in French. According to Carr (2007) in a report, “the majority of elementary and middle years teacher candidates presently enrolled at these BC universities [UVic., U.B.C., S.F.U.] will graduate without any specialized training in second language methodology (p. 6).” In opposition, parents choose to enrol their
children in French Immersion knowing that all curriculums will be taught in an additional language. Teachers in the French Immersion program choose to teach French Immersion and require additional training in order to teach it.

The idea of choice is one that Jacqueline and Stephanie spent some time discussing because of its importance in their career choices with regards to language learning. In Stephanie’s case, teaching French Immersion was a choice. She decided to take the necessary steps needed in order to make this choice a reality. On the other hand, Jacqueline chose to teach in English classrooms, but did not choose to teach Core French. The Greater Victoria School District decided that all students will learn Core French and that classroom teachers will teach it. In the case of French Immersion, parents choose to enrol their children in this program. Bienvenue (1986) and Roy & Galiev (2011) believe that learning an additional language helps with different aspects of life. First, it aids in cognitive development, and second, it is useful in helping find employment later in life especially for employment in government offices. Bienvenue (1986) finds that for parents who enrol their child in French Immersion, they find these reasons to be of high importance in their child’s education. Stephanie and Jacqueline believe that these reasons, explained by the researchers, describe some examples of why parents choose to enrol their children in French Immersion programs.

Core French is taught as a subject starting in Grade 5 in all English track classrooms in the Greater Victoria School District. Core French is not a choice, it is a district requirement. Students are required to learn French as an additional language beginning in Grade 5 until Grade 8. After Grade 8, they have the option of taking an additional language course such as French, Spanish or Japanese. However, learning an
additional language after Grade 8 is no longer a requirement for graduation. According to the Ministry of Education Integrated Resource Package (2001), the purpose of teaching Core French from Grades 5-12 is for students to have opportunities to learn and communicate in French. While this is part of the ministry curriculum, there is research to support the notion that learning an additional language at an earlier age is more beneficial for students’ language acquisition. McLaughlin (1977) found that the optimal age for learning an additional language is from 2 years to early teens. By beginning Core French in Grade 5, Stephanie and Jacqueline believe that the Ministry of Education may be cutting critical language learning years short, especially given that students are only required to learn Core French for four years. In contrast, French Immersion programs begin introducing English into the curriculum in Grade 3. McLaughlin (1977) believes that students would be more successful in additional language learning if Core French programs began earlier. Boyson (2013) conducted a study in Connecticut in which students in the public school system had the opportunity to learn Spanish as an additional language beginning in Kindergarten as opposed to Grade 5. The study was conducted over a five year period where oral and listening comprehension were examined. At the end of the study Boyson (2013) noted that students who began learning Spanish in Kindergarten attained higher proficiency scores than those who began learning Spanish in Grade 5. This research supports McLaughlin (1977) as it shows that students who begin learning additional languages earlier are more successful than later years.

As one of Canada’s official languages, a quarter of the population of our country speaks French. However, the language is not homogeneously spoken across the country. There is a low French population in Western Canada, including Victoria. In 1994 the BC
Language Policy was created which required all students in Grades 5 to 8 to study an additional language such as French (Carr, 2007, p.4). According to Carr (2007), “This policy was followed by the development of a communication-focused curriculum, the Core French Integrated Resource Package (BC Ministry of Education, 1995), and in 1997 the policy and curriculum were fully implemented (p.4).” The British Columbia Ministry of Education (2001) states that learning French might provide national and international career opportunities, might enhance learning of first or additional languages, will help to develop a positive attitude towards Francophone, other cultural groups, and it will develop awareness about student’s own cultural background (p.9). The B.C. Integrated Resource Package (2001) states,

> Communication in French is an appropriate and accessible goal for all learners in BC schools. Because the overriding aim of Core French is communication, the suggested instructional and assessment strategies emphasize the practical use of the language in all its forms, and de-emphasize the analytical study of grammatical theory as an end in itself (p.9).

Jacqueline believes that these goals are not appropriate due to the lack of French skills teachers possess. Lewis (1998) sees this shift away from the French language as a fixed entity as an opportunity for students and teachers to view the language as a tool for communication and an avenue to explore cultural diversity and worldviews. While this may be the focus according to the Ministry of Education, from Jacqueline’s personal experiences and perspective, she believes that teachers have a very difficult time teaching communicative French skills because they do not possess them themselves. In a study conducted by Johnson in the Prince George School District from 1988 to 1992, he found that approximately 12 teachers out of 150 spoke French (Carr, 2007, p.7). While working in schools, Jacqueline found that many teachers and parents put a low priority on Core
French because of a lack of knowledge and confidence. Jacqueline believes that the Ministry’s expectations of Core French teachers are unrealistic. If children are not successful in Core French it will not affect the rest of their schoolwork.

In 2011, the Ministry of Education created a new draft curriculum for Core French programs. Work on this document was discontinued in 2013 with the introduction of a new curriculum redesign for all areas of learning. The draft document will be reviewed to see what aspects will fit into the new concept-based curriculum and the big ideas in the new curriculum design. The 2011 draft curriculum has changed significantly from the 2001 curriculum document that is currently being used in across British Columbia. The draft curriculum introduces a proficiency-based system and is guided by Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (BC Ministry of Education, 2011). This proficiency-based system is centred on students’ level of understanding rather than grade levels. The CEFR believes there are three levels of understanding when learning an additional language, basic, independent and proficient. Assessment for teachers and learners are focused on “Can Do” statements. Using the proficiency levels instead of grade level outcomes allows the document to focus on personalized learning. Students are able to learn in a variety of ways and at different rates. It is expected that most students will reach the end of level A1.2 after four years of instruction. However, students may need more time or complete this level sooner. This curriculum allows students to learn at their own level and pace. This document does not start French learning any earlier than the 2001 curriculum document. The document also does not address a lack of teacher knowledge. While this document does increase the opportunities for personalized learning, it does not change any of the challenges Core
French teachers face. If anything it may make Core French teachers’ task more difficult by catering to a variety of levels of proficiency that may be greater than their own.

Jacqueline was not very successful as a child at developing additional language skills. By the time she was in Grade 8, she felt she was behind her classmates. Even though she did not feel successful in developing French skills, it did not affect her other schoolwork or her future educational opportunities. Jacqueline believes that the lack of motivation and value placed on Core French by students and parents is another barrier in teaching Core French. Despite her experiences as a child, Jacqueline now believes there are many benefits to learning an additional language. There have been many professional and travel experiences where it would have been valuable for her to have French skills. Not only knowing the language but also developing a positive attitude and understanding of other cultures is particularly valuable when traveling to foreign countries. Since high-school Jacqueline has had the opportunity to travel to French speaking countries on three separate trips. Her first trip was to Monaco, where she quickly found that she did not speak enough of the language to communicate with locals. One particular experience she remembers is shopping for groceries in a local grocery store. The store did not use plastic bags and customers had to either purchase re-useable bags or carry their groceries. The store clerk was trying to explain this to Jacqueline in French. There was a very long and confusing interaction with many hand gestures. The clerk finally just rang in a few bags and packed up the groceries. It was challenging to do simple tasks like grocery shopping without knowing the language. It was interesting for Jacqueline to see how much she relied on hand gestures and trying to listen for a word she might know in the conversation to help her understand. On her second trip, she went to France with some of her friends
from England. The family she was traveling with spoke both English and French. This was very helpful because they were able to translate for Jacqueline and help her order food when they went out to eat. The family thought it was interesting, and amusing, that Jacqueline did not speak French even though she was from a bilingual country.

French Immersion takes on a different approach to teaching. Parents choose to enrol their children in French Immersion starting in Kindergarten in order for them to acquire French Language skills. One significant way French Immersion differs from Core French is that all subjects are taught in French. There is no English language learning until the students are in Grade 3. The objective of this is to immerse the students in the language in order to develop their fluency. According to the Ministry of Education (1995), the purpose of French Immersion is to help students become bilingual in French and English. Students learn how to speak fluently so that they can communicate their emotions and ideas with others. They also learn how to express themselves fluently through their written work. For example, when Stephanie was a child she learned French so that she could communicate with family members who also spoke French. On Stephanie’s father’s side of the family many family members do not speak English. The only way to communicate with these family members was through speaking French. Since Stephanie visited with these family members on many occasions it was useful for her to learn French so that she could have conversations, get to know her family, and learn about their lives. This example shows an authentic need for learning French in Stephanie’s life. In order to be able to communicate with family she needed to speak French. Lebreton (2014) discusses the difference between the need to understand a language and learning a language for the purpose of passing a class. Students might be
more interested in learning an additional language if there is a purpose such as living in a community that speaks a different language, learning for purposes of work or for the interest in traveling to another country.

Stephanie learned French through communicating with family and in school. She feels that her teaching methods which require students to interact and play using the French language are a result of her interactive upbringing. Stephanie is used to learning French through hands-on experiences and translates this into her daily teaching practice. Stephanie was never taught French through worksheets. She believes that the best way to learn a language is to be immersed in its culture and to communicate with others using the language.

The idea of a French Immersion program was created in the 1960s in Quebec as a way to help children of English speakers learn French so that they could work in the Quebec job market (Roy & Galiev, 2011). The purpose of the French Immersion program is to help students become proficient in their written and oral aspects of French, to develop understanding of different francophone cultures and to also maintain the development of their first language which in most cases was English (Roy & Galiev, 2011). In order for teachers to teach in a French Immersion classroom they need intensive preparation and education in the language. Many school districts require teachers to have “native-like” French fluency in order to receive French Immersion teaching qualifications. Each school district has their own definition and standards for “native-like” French fluency. Stephanie has observed through her professional experience that in the Greater Victoria School District native-like fluency means the ability to communicate in French through oral and written work with little to no error. In Stephanie’s experience
it was a long process to receive this qualification despite her having oral French fluency. 
Upon receiving her teaching degree she took her exam in order to obtain her Immersion qualifications. Stephanie’s written French did not meet the Great Victoria School District’s requirements. She spent the next year taking several French classes in order to improve her written work so that she could teach in a French Immersion classroom. Many of the courses that Stephanie took were helpful in developing her written French. Stephanie took courses through continuing studies at the University of Victoria that helped her work on vocabulary and grammar. After those courses she took a program at the University of Victoria called *Specializing in Teaching French Immersion*. This program included courses that helped to develop her French grammar/vocabulary as well as how to teach in a French Immersion classroom. What Stephanie enjoyed most about these courses was the fact that the professors created the course around what the students were interested in learning. For example, when learning how to teach in a French Immersion classroom, many of the students in the course were early elementary teachers. So, the course was designed to help teachers learn how to teach in an early French Immersion classroom.

It was a long process, but Stephanie knew this is what she wanted to teach and she worked hard to meet the district requirements. This again relates to the idea of choice, for both students and teachers. Stephanie chose to teach in a French Immersion classroom and in order to make this possible she needed to have a certain level of French. For students and parents there is no screening process to enter the French Immersion program. Although many parents see French Immersion as a two tiered system, where many refer to immersion programs as a free private school within the public system, all
parents have the choice to enrol their children. Over the past few decades immersion programs have become more popular and have more diverse populations than before. In Stephanie’s teaching experience she has observed that students with extraordinary needs are often moved into the English track in the early primary years. Anyone can enter in French Immersion in Kindergarten or Grade 1, but many parents do not consider that home support for French language learning is important in order for students to be successful and feel confident with the language. In French Immersion all courses are taught in French. A key aspect of French Immersion is home support because students will feel more motivated and encouraged if the language is reinforced at home. If a student struggles with understanding the language then it is possible that they will face challenges in learning across all subjects. At the beginning of the year, Stephanie discusses with parents the importance of building a strong relationship between school and home environments. One of the tools for students to be successful in learning a new language is to receive support in their home environment. Parents who are involved in encouraging enthusiasm and knowledge for French language learning will help their child be successful at school. Developing opportunities to use the French language at home will reinforce learning that happens at school and it will help to build the student’s confidence in using the language. Stephanie’s philosophy is that learning is happening all the time and that this should also hold true for language learning. Parents can help support their child’s French learning at home by reading with them in French, watching television in French, and looking at French websites together in order to help develop language skills.
Stephanie and Jacqueline believe that the idea of choice plays a significant role in parents’ and teachers’ attitudes surrounding additional language learning. Parents, teachers and students have hopefully made an informed decision to enter French Immersion based on a desire to learn an additional language. Because of a lack of choice in the English system, Stephanie and Jacqueline believe that teachers, parents and students in the English track often do not see the benefits or the value in additional language learning. Teachers feel unprepared and lack the confidence needed to teach a successful program. In Jacqueline’s experience, the teacher’s attitude towards French can be passed on to their students. With a lack of knowledge and enthusiasm, a Core French program does not have a very good chance at being successful. We hope that by building teachers’ and parents’ confidence and skills in French it will improve our education system and increase students’ learning.
Chapter 2

The aim of this Masters’ project is to address our research question: how do we support Core French teachers and French Immersion parents in learning French language skills? This literature review will explore the value of additional language learning, teachers’ background knowledge of the French language and the importance of supporting additional language learning at home.

**Value of Additional Language Learning**

Growing up, Jacqueline did not put any value in additional language learning. She found that the Core French program she was taught in elementary and high school did not meet her needs as an additional language learner. Jacqueline was always a dedicated student growing up and achieved good grades, with the exception of French. She found Core French to be the most challenging and frustrating part of her education. When she was in Grade 8, Jacqueline’s mom hired her a tutor for French because Jacqueline was so frustrated. Although Jacqueline at the time felt that French skills were not necessary in her life, she still wanted to succeed in her learning and achieve a high grade in the class so it would not decrease her grade point average.

Jacqueline’s parents are both from Victoria and they did not place any particular value on learning an additional language. As Jacqueline looks back on her experiences she wonders why her parents had this view of French. For Jacqueline’s job as a teacher, learning French would have been an extremely valuable skill. Her father works for the Federal Government and a few years ago they paid for him to go back to University to learn French so that he could participate in conferences and work with French colleagues.
This was short lived as her father found it too challenging to learn the language and did not complete his course. Instead the government now pays for translators to assist him in communicating with colleagues from the East. Jacqueline believes this memory is significant in a number of ways. She believes that it helped define her attitude towards additional language learning. Her father was still able to participate in meetings with colleagues across the country and it did not impact his career. This shows that English-speaking Canadians are able to participate in Canadian culture, even within the Federal Government, with only one official language. The experience also resonated with Jacqueline by showing her the extreme challenge of learning an additional language at an older age. Jacqueline believes that her father is a very intelligent man, but watching him struggle to learn French showed the difficulty of acquiring an additional language. Shine (2011) found that additional language learners are rarely successful, as it is very difficult to learn an additional language in adulthood. Shine (2011) explains one of the reasons children are more successful in acquiring an additional language is that they are able to experiment and make mistakes with the language. These mistakes are not criticized by adults but are often seen as endearing. When adults are acquiring an additional language, they are often too afraid or embarrassed to make mistakes with the language. This discourages many adult additional language learners from playing with the language.

According to Nikolov and Djigunovic (2006) there are biological and neurological differences in the way children and adults acquire additional languages. They found,

The acquisition of implicit competence is affected by age in two ways: (1) biologically, the plasticity of the procedural memory for language gradually decreases after about age 5; (2) cognitively, reliance on conscious declarative memory increases both for learning in general and for learning a language from about age 7 (p. 235).
These two factors, in addition to societal pressures, show the challenges for adults and older children in learning new languages.

When Jacqueline completed her undergraduate degree at the University of Victoria, she had the choice to take either a French as a Second Language (FSL) course or an English as a Second Language (ESL) course. She had just completed her first practicum at an English track elementary school where she worked with many students who were identified as English Language Learners (ELL). She chose to take the ESL course because at the time she thought that she would work with many more ELL students than French. She did not know then that her first contract would be to teach Core French.

Jacqueline’s first contract was a small contract in a Grade 4/5 English class. Her teaching partner was the Vice-Principal and she informed Jacqueline that during her teaching time she would be teaching Science and Core French. French was a subject that Jacqueline’s teaching partner did not feel comfortable teaching. As Jacqueline was a new teacher, she was thrilled to accept the contract. Jacqueline felt prepared and excited to teach the Science curriculum. She was nervous and anxious about teaching the French curriculum. However, she felt she would be able to work through the challenges of teaching Core French. Throughout her time in the Grade 4/5 class, Jacqueline asked many close friends who teach French Immersion for help and did a lot of research and work to develop lessons for her class. Jacqueline wanted to create lessons that the students would find interesting and engaging. Jacqueline believes these were useful strategies for her but they still did not increase her confidence in speaking the language.
Growing up in Victoria, Jacqueline never felt a part of French culture. In her teaching experiences, she taught students from a variety of cultures but she has yet to work with a student from a French background. While French is an official language of Canada, Jacqueline has found that Victoria is a predominately English environment. Living in this context produces challenges for teaching about French culture. Learning about French-Canadian culture may be a challenge for both Core French teachers and students who have never visited or experienced French-Canadian culture themselves. The prescribed learning outcomes do not seem to match the context that students in Victoria are living in. Jacqueline believes that although this produces challenges for finding authentic lessons about culture, it is important for students to learn and understand cultures and communities other than their own.

Throughout her adult life, Jacqueline has developed an appreciation for additional language learning and for understanding diverse cultures. Through teaching and traveling experiences, Jacqueline has witnessed the benefits of additional language learning. In particular, Jacqueline has traveled to Monaco and France and quickly realized that her minimal French skills were not adequate for communicating. She now believes that it is advantageous for students in Core French to learn the language to benefit from economic, career and travel opportunities later in life. While the goal of Core French is not fluency, basic communicative French skills would help students to connect with others around the world. Roy and Galiev (2011) found that parents who enrol their children in French Immersion often recognize these benefits as a reason to register their children in the program. According to Bienvenue (1986), parents who enrol their children in the English track do not recognize the value of additional language learning. Bienvenue’s (1986)
study found that Immersion parents had a more positive attitude towards French learning and culture than English track parents. In order for students to learn Core French, teachers need to have adequate knowledge, confidence and place value on French language learning. Jacqueline hopes that her website will inspire and support Core French teachers to learn the language themselves and start to value Core French education.

Stephanie has always valued learning French and has appreciated the French culture. Stephanie grew up in a family where learning an additional language was normal and encouraged. Stephanie spent the first several years of her life living in many French communities across Canada. In these communities French was needed in order to communicate with others in the town. Same as the students from Lebreton’s (2014) study, Stephanie’s parents felt that in order to live in these communities knowing how to speak and write in French was a valuable asset. Therefore, Stephanie was enrolled in French Immersion and was encouraged to speak and read in French at home. Stephanie’s father speaks French as his first language and learned English through his schooling. Stephanie was fortunate to have parents that not only placed a strong value on learning an additional language, but that also had the French background needed to help support what she was learning at school. Stephanie believes that learning an additional language opens many doors for travel and work opportunities, especially in a bilingual country such as Canada. Her beliefs have been supported in several studies where Roy & Galiev (2011) and Bienvenue (1986) have also found these points to be true in their respective studies. Throughout Stephanie’s life, she has had many advantages over her peers because she is bilingual. She was able to acquire a full time job teaching years before her English peers. Because of the advantages she has witnessed throughout her life, Stephanie believes that
all Canadians would benefit from learning both English and French. Stephanie’s strong belief for learning additional languages, as well as her upbringing, is what motivated her to become a French Immersion teacher.

Living in British Columbia, Stephanie finds that citizens are isolated and sheltered from a lot of French culture in Canada. Compared to Eastern Canada, B.C. has a very small French population with secluded communities. The Ministry of Education requires students to learn a language in order to develop language skills that will help them to live and function more effectively in British Columbia’s ethno-cultural diverse environment and in Canada as a bilingual country (Carr, 2009). According to Carr (2009), languages are now considered symbols of economic capital as opposed to national identity. Due to the low French population in Victoria, Stephanie wonders how authentic and valuable French learning would be in a predominately English community. Parents in Stephanie’s French Immersion class may view the value of French in a variety of ways. Whether they view French as an economic capital or as tool to learn new about another culture, it is important to consider the context in which she teaches. Lebreton (2014) conducted a study in two International Baccalaureate Schools that explored the purpose for teaching an additional language and the attitudes and motivations of students in the programs. She examined the similarities and differences between two very different communities and cultures. The first group were English students living Paris, France learning French as an additional language. These students felt it was important to learn French as they live in a community where French is a dominant language and they wanted to integrate themselves socially. The second group of students were English students in Australia learning Mandarin as an additional language. These students were predominately
interested in learning the language for possible future travel opportunities in China. The students noted that there is a lack of large Chinese communities in Australia so there is no pressing need to learn the language. What Lebreton (2014) found was that the students in Paris were more motivated to learn another language, as it is part of the culture and society that they live in. Motivation was determined by questionnaires given to the students. Students who were motivated to learn enjoyed their language lessons and wanted to understand the language. This article shows that motivation for learning an additional language is a key factor in students enjoyment and success in learning an additional language. Students in French Immersion programs will most likely be interested and motivated to learn the language so they are able to participate in classroom learning and interact with their peers. How can this motivation be passed on to parents in the home learning environment where French is not a necessity? In home environments where French is not a spoken language, how can teachers help to foster French language learning? The website developed for this project will give parents and caregivers practical ideas to incorporate French language skills into their home environment. It is our hope that students will feel more motivated and supported if the French language is valued at home.

Stephanie examined the new draft Français Langue Seconde Immersion curriculum documents developed by the British Columbia Ministry of Education (2013). She compared these documents to the current curriculum used by BC teachers to see how it will affect teaching French Immersion and its impact on students and parents. The new draft curriculum focuses on personalized learning. This new way of learning and teaching encourages students to work at their own pace and to progress at their own rates.
Stephanie found that there is a significant difference in the amount of Prescribed Learning Outcomes in the new draft curriculum. Currently, the French Immersion curriculum has very specific Prescribed Learning Outcomes such as student can sit and read for short periods of time (Ministry of Education, 2010) or a student can write familiar words (Ministry of Education, 2010). In contrast, the new draft curriculum has much fewer and broader Prescribed Learning Outcomes. Stephanie is familiar with teaching to very specific outcomes and the idea of the curriculum changing is daunting. Having more open-ended Prescribed Learning Outcomes will change the way Stephanie teaches. It will allow Stephanie to explore language learning through authentic language activities that are of interest to the students. While the idea of having to change her pedagogy is intimidating, Stephanie is excited to see the development of more flexibility in the curriculum to address students’ individual interests and learning needs. The new curriculum allows teachers to be more flexible in their teaching, as the number of learning outcomes has been reduced. It also allows students to learn about topics that are of interest to them. Many of these learning outcomes have been reduced to include 4 “Big Ideas” for the focus of the year. For example, the “Big Ideas” in the Kindergarten French Immersion Curriculum are as follows,

“Each letter has its proper written form and sound, student understands that all images in a text have meaning, that learning a new language happens by listening and reproducing models explained by a teacher and that student needs to understand how to listen to others and communicate in a polite and respectful manner (Ministry of Education, 2013).”

It appears that the new curriculum draft for Français Langue Seconde Immersion allows for students to work at his or her own pace and encourages them to be immersed in
understanding the French language as opposed to having to fulfill specific Prescribed Learning Outcomes.

Jacqueline and Stephanie discussed the importance of the draft Français Langue Seconde Immersion curriculum for supporting learning in home environments. Although the new curriculum is reduced in the amount of learning outcomes, parents of French Immersion students still need to play an integral role in supporting their child’s additional language development. However, because the new curriculum will be based on personalized learning it is possible that students will be able to focus on their personal interests. One of the benefits of the new curriculum is its ability to allow this freedom of choice. Parents can still help support their child’s language development by learning basic French vocabulary. They can then transfer these skills to help their child explore their interests through the French language. Parents who engage in French language activities at home that focus on their child’s specific interests will help to foster motivation for learning new language skills.

Another benefit of the new curriculum is that it is still in the development phase. The Ministry of Education is seeking feedback from the general public, especially teachers and parents, on what should be included in the new documents. This is a key way for parents to become engaged in their child’s learning. They can provide specific feedback to the Ministry of Education about the types of support they would like to see included for supporting their child’s learning at home. Overall, the new curriculum draft for Français Langue Seconde Immersion is beneficial in reducing the amount of learning outcomes and increasing teachers’ flexibility in lesson planning. We hope that the new
curriculum will encourage students to further their learning of French, or any additional language, and will share this love of learning with their families.

As Stephanie and Jacqueline examined their own values of French language learning, they believe that they have a common understanding of why children should learn French in school through both the Immersion and Core French programs. In order to have a successful learning experience, students need to be taught a language program that is interesting to them and is at their learning level. This begins with the teacher. We feel that teachers need to create an environment that fosters positive attitudes and a motivation to learn a new language. A classroom that promotes additional language learning should have language posters on the wall, books in the language for students to read, and electronic devices with games and stories in French. We have found that learning an additional language can increase children’s opportunities for travel, jobs and cultural understanding. As Canada is a bilingual country we believe that French is an important part of the education program.

**Teachers and Parents French Background Knowledge**

In this section of our paper, we will be focusing on the French language knowledge of Core French teachers in the English program. Followed by a discussion on the knowledge of French language of parents with children in French Immersion programs. We have provided these two sections to reflect two different approaches to French language learning because of our personal and professional experiences working within the school system.

**Core French Perspective**

From personal experiences Jacqueline can say that her French knowledge is
significantly lacking. While she took French until Grade 11, she does not feel that it
helped her to retain many of the skills she may have learned. Many other students in BC
Universities face the same challenges. British Columbia education programs at the
University of Victoria, University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University do
not offer an additional language methodology course,

…even though Grade 5 to 8 core French is mandated for all British Columbia
students and has a fully developed curriculum document with prescribed learning
outcomes, funding formulae for district budgets based on numbers of Core French
students, and reporting expectations (Carr, 2007, p.6).

This presents a challenge for Core French teachers as most will graduate without any
specialized language training. Jacqueline knows some basic vocabulary words from
specific units she was taught in high school. Jacqueline can recall individual words from
a unit on food and she remembers learning some clothing and sports words. She knows a
few basic greetings and how to say please and thank you in French. Jacqueline does not
feel that these disjointed pieces of information should qualify her to teach children an
additional language. The lack of retention may be a function of the way her Core French
was taught. Jacqueline recalls completing many fill in the blank worksheets and having to
memorize different verb tenses for tests. This type of learning did not translate into
authentic or meaningful learning for Jacqueline. She was not able to transfer the
individual words into communicative French or use the language in real life situations.
Jacqueline found that other teachers in the province had similar experiences. In a survey
response, one respondent explains,

My background in French did not prepare me for my assignment. We learned to
read and write but not speak. What is the value of learning a language without
practice in speaking it? We memorized verbs, tenses, and J’entre dans la salle de
casse… This left me with little love of French, and after four years of instruction
from grade 9-12, no feeling at all that I could speak even a small amount of
French with anyone (Kathleen) (Carr, 1999, 164).

There was no time for speaking or playing with the language in Jacqueline’s Core French classes as a child. After reflecting on these experiences, she believes that she relies on many of the same teaching styles as her childhood teachers. This shows that her teachers may have also lacked the skills and confidence to teach meaningful communicative French lessons. It seems that the learning and teaching for Jacqueline is recursive in nature. Even though her experiences as a child did not serve her well as an adult, she relied on them in her teaching practice because they felt comfortable and safe. According to Nikitina (2011) the use of hands-on activities help to promote authentic language learning. She describes the use of drama to teach new languages.

The benefits of using drama in language teaching and learning are numerous. It has been observed that involving language learners in drama production stimulates development of the analytical skills and creativity (Schultz and Heinigk, 2002), it promotes the students’ ownership of their learning (Moody, 2002), and introduces in the language classroom “countless different dimensions that they [the students] wouldn’t otherwise be likely to be exposed to in the same hands-on context” (Lys et al., 2002, p. 223) (p. 34).

Incorporating hands-on authentic activities for students would help them to develop new language skills and engage them in useful activities. Peacock (1997) investigated the validity of using authentic materials to increase motivation and learning in additional languages. This is a claim that is often made but he found that there were in fact very few studies that examined whether this was true. The term authentic itself poses many problems as researchers use this term in a variety of ways (Gilmore, 2007). Gilmore (2007) found that, “most researchers use the term to refer to cultural artefacts like books, newspapers, magazines, radio and TV broadcasts, web site, advertising, music and so on (p.107).” Peacock’s (1997) study focused on English language learners in South Korea
and found that student’s motivation and on-task behaviour was significantly improved with the use of authentic materials and tasks. Culham (2010) shows that language learning does not always occur from teachers passing knowledge on to students. Language learning can be a shared social activity through drama activities. Culham (2010) found that when students are engaged in activities that tap into their own interests and personal experiences their development of language skills increase. Drama activities that do not necessarily involve language speaking can help to encourage a positive classroom community, develop non-verbal cues to reduce stress and can help hesitant students become more confident (Culham, 2010). Jacqueline believes that including authentic resources and activities into Core French lessons would help to increase teacher and student motivation and learning in more meaningful ways. It is important for students to be able to use their French skills in real life situations. Creating authentic learning experiences will help to achieve this. The website created in conjunction with this paper will include a variety of authentic resources that will support meaningful learning.

After talking to her English track colleagues, she has found that she is not alone in feeling inadequate to teach French. She has heard stories of teachers trying to trade French Immersion teacher’s blocks so they can teach French for them and they could teach their PE or another subject. This is not always possible as not all schools have French Immersion programs and many French Immersion teachers do not want to take on the extra responsibility or lose time with their own class. Ewart (2009) conducted a study on French teachers in Manitoba and found that teachers faced similar challenges in starting their teaching careers. The teachers in Manitoba wanted more resources, more
classroom management skills and felt there was a need for a mentorship program. In 1997 a study of Surrey School District teachers teaching Core French in BC found that,

“The biggest challenges these teachers faced were a lack of specialized training, inadequate time to assimilate many curricular changes, and the need to integrate students with English as an additional language or with special needs” (Carr, 1999, p. 154).

In a survey completed by BC teachers, 79% of those surveyed found the biggest challenge facing Core French teachers is the lack of specialized training (Carr, 1999). Jacqueline believes that Core teachers still face the same challenges today.

When Jacqueline was offered her first contract last year, she was informed that she would be teaching Grade 4/5 Science and French. Jacqueline felt completely confident and excited to teach the science curriculum as she had received sufficient education and preparation through her undergraduate degree and practica. French on the other hand caused Jacqueline some anxiety. When Jacqueline began to think about French she felt nervous and fearful, however this was the first contract she was offered and she was committed and excited to be given the opportunity. Jacqueline remembers meeting Stephanie to ask her questions about where she should start, and how she should go about teaching French. Stephanie gave Jacqueline lots of ideas but she still did not feel confident in her own abilities and worried about how to pronounce words and if the resources she was using were correct. Jacqueline began her unit by having student’s research their own cultures, which is one of the prescribed learning outcomes from the Ministry of Education. She felt confident in this because the learning and teaching was done in English. After completing the cultural heritage projects, Jacqueline moved on to a food unit. She had the students create a restaurant menu using vocabulary words from a
French picture dictionary that she purchased from the teacher store. This picture
dictionary was a very helpful resource for her as a teacher and for the students.
Additional resources to increase student’s oral language would have been valuable for
this unit. Having students practice authentic oral language tasks like ordering from a
restaurant would have been helpful for students. Calman and Daniel (1998) conducted a
study on instructional practices of Grade 3-8 Core French teachers and found that
teachers were using less oral language strategies than the Ministry of Education allotted
and focused more grammar based activities (Lapkin, Mady & Arnott, 2009, p. 18). They
also found that teachers used predominately English instructions during the lessons.
Reflecting on her own teaching experiences, Jacqueline believes that her lessons were
surface level and did not encourage students to have a deep understanding of the
language or culture. Jacqueline created a lot of resources herself such as worksheets and
projects that were primarily grammar based. She did not ask the school if there were
French resources available for Core French teachers. Looking back Jacqueline feels that
she should have investigated resources within the school and the district to supplement
her teaching. She thinks that this may have been because she was embarrassed to show
people that she lacked French knowledge. She did not want to ask for help within the
school. Instead of relying on grammar-based activities, Jacqueline could have encouraged
collaborative activities. Lapkin, Mady & Arnott (2009) found that the use of collaborative
learning in Core French programs, “can increase student and teacher French production
and motivation, while also positively influencing aural comprehension, oral proficiency
and target language accuracy (p.18).” In order for Core French to be successful, we need
to ensure that teachers feel confident in teaching French and have resources to support
them. Our website will be a great starting point for Core French teachers who need support in developing a Core French program and will help to build their confidence in their own French knowledge. Later on in our paper we will describe the categories of our website and their usefulness to parents and teachers interested in learning about the French language.

**French Immersion Perspective**

Stephanie has been teaching French Immersion for four years now and every year she encounters many families that decide to enrol their child in French Immersion without having a family background in French. For students starting French Immersion in Kindergarten they not only have to adjust to being at school full-time, but they also have to adjust to learning everything in a language that may be foreign to them. Learning an additional language is not easy. It takes a lot of practice and time. One thing that Stephanie has learned is that learning an additional language should not start and stop at school; it should be something that is incorporated in the home environment.

Purcell-Gates (1996) conducted a study that looked how much literacy time was incorporated in the home environment. The study focused on English as a first language. Through home observations, Purcell-Gates (1996) found that in order for children to learn vocabulary in English, parents needed to interact with their child by talking to them and reading to them in English. When parents spend time with their child reading a story it shows the child that they are there to encourage, support and teach them. This helps the child create a positive attitude towards learning. Home literacy environments may help children to develop good phonological awareness skills, oral fluency and an overall enjoyment towards literacy (Burgess, 2010). We believe that although this study focuses
on children developing their first language, that the principles of learning together at home would hold true for learning an additional language. In the next section of our paper we will discuss how parents, teachers and students can work together to support a positive additional language literacy environment at home.

With students learning an additional language at school it is important for the parents to be supportive of language learning at home. Learning does not take place solely in the classroom; parental involvement at home positively affects students’ additional language learning at home (Boas, 2012). Boas (2012) makes a connection between the school and parent support by saying that there should be a positive relationship between parents and teachers and that schools should be providing homework that promotes parents and students learning together. One example that was given was to watch a TV episode in a foreign language at home and to answer questions about the episode provided by the teacher. What we have noticed through our experience is that unfinished work from the school day is often assigned as homework to be completed at home, usually in the form of a worksheet. One issue with this type of task is that parents may not know what the homework is about as it was started at school and may not have the language knowledge to help. The other issue with this task is that it is not allowing students to interact with others in the language that they are learning. Teachers need to encourage collaborative home learning with the parents and student. Teachers should try to foster a positive relationship with parents in order to design home learning tasks that will work for the families in the classroom. If the homework provided was more interactive such listening to the radio or reading books together that might change the way that parents view the importance of homework and may become more
involved with their child’s learning of an additional language at home. Further along in our paper we will discuss how teachers can help support interactive learning at home through additional language learning. We also give ideas in our websites as to how parents can foster additional language learning at home.

This year in Stephanie’s classroom a parent approached her with an issue about a language barrier between home and school. The parent was concerned that their child was writing information in their agenda in French. The parent asked Stephanie if it could be written in English instead as they could not understand the messages in French. Stephanie responded by explaining that their child is in a French Immersion classroom and everything that they are learning and will learn is in French. Stephanie encouraged them to learn with their child by having their child teach them what they are learning at school. Stephanie also had a similar situation with a family whose first language is neither French nor English. In fact, French is the third language for this student. When this parent approached her about the agendas being in French they asked if they could also have an English agenda so that they could learn the languages together at home. The difference that she noticed between these two families was the willingness to learn with their child. Both families had a limited knowledge of French, but one family knew how to approach the language with their child at home and the other parent needed help from the teacher with ways to work on French learning at home with their child.

At the beginning of the year, Stephanie discusses with parents the importance of encouraging French learning at home. She suggests collaborative French activities such as singing, reading, watching T.V., listening to the radio etc. Many parents enrol their child in French Immersion with the idea that their child will learn all the French they
need to know in the classroom and that it will be enough. Unfortunately this is not the case. Learning a new language is a life-long process (Shine, 2011). It is also one that requires interaction with others while speaking and writing in the additional language that is being learned. Our website will include interactive resources that will help teachers and parents with the basics of the French language so that when their child or students begin to learn French they will be able to help support them and learn with them along the way.

**Home Learning Environment**

From the Core French perspective, Jacqueline at first did not think the issue of home support was relevant. But the more we discussed the topic the more we believed it came down to the value placed on Core French at both school and home. Core French is a component of the BC ministry curriculum and is the language that is required to be taught in the Greater Victoria School District. We believe that Core French should be given as much value as any other subject such as science, math, or language arts. We began to explore the idea of why French may not be valued in the homes of English students. Parents have not chosen for their children to learn an additional language, as opposed to French Immersion parents, and they may not see the value in learning an additional language. Another thought may be that English parents do not speak French themselves and have not thought about the possible benefits of learning an additional language. Through Jacqueline’s teaching experiences last year, she did not send Core French homework home with the students because she did not think they would have support at home. It is hard for us to know if this is a valid assumption. Research has showed us that many parents do not see the benefits in learning an additional language (Bienvenue, 1986). Jacqueline believes that this may have been her own personal bias based on her
experiences growing up with parents who were unable to help her with her French homework. We believe that in Victoria, the lack of French skills is more common than the lack of Math skills or English skills. It is difficult to survive in Victoria without basic Math or English skills. Living in Victoria, it would be easy to live without French skills as Victoria is a predominantly English speaking culture. Without the basic need of an additional language in Victoria we believe that many teachers, parents and students may not see the importance in learning language skills.

Regardless of how parents view learning an additional language all students will learn French for a period of time in the public school system. Stephanie and Jacqueline believe that as educators we need to support parents in additional language learning just as teachers would for any other core subjects taught. It is important to educate parents of the significance and benefits of additional language learning. Just as teachers provide parents with suggestions on how to support students’ math and literacy skills at home, we should also provide parents with resources to support their child’s French learning. Paez, Bock and Pizzo (2011) explain that schools should help provide instruction to parents of students who are learning an additional language. Schools should offer resources to parents with no additional language background on how to support their child’s learning at home. Parents should be given the opportunity to learn how to select appropriate books for their children as well as songs and games that will help to increase language. Watching TV or listening to the radio in French may increase students and parents French knowledge (Dixon, 2009). In order to fully support parents at home with additional language learning, schools need to provide open lines of communication along with ways to support families at home (Paez et al, 2011). Duran (2010) conducted a study in which
students of a Hispanic background were learning English and were also teaching their mothers how to speak English at home. Educators in the study found that by creating homework that encouraged parent/child interaction both parent and child were learning English simultaneously. This same style of homework could be applied to students in both French Immersion and Core French programs. Educators could design homework activities that would allow for interaction at home in the additional language.

As Duran (2010) looked at how parent/child interaction in homework helps to increase additional language learning for both the parent and the child, Villas-Boas (1998) conducted research to see how well-designed homework activities and parental involvement in these activities improved students learning. The researcher found that homework activities should be designed to help expand upon learning at school, but should also be interactive. The activities sent home to help build on language learning should be activities that help develop vocabulary listening, reading and writing skills. Furthermore, the students should be engaged in their homework and parents should be involved in the learning process. In order to help develop English language skills, the research would ask the students to watch TV and to listen to the radio, but there would be homework questions attached to what they were asked to listen to. In the end, Villas-Boas (1998), it was found that not only is parental involvement in additional language learning at home important, but that it is also important that teachers take the initiative to contact parents and to work with them to make sure that they feel they can help support additional language learning at home. This study brings us back to our earlier point of the importance of creating a positive relationship between home and school for not only additional language learning, but for all areas of education.
One way that Jacqueline incorporated parents into her French curriculum last year was through the projects on family cultural heritage. Each student was asked to go home and discuss their family heritage with his or her parents. Once the students had found out their heritage, the class used small post-it notes on a world map to see the variety of cultures our class was made up of. Most students were able to find information about their family history. One student in Jacqueline’s class did not know where her family was from. The student had moved from Port Alberni to Victoria when she was 5 years old. While the student did not know her family heritage, she was able to create a meaningful project for herself and described in detail the differences in culture between Port Alberni and Victoria that she had experienced in her life. Each student created a PowerPoint presentation at school about one of the countries their family was from.

During Student Led Conferences, the students shared the presentations with their parents. Jacqueline had several parents ask her to email their child’s work so they could share it with other family members. As a culminating activity, the class hosted a cultural heritage lunch where each student brought a food item from the country they had studied. Parents and family members were invited to share the lunch with the class. Learning about students own cultural heritage and about French culture helped to build an understanding of a variety of cultures as well as the importance of learning an additional language. Jacqueline thinks that involving parents in the students learning will make it more authentic and valuable to both students and parents.

As we mentioned earlier, we live in a predominantly English speaking culture. Students that are learning an additional language may not have much exposure outside of the classroom. We looked at the role of homework, not just for additional language
learning, but also to examine the support that is received outside of the classroom. How can parents and teachers work together to support continuous learning? Parental support of literacy at home, regardless of language, is crucial in developing children’s language and reading development (Paez et al., 2011, p. 136). Through research we found that parental support in school can take on many forms such as volunteering in the classroom, or supporting what is being taught in the classroom at home. In a study conducted by Patall, Cooper, & Robinson (2008), the researchers looked at many different studies regarding how parental involvement at home affects student achievement at school. Many of the studies found a variety of contributing factors such as the types of resources in the home linked to the homework sent home from school as well as the strategies that parents use during homework time. Patall et al. (2008) found that parental background knowledge of a subject matter did not always help a child in their learning. What proved to be most successful were parents who were supportive of their child’s learning through creating homework routines at home as well as by providing their child a quiet place at home to complete their homework.

Children are more confident in their academic learning when they have parents that encourage and support them (Purcell-Gates, 1996). But when it comes to French learning, the parents also need to be supported which is why it is important for schools to provide parents with homework that can be completed together at home as it will have a positive affect on the students learning (Boas, 2012).

As educators, the best thing that can be done to help support both parents and students outside of the classroom would be to set-up a homework routine that allows parents and students to work together in completing homework assignments. To help
support French learning at home. Stephanie encourages her students to read every night to parents or siblings in French. Each student is only allowed to bring home a book that is at their reading level. When a student wants to move up a level the need to read that level to the teacher and the teacher decides whether or not they are capable of reading independently. What Stephanie finds to be most successful in parents learning the French language is by having the child teach new vocabulary to the parents. By learning together it helps to reinforce what is being taught at school. We have also found that students who are exposed to literacy at home through magazines, newspapers, books, etc. excel in literacy compared those that had no literacy support at home (Purcell-Gates, 1996). Although this was found in students learning their first language, we believe that the same would be true for additional language learners. Supporting additional language learning at home reinforces the students understanding of the language. Throughout Stephanie’s research for this project, her personal teaching philosophy has remained the same. She still feels that using hands-on and personalized learning strategies work best for learning French in Immersion programs. Where she has seen a shift in her beliefs is the way in which she views the home learning environment. She now sees that many of the things she sent home for homework were inauthentic or were not valuable learning materials. While developing the website, Stephanie has focused on ways to engage students and parents at home in more authentic learning tasks. For example, having families label household items and use that vocabulary is more beneficial than sending home fill-in-the-blank worksheets. Stephanie sees this as a significant pedagogical shift in the way she views the importance of home learning environments. She is determined
to continue to develop effective resources that engage parents and students learning together in hands on authentic ways.
Chapter 3

Methods

As discussed in our introduction, Stephanie and Jacqueline decided to work together because of their similar interests in French language learning and its effects on teachers and parents. Throughout the project, Stephanie and Jacqueline each brought a unique perspective to language learning. They were able to learn from each other, challenge each other’s ideas and grow their learning together. They feel that by working together they were able to understand a new perspective by learning from each other’s experiences. Throughout the process they were able to support each other through challenging times balancing school, work and life. They began their project by each researching their individual areas of interest; Stephanie focused on parental involvement in immersion learning environments and Jacqueline focused on the challenges faced by Core French teachers. From there, they read each other’s articles and began discussions on the research. During this period of the project, Jacqueline and Stephanie worked individually and at times would meet to discuss their findings.

The next step of their project was to discuss their personal experiences in regards to their research topic. At this point Jacqueline and Stephanie began to work more collaboratively on the project. They began to discuss with colleagues and parents to find other opinions about what would make a useful resource for additional language learning. Stephanie spoke with parents in her class about how she could help to support them and their child in home learning environments. Jacqueline spoke to colleagues about the challenges Core French teachers face and the types of resources they would like to see in a website. After these discussions, Stephanie and Jacqueline delved into the literature and
began to break up the articles and resources into categories. They decided to focus their research on the three main ideas that stemmed from all the articles: the value of additional language learning, teachers and parents background knowledge and home support. These topics seemed to be recursive throughout the research. It was at this point that Jacqueline and Stephanie began to cultivate and write their own stories that fit into the research they found. Once they had written their personal stories, they began adding in the research. Writing together helped Stephanie and Jacqueline define their ideas and challenge each other’s perspective along the way. The majority of the literature review was written together by spending many nights and weekends together at coffee shops and the library. Once they had a draft they were happy with, both Jacqueline and Stephanie would take turns editing it on their own at home.

Jacqueline and Stephanie have both approached teaching French as additional language in different ways based on their past experiences with additional language learning. Jacqueline learned French through worksheets in her Core French class. Apart from her travel experiences she was not as exposed to French as Stephanie was. As a result of her experiences with French she began insecure in her abilities to teach French and worried about how she would be able to teach French to students. Stephanie, on the other hand, was brought up in a French family and was immersed in the language from the beginning stages of her life. Her experiences with French were rich in language and culture. Because of her positive experiences with French she decided to become a French immersion teacher and was confident in her abilities to teach French. She also learned French through a variety of hands-on experiences which she translated into her teaching of French Immersion.
Through this project Jacqueline and Stephanie have been able to share their experiences and to learn from each other in a way that will benefit their teaching practices. Jacqueline has learned that she does not need to feel insecure about teaching French as there are a variety of resources available to her. Stephanie has learned that not everyone understands French like she does and that she should open herself up to others about how to find proper resources for learning French and to guide them in the right direction.

Throughout this process, working collaboratively helped both Stephanie and Jacqueline reflect on their own teaching practices and their philosophy on teaching additional languages. Sharing personal stories and memories can be a vulnerable but rewarding process. Being able to share ideas and opinions with someone else who is going through the same process but on their own journey was very insightful. Working collaboratively helps to keep motivation going and also helps to keep you accountable for continuing your work. There were times when both Stephanie and Jacqueline felt deflated, but because they were working together they were able to help support one another and continue. Both Stephanie and Jacqueline worked full time throughout their Masters program. It can be very challenging trying to balance teaching, second jobs, schoolwork and life. Working collaboratively helped to balance this process. When one partner is feeling overwhelmed the other can help take on more. Stephanie and Jacqueline feel they would not have been able to complete their project without each other’s support.

From here, they began to create their website. After talking with colleagues and parents, Stephanie and Jacqueline decided to create a user-friendly website that was easy to navigate. The website is broken into five sections: home, vocabulary, teacher support,
home support and resources. They decided to create these five sections because they encompass the areas discussed through the literature, their own experiences and their discussions with parents and colleagues. The home page provides the rationale for why Stephanie and Jacqueline created the website and project. The vocabulary section includes useful documents that incorporate the basics of the French language that includes the phonetic breakdown of letters and words. This portion is helpful for parents and teachers learning the new sounds of the language. The phonetic breakdown will help adults learn how to pronounce the words and make them feel more confident in learning oral language. For the teacher section, they wanted to include a list of resources that addressed the specific Prescribed Learning Outcomes that Core French teachers are currently expected to teach in British Columbia. Through collaboration they provided a variety of activities and ideas to help achieve the Prescribed Learning Outcomes. These ideas will address the use of oral and communicative language skills in the classroom. There are also a variety of cultural activities that will help the children learn about their own culture and French culture. The home support section provides resources for parents to engage in French language learning with their child at home. The activities on this page are useful ideas for parents and children to learn the language together. The ideas are easily accessible for any level of language proficiency. The ideas help parents to reinforce French learning at home as well as build their own language skills and confidence. The activities help families engage together in new language learning. The resource section provides a list of helpful websites and electronic apps for parents, teachers, and students. Stephanie and Jacqueline have evaluated these websites for efficiency and usefulness for developing new French language skills. Many of the ideas
on the website were created collaboratively by Stephanie and Jacqueline. Stephanie’s French Immersion skills were helpful in developing resources for Core French teachers. When Jacqueline had an idea for an activity, Stephanie was able to provide her French skills to adapt it to French. Using both partners’ skill sets helped to create effective resources for non-French speakers.

After creating their website, Stephanie and Jacqueline went back to their literature and began fine-tuning their writing and going more in depth in the research. At this stage they began to focus on the importance of homework and the idea of culture. Jacqueline and Stephanie found that their collaboration has been very successful. Because they worked together they were able to see different perspectives and were able to grow their ideas and learning. They feel their learning and thinking was deepened because of their collaborative relationship. While working in a group can sometimes be challenging, Stephanie and Jacqueline found the process to be more than helpful. Their support for each other throughout the process, as well as their increased learning shows the benefits of working together. Jacqueline and Stephanie learned that different perspectives in a project can help to bring to light ideas on a topic that may not have been thought of if working alone.

This collaborative process also allowed Stephanie and Jacqueline to think critically about how to help foster collaborative relationships between teachers. Throughout the process, Stephanie and Jacqueline found that teaching could sometimes be an isolating profession. When teachers are not confident in their abilities, they are often less likely to seek help from other colleagues for fear of embarrassment. Stephanie and Jacqueline believe that creating positive relationships, or even mentorships, between
French Immersion and Core French teachers would be very beneficial. As they witnessed throughout their project, Stephanie and Jacqueline were both able to learn from each other and provide insight into each other’s teaching practices. One way teachers are able to work collaboratively is through district inquiry projects. This year the Greater Victoria School District has launched a new inquiry topic called Modern Language Learning. Stephanie is part of this inquiry looking at how technology can be used in the classroom to help increase French Oral fluency. Inquiry projects developed by the district that promote additional language learning are a great way for teachers to be involved in collaborative learning with colleagues.

Stephanie and Jacqueline will continue to support each other’s teaching and learning practice. They believe that this is only the beginning of a lifelong professional journey together. They will continue to enhance their website with new ideas and resources as they continue to learn through their personal and professional experiences. They will also continue to share their website and findings with other colleagues. Throughout their careers they hope to collaborate with other teachers to improve support for additional language learning. They would highly recommend that future graduate students and teachers consider working collaboratively on education projects.
Chapter 4

Conclusion and Recommendations

Throughout this project we found many studies that support our thoughts on additional language learning as well as studies that broadened our opinions on how to support parents and teachers in learning French as an additional language.

We feel that in British Columbia there is a lack of emphasis placed on learning French as an additional language compared to other core subjects. Throughout our study, we have found that teachers and parents face many challenges in supporting students learning French as an additional language. French is a subject that is taught either through Immersion Programs beginning in Kindergarten or Core French Programs beginning in Grade 5. Many teachers who teach Grade 5 have no prior background in French and yet they are required to teach the subject. As with parents of French Immersion students, they place their child in this program to give them the advantage of knowing an additional language, and yet they might not be able to help support their child at home.

In the case of Core French teachers, Jacqueline feels that if the British Columbia Ministry of Education requires English teachers to teach Core French that these teachers deserve education and resources to help support them. Firstly, Jacqueline feels that French should be a required subject in all University Education Programs in order for teachers to feel confident in teaching French in their classrooms. While this would be a step in the right direction, not all of the responsibility of learning an additional language should fall onto the Education Programs. Secondly, school districts should provide professional development opportunities for teachers to develop on-going French language skills to help support their language development. Jacqueline believes that it is unrealistic
for teachers to be able to teach Core French without proper training and resources to do so. Finally, the British Columbia Ministry of Education should re-examine the prescribed learning outcomes for Core French programs. Creating an accessible and realistic program for teachers and students would help to address many of the challenges Core French teachers face today. As we have seen through the research in this paper, many Core French teachers are currently not prepared or qualified to teach the outcomes required. In consultation with English track teachers; the Ministry of Education could create a curriculum that meets the needs of both teachers and students. The curriculum should be based on authentic hands-on learning that would help students develop an understanding of the language where they could use their skills in real life situations, such as traveling or communicating. The new draft curriculum is a step in the right direction but it does not address the fundamental issue of teachers lacking the skills necessary to teach Core French. The new curriculum must include specific resources to help support teachers develop French Skills.

Jacqueline and Stephanie have learned throughout their research that support plays a key role in language development. Teachers and parents must work together to create a positive relationship and circle of support for students. This relationship should provide an open line of communication and resources to help support those wanting to learn French. Just as first languages need to be supported at home, additional language learning should also be supported at home. The home learning environment plays a critical role for students of all languages. Having an open-line of communication between teachers and parents will help to develop a positive and supportive environment for families and schools. Developing accessible homework activities that support students
learning in a collaborative way at home will help students build their language skills, develop a positive attitude towards language learning and build their confidence is using their language skills.

We believe that future researchers would benefit from exploring the role of parents of French Immersion children in additional language learning. Research should focus on the importance of the home learning environment as well as parent’s knowledge of the additional language. Future research could also examine the types of activities used to teach Core French programs. It would be interesting to see if teachers use hands-on methods or rely on older and ineffective methods such as fill-in-the-blank worksheets. Many studies that we looked at for French language learning were not from Western Canada. As Western Canada lacks French culture, it would be interesting to learn how this affects French learning at school.

We also feel that Education programs would benefit from increasing French language learning. We understand that it may be difficult to find professors with proficient French to teach the courses, but it would be interesting to see how this would affect future educators’ views on teaching French as an additional language in the classroom.

This project has showed the complexities and importance of French language learning in British Columbia. Stephanie and Jacqueline have learned through this project that there are significant gaps in support for language learning that need to be addressed. For future students to become successful in learning French in the public education system major changes need to be made to Core French programs. Parent education about the importance of home support should be made a priority at the beginning of Immersion
Programs and Kindergarten registration. We hope that future researchers continue to explore the intricacies of French language learning in British Columbia.
Bibliography


