

Exploring the Potential for Informal Language Instruction in the French Immersion

Context

by

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B.A, University of British Columbia, 1997

B.Ed., University of British Columbia, 1998

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Faculty of Education, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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University of Victoria

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Abstract

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French Immersion teachers are constantly frustrated by both the amount of and skill level of their students when using French in informal situations. My research attempts to answer: How can informal language be taught in the French Immersion context? Will teaching informal language in a systematic way in a Classroom Community of Practice improve the frequency of second language (L2) use by FI students in peer-to-peer interactions? Can we teach students to actually speak French – to spontaneously communicate in informal situations? Informal language is the language used in conversations and interactions beyond academic topics or class time such as conversations between students during group work, on field trips and during games and play time. Is it through pedagogical approaches or by developing a clearer understanding of the community of practice necessary for a successful language classroom? This study is an action research study conducted in Victoria, British Columbia with a team of 5 teachers, including the researcher as co-participant. Grounded theory was used to analyze the findings and the themes of ‘spaces’ are presented using creative nonfiction to recount the participants’ stories. The study concludes that it is the importance of the teacher as member of both the classroom community and as member of a community of educators that is critical to success.

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Acknowledgments

Thank you to all my friends and family who have supported me to accomplish my goals and dreams. A special thank you to the following people:

My supervisory committee. Dr. Kathy Sanford, my supervisor: Thank you for pushing me to realise my own potential and for giving me the freedom to explore and learn in creative ways that I didn't think possible at this level.

Drs. Alison Preece and Darlene Clover: Thank you for your time, your support and your valuable feedback to this research.

My co-participants. Charlotte, Gabe, Julie and Katherine: Thank you for giving your time and lending your extensive teaching and learning knowledge to this study. This research would not have been possible, or as fun, without you.

My fellow graduate students. Thank you for your inspiration and wisdom along this journey. A special thank you to Sarah Bonsor-Kurki, Tiejia Thomas and Lauren Frodsham: Thank you for making the time to talk through problems, get together for nerd parties and read over my work. You are all amazing!

Dedication

For my students: past, present and future.

You inspire me to be a life-long learner.

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

I never learned the words to O Canada in English until I was an adult. I celebrated La Fête de la Ste. Catherine each winter with toffee and I participated in “Carnaval” wearing a red belt, building ice sculptures of paper cups. I thought that Canadian history had only occurred in Quebec and Ontario (besides Louis Riel). I conjugated verbs ad nauseam and I proudly aced most of my weekly dictées. I was told at least 100 times a day to speak French to my classmates although I rarely did out of earshot from my teachers. I am bilingual, or am I? I can still easily speak and understand “classroom pidgin”, “franglais” (or “Frenghish” if you prefer), or “Immersion French”.

I now work in French...but can I order a coffee in a café in Paris and chat with my waiter? Can our students in French Immersion? And if not, can we change this?

The French Immersion (FI) program Integrated Resource Package (IRP) mandated for use in British Columbia states in its introduction that the end goal of French Immersion is for students to be able to function bilingually in society: to be able to work and study in either a bilingual or francophone milieu. “Un élève ayant terminé son éducation secondaire au programme d’immersion en français est à même de poursuivre ses études dans un établissement postsecondaire francophone ou d’accepter un emploi dans un milieu de travail francophone ou bilingue” (IRP, Français Language Seconde, Immersion M-7, p. 1). Through the process of being an Immersion student, it is stated that students will explore feelings, values, and knowledge in a milieu that values

diversity, francophone culture, and language, and respects the values and cultural diversity of the student. To be permitted eventually to pursue these goals of study and work in a second language requires that students have a command of the French language that would be categorized as ‘advanced’ by institutions and workplaces. While this has been the goal of FI since its creation in the late 1960s (Rebuffot, 1993), it is unclear as to whether or not ‘native-like fluency’ is a reality for FI students who complete the program.

Many researchers (Cummins, 2000; Hammerly, 1989; Lapkin, 1984; Mannavarayan, 2002; Pawley, 1985; Pellerin & Hammerly, 1986; Tarone & Swain, 1995; Turnbull & Lapkin, 1998) have found that the level of French spoken by graduates of the FI program does not qualify them as bilingual. Moreover many students graduate with a significant amount of errors in their oral French when assessed through oral exams and assessments. After almost 40 years in which to polish and to improve the FI program in Canada, is it disconcerting to me that many graduates of FI are still speaking the inter-language of their childhood years. Is this a critical fault that can be remediated or a reality that must be accepted as the inevitable consequence of learning a language in a minority language situation? Although students learn to answer academic questions and respond in French during formal situations, French Immersion students struggle to simply ‘chat’ in French.

Throughout most of the past 30 years, I have been involved in some manner in the Canadian movement for bilingualism. I was a member of the lead class in Dauphin, Manitoba during the 1970s with my enrollment in Kindergarten in the FI program at the age of 4 years old In Manitoba. I completed my middle school and high school studies in

British Columbia and received my bilingual diploma. Ten years ago, after a seven year hiatus from using the French language in any formal situation, I began teaching in the FI program. Today, one of the major questions that drives my professional development, my personal reflection, and ultimately my research is: How do we improve FI instruction so that students learn to more easily and more correctly communicate orally in informal situations in French? My research asks: (1) How can informal language be taught in the French Immersion context in Western Canada? (2) Will teaching informal language in a systematic way in a Classroom Community of Practice improve the frequency of second language (L2) use by FI students in peer-to-peer interactions? (3) Can we teach students to actually **speak** French – to spontaneously communicate in informal situations?

“Native-like fluency” needs to be able to extend beyond the classroom. A student coming from the FI program should be able to order a coffee in a Parisian café as easily as he or she can answer a question in a grade 7 science class. When I leave the classroom, whether I am simply going to the staffroom for lunch or as far as visiting a friend in France, I struggle. I never learned to simply “speak” French. I never learned to chat, converse, and joke in my second language. When I first read the description of sociolinguistic competence, I was sure that it was an area in which I fail. Faced with feelings of inadequacy and stupidity, I invariably switch to English when I’m stuck. I used to dread attending workshops with francophones and was sure for years that at any point someone would discover my terrible secret: I can’t actually speak French. My imagination runs wild at these moments as I picture the accusatory finger pointed in my direction, the laughing and jeering of the ‘real’ French speakers causing me to walk, head bowed in shame, from the room.

I have learned through discussions with fellow FI grads that this terrible nightmare of expulsion from the French speaking community is more common than not. I have known teachers who will not even attend French workshops for fear of discovery and others who attend yet never lend their voices to the discussion. There are pivotal moments during my teaching career that have lent their support to my ‘expulsion theory’ – the theory that eventually someone will discover that I can’t actually speak French. During a national French Immersion conference several years ago, the keynote speaker spoke of the “mauvaise vague” (terrible wave) of poor French speakers who were now teaching in the Immersion program. The popularity of the program has caused, especially in the west of Canada, a shortage of French Immersion teachers. Many former Immersion kids such as me are now teachers in the program. The keynote speaker spoke of the danger of poor speakers corrupting the language and teaching children to continue making grave errors by modelling this incorrect French. I sat listening to this speaker and looking around the room at many heads nodding in agreement, I waited for someone to quietly ask me to leave.

In this study, I used action research methodology to work with a group of 5 teachers from the same middle school, including myself as a co-participant, to examine informal French use in FI classrooms. Over a period of 8 weeks, we met bi-weekly to discuss pedagogical approaches as well as the broader questions of bilingualism and the structure of the FI program. I used grounded theory throughout to analyze the data collected during focus group meetings, from participant journals and final individual interviews. My findings are presented using creative nonfiction and are organized by the themes of ‘spaces’ that emerged from that data. My study attempts to answer the pedagogical

questions surrounding informal French instruction and examines space in terms of language expectations and authenticity. My analysis highlights the importance of communities of practice for students and teachers as inextricably linked to success in informal French use in a FI program.

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

What is French Immersion?

French Immersion (FI) grew from the anglophone response to the ‘quiet revolution’ in Quebec during the 1960s. Up until this point, according to Rebuffot (1993), the French language had taken a back seat to English in the majority francophone province. Due to this political and social movement, French was quickly becoming, both culturally and institutionally, the language of business and government in Quebec. This in turn caused Anglophones in the province to become concerned about their children’s futures. For French-Canadians, language and culture were inextricably linked. Immersed in the centre of an English speaking country, they needed to preserve this culture or become assimilated into North American anglo-society. For the Anglophones in Quebec, they had to either change with the times or leave the province to re-establish themselves in English Canada. Those who wished to remain in Quebec began searching for ways to educate their children in a manner in which they would be able to eventually compete with their francophone neighbours. Anglophone parents in Quebec had been sending their children to French Catholic schools as a temporary answer as these were the only schools willingly accepting Anglophone children in their French programs. However, when the numbers of protestant children in Catholic schools was rising to an uncomfortable level for Catholic school authorities, a new solution had to be found. The answer became the birth of FI as we know it in Canada: a French education, beginning at the age of five for non-French-speaking children (Rebuffot, 1993).

During the 1960s, the French language was becoming entrenched and institutionalised at the federal level as well as in *la belle province*. The *Official Languages Act*, adopted in 1969, made both French and English the official languages of Canada, giving them equal status. This move shook up Anglophone parents outside of Quebec and motivated some of them to begin to consider the future of their unilingual children in this new bilingual space. This political climate not only gave birth to the FI program but also helped foster its growth, both socially and in terms of the financial resources available to support it, outside of Quebec.

My own beginnings in the FI program in Manitoba began as a result of this political climate of change and opportunity in Canada. Jeanne-Marie Mannavarán (2002) refers to two separate studies investigating parent motivations for placing their child in FI: “Dube (1993) suggests that it is the socio-economic advantages of such an education that appeals the most. Lewis (1986) also finds that among the reasons for pursuing a bilingual education, better education and job opportunities rated the highest” (p. 33). For my own parents, a better education was the prime motivation. But if students, me included, do not attain a native-like fluency, most are unable to study or work in French. This causes one to question: is the idea of FI flawed or is it the teaching of FI that needs to be improved? Unlike the original students of the program in Montreal, FI students in most of the rest of Canada do not have French-speaking peers with whom to practise. As the program is designed for anglophone families, most students do not have French speaking parents or relative with whom to practise. Their only exposure to the language is limited to the confines of their school. Contemporarily, with the growing popularity of dual-track schools, students’ French language exposure is further limited to their classroom

environment. Dual-track schools are FI schools where the program shares a school building with the regular English stream program. In a single-track school, announcements, assemblies and other communications occurring outside the boundaries of the classroom occur in French. In a dual-track school, most out-of-class interaction occurs in English so that the entire school can understand the message. This dual-track model further limits exposure to French and has an impact on the oral language skills of students. “Expressive skills tend to develop better in schools where the entire school is a French immersion centre rather than in schools where just one stream is taught through French” (Cummins, 2000, p. 3).

How Should We Teach in the FI Program?

Experiential Learning.

French Immersion was conceived as an experiential French learning situation. The program was modeled on research concerning first language acquisition and was intended to parallel the manner in which a child learns a language at home. In this way, children would learn to negotiate and build meaning as they attempted to communicate with their teachers and peers in their second language (L2). This form of bilingualism is termed as additive bilingualism: “Additive bilingualism refers to situations where both languages are supported and develop in parallel. Subtractive situations, in contrast, are characterized by a gradual loss of the first language as a result of increasing mastery and use of the second language” (Bialystok, 1991, p. 175). The additive bilingualism enrichment principle explains why bilingual students demonstrate a greater sensitivity to linguistic meanings than their monolingual counterparts. The bilingual student becomes more conscious of language norms and adds the second language to their repertory of skills at no cost to their first language. This occurs especially when they are encouraged to

compare and contrast the two languages (Cummins, 2000). Lambert was one of the first researchers to challenge the idea that second language learning had a negative impact on a student's first language. "Theoretically, Lambert challenged the hydraulic view of bilingualism: Fluency in one language will naturally diminish fluency in another language. Instead, he proposed that gains in one language actually transfer to another language such that bilingualism could be achieved without compromise" (Taylor, 2011, p. 260).

Unlike Core French Programs (of the past and present), language would not be taught through the *grammar-translation method* in which teachers "explain rules and students memorize" (Hammerly, 1989, p.4). Rebuffot (1993) describes a similar teaching methodology as *analytical teaching*: a focus on analysis, repetition, and correct use of language. However, it appears as though these types of approaches have resulted in most L2 learners having little to no productive skills: oral or written communication abilities. Research demonstrates that FI students struggle particularly with productive skills even when their receptive skills (reading and listening) are comparable to francophone students at the same age (Cummins, 2000; Genesee, 1987).

Rebuffot (1993) lists the characteristics of *experiential teaching* as:

1. An accent on interesting and important subjects and themes.
2. Students not asked to do grammar exercises but instead focus on significant activities and research projects.
3. An authentic use of language in the form of conversations and communication activities which have a goal.
4. Priority given to the transmission of the message and the ease of communication.

5. Priority given to the usage of the language in diverse social interaction contexts (p. 189).¹

Today, this philosophy of experiential learning is echoed in the French Immersion Integrated Resource Package in British Columbia, as well as in the 1993 research document published by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism and Human Rights: *L'art du langage en immersion française – document de recherché*. The introduction to *L'art du langage* (1993) states that language acquisition will be a creative and constructive process where the student will subconsciously organise the language along the rules that will allow him or her to understand and build sentences (*L'art du langage*, 1993, p. 13). This point of view supports the notion that learners are autonomous and able to actively construct meaning. It is believed that this construction of meaning happens through providing engaging student experiences, which ultimately results in L2 skill and vocabulary growth developing more naturally than would occur with the grammar-translation model.

Communities of Practice.

A community of practice model provides the framework for this approach to language learning. There are many defining characteristics of a community of practice; however, John Hellerman (2008) sees five concepts as relevant and integral to a community of practice in the second language learning context. I have summarized his concepts below and I have italicized my own comments and connections.

¹ Translation.

1. Mutual engagement: Individuals develop an understanding of their roles and are able to modify and adjust these roles as their level of participation in activities and tasks change.

The movement for students and teachers between the role of expert and novice is important in second language learning classrooms for if the teacher is the only one considered to be the expert, students will be less likely to correct and assist their peers in both formal and informal speaking situations.

2. Joint enterprise: More apparent in adult second language contexts, language learners realise a common goal of language acquisition.

This may explain, in part, the success of Late Immersion programs where children have had input and choice in joining the language community as opposed to Early Immersion students who are there due to parent choice.

3. Shared repertoire: The shared language and developing repertoire of that language is significant in second language classrooms.

It is this shared repertoire that can also produce fossilised errors in French Immersion students due to the accepted understanding of flawed speech by the community. The errors such as “J’ai allé” instead of “Je suis allé” are both used and understood by the participants in the class, therefore, there is less motivation to self-correct. I believe that this notion of shared repertoire can also be used to teach informal language, as in my experience, when one or two students start using expressions and informal language to interact within the classroom, peers begin to mimic and use the same expressions in their own language production. Students and teachers in FI begin to ‘speak immersion’ – develop a FI code that

is understood by members of the community but not by French speakers from outside the FI experience (Lyster, 1987).

4. Reification and participation: Hellerman indicates that groups with either no shared history or those with a long ritualistic shared history may lack the participatory drive necessary to function as a community of practice. He sees teacher lessons and structures as an important part of the process that sets students up for either success or failure at dialectic tasks.

This sense of participation is important to my study as, in my experience, the critical mass of students in a FI classroom must be willing to speak French in informal situations; without critical mass, students who are trying to interact in French will eventually give up and respond to peers in English.

5. Economies of meaning: The concept that both the novice members of the community as well as the experts have a valuable place in the learning process is a key element to the French Immersion classroom. *The entrenched attitude of many FI teachers that it is impossible to correct every error because of the pupil to teacher ratio does not give respect or weight to the novice members' value and ability to co-construct and negotiate meaning. The importance of shared economies of meaning is that all members have equal value and contribute to the co-construction of language within the community. Both the student and teacher can adopt the role of expert or novice dependant on the individual situation.*

The community of practice model makes the experiential approach possible. If a teacher wishes to follow Rebuffot's model and plan "significant activities" and promote an "authentic use of language" (Rebuffot, p. 189), the respect for the students' ability to

construct meaning and the value of their place as novices within the community are paramount. Communities of practice empower students with regards to their second language acquisition that grammar-translation models do not; it is only in sharing power between the experts and the novices that language will develop beyond the limited repetition and regurgitation that occurs in some language learning contexts. When the novices are empowered, they begin to play with the language and the amount of second language used in informal situations will increase because they will be less afraid to “say it wrong” and their classmates will be more comfortable correcting them which helps lessen error fossilisation. Cummins defines empowerment in a second language classroom as “*the collaborative creation of power*. Students in these empowering classroom contexts know that their voices will be heard and respected. Schooling amplifies rather than silences their power of self-expression” (Cummins, 2009, p. 263).

A Counterbalanced Approach: Content and Form.

The experiential approach was to be realised through the same curricular areas as the English stream (*L’art du langage, 2003*). Paralleling the English program in all areas such as Science, Social Studies, and Mathematics, it was argued that students in FI would not lose any content knowledge compared to their monolingual peers (Rebuffot, 1993). The content of subject areas would provide a rich array of topics in which FI students could acquire their L2 through experiential learning. The intention was that through discovery, collaborative learning and investigation, students would acquire knowledge and be immersed in situations where they could practise and improve their L2 skills with their peers as well as with their teachers. Students are expected not only to answer their teacher in French when asked a direct question but also to interact in all situations,

formal and informal, in French with the teacher and their peers. When I was a student in the FI program, the ‘experience’ portion of experiential learning was limited to academic contexts such as science or social studies content and knowledge. I wonder, then, whether the same theory could apply to informal situations? The design of the program calls for informal language use, however, the structured approach to L2 acquisition used in formal situations is not, in my experience, extended to informal situations. Can we extend the definition of ‘experience’ in the FI context beyond Social Studies and Science and include soccer matches, board games, and playtime on outdoor equipment?

Roy Lyster (2007) proposed a form-focussed approach, both proactive and reactive, to language teaching in the FI context. The rich experiences and content-based lessons developed during periods of Social Studies or Science should provide the setting for focussed grammar instruction. He believes it is important to teach the form of language during these experiences rather than as a separate entity existing only during French language arts class. Stopping during content area reading and writing to draw student attention to grammar rules and norms such as conjugation and agreement is more effective than a separate grammar lesson on the same point. Lyster and Ranta’s (1997) research demonstrated that teachers should encourage meta-cognition and that using strategies such as elicitation (the teacher elicits the self-correction by asking guiding questions) and metalinguistic feedback (posing questions as to the form of the language error and having students self-correct) were the most effective ways to have students correct grammatical errors. His work provides a structure in which educators can both fulfill the experiential approach model while still teaching the grammar necessary for language skill improvement. In proactive form-focussed teaching, instructional

interventions are designed to heighten learner awareness of language and draw the student's attention explicitly to grammar and language forms during all classes where the language of instruction is French (including core subject areas such as Math, Science and Social Studies). In reactive form-focussed teaching, the teacher helps students say what they want to say by the use of corrective strategies such as elicitation, metalinguistic feedback and clarification requests. This will encourage students to self-correct and manage their own language development. The second motivation to self-correct stems from what the student wishes to communicate and the first corrective strategies from what the teacher feels students must learn in order to advance the learners' language skills. Lyster's (2007) work draws on Canale and Swain's (1980) communicative competences in order to explain the complexity of language competence. These competencies are presented in the table below.

Table 1: Communicative Competences

Strategic competence: The ability to employ strategies to sustain language production despite L2 gaps
Discourse competence: The ability to produce language cohesively and coherently
Grammatical competence: The knowledge of the L2 code and the ability to use it
Sociolinguistic competence: The ability to produce L2 following the socially appropriate norms for the language

Co-construction of Language.

Like Hellerman (2008), Lyster (2004) holds a socio-constructivist view of learning, believing that knowledge is co-created in social groups. The co-creation of knowledge in the FI context can be both its strength and its weakness. Lyster, as well as many critics of the FI program, note that FI students have excellent strategic

competences. However, they make sociolinguistic errors and have a limited lexicon on which to draw. Like a small child learning language, FI students often overextend the meaning of one word and apply it to any unknown words belonging to a similar schema. Students in FI often overextend the word “chose” (thing) to replace any noun unknown to them in French. “Peux-tu me passer *la chose* qui est là?” The word “chose” in this sentence may indicate anything from a pencil to a skateboard. The student speaking knows what they are trying to communicate and the student or teacher understands within the context of the conversation. The language is understandable yet remains imprecise. “Immersion students are L2 speakers who are relatively fluent and effective communicators but non-targetlike in terms of grammatical structure and non-idiomatic in their lexical choices” (Lyster, 2007, p.16). Since the majority of their practice of the L2 is with peers making similar errors, these errors tend to fossilize. Lyster (2007) argues that students have excellent strategic competence and reasonable grammatical competence, yet they struggle with discourse competence and especially sociolinguistic competence. FI students rarely have command of any idiomatic expressions, vernacular features and informal variants in large part because they have never been modelled or taught. Lyster’s proposal for counterbalanced, form-focussed intervention strives to address these language gaps during significant content-driven experiences. A Science lesson, for example, would become the ‘text’ in which the teacher makes explicit grammar rules and teaches new vocabulary and structures. The grammar lessons derive from what the students are struggling with in the moment and not from a pre-made series of grammar lessons. Students are motivated to learn in this situation as they need the grammar and vocabulary being learned to immediately make sense and share their

understanding on the subject being studied. Engaging in their own meta-talk through activities requiring skills such as negotiation and inferencing is more effective than traditional decontextualized paper tasks (Lyster, 2007; Atay and Kurt, 2006).

When I reflect back on my own time in FI, I had teachers who understood the experiential model to differing degrees; however, many employed the grammar-translation approach. These teachers were French speaking teachers, but not necessarily teachers with second language acquisition training. I was able to learn and discuss content areas in French and possessed good strategic and grammatical competencies yet I continued to have poor sociolinguistic competence as well as discourse competence. As a French Immersion teacher, I am comfortable teaching subject areas in my second language although it does require me to look up specific vocabulary. However, after 10 years of teaching similar grade levels, I do so less frequently as my L2 lexicon has improved through teaching the same themes year after year. I have reconnected with my 17 year-old self and can function quite comfortably in the classroom... as long as we are in academic situations. My own French remains to be challenged in two contexts: My interactions with Francophones outside the classroom and my ability to help students with their informal French.

Improving Instruction in French Immersion

Critics of French Immersion.

Critics of the experiential model in FI focus their critique around one ‘critical’ problem in productive skills such as writing and speaking: the fossilisation of errors throughout the FI years leading to a “classroom pidgin – a hybrid between limited French vocabulary and mostly English structure” (Hammerly, 1989, p. 20). Although Hammerly

takes a most extreme position on FI language productive skills (i.e., he feels that the program is an undisputed failure), his book clearly highlights the types of errors that FI students make. He cites the Spilka study (1979) which found that only 52 percent of all the sentences spoken by Grade 6 FI students were correct and that there was no evidence of progress in speech accuracy between grades 1 and 6 (Hammerly, 1989). Catherine Pawley's (1985) research also demonstrates that approximately 50% of students graduating from the FI programs studied scored only a 2 or 2+ on the Foreign Service Interview Test. This test places the majority of students who took the exam at a level where their spoken abilities in French are adequate for routine social situations and limited professional use. This would hardly qualify as success in meeting the stated goal of FI: bilingualism. The idea of "correctness" and "error" and even "bilingualism" need to be examined before we can agree or disagree with Hammerly. If bilingualism is 'perfect second language' production similar to native speakers, does the level of 'correctness' correspond also? As a native speaker of English, I make grammatical errors in my speech as do most of the population. Anyone who has had to take an English language proficiency test can attest to our poor grammar. Every time someone I know says, "I seen it," I cringe. Even the grammar check on my computer has underlined the word denoting an error. Does this make my friend less than proficient at his own language? Do we criticise native speakers for their errors? When Francophones insert English words into their French sentences, is this considered 'incorrect'? Yet when Immersion students do the same, it denotes imperfection and flawed use of the language? If we are going to define bilingualism as perfect command over a second language, then are any of us bilingual? Or is bilingualism the ability to both produce and understand

both languages with enough facility that it does not hamper or impact comprehension and speech? Following the first definition, I am not bilingual; following the second definition, I am bilingual. Which bilingualism is the goal of French Immersion students? The answer colours all teaching and research in this area. In Roy and Galiev's (2011) study on bilingualism in FI, they found that their participants (middle school aged students) "defined bilingualism in terms of being 'truly bilingual' or 'bilingual, yes, but not like the francophones.'" (p. 365). They state that because of this notion that bilingualism need to be perfect in or to qualify as 'truly' bilingual, L2 learners often see themselves as failures.

The interviews in Hammerly's (1989) book are what initially sparked both my emotions and my ideas. Hammerly interviewed students who had recently graduated from the FI program. The interviews were spontaneous in nature and students were asked questions about topics such as their experiences in FI and their future plans. When someone is interviewed, a certain degree of ease, spontaneous production of language, and informal skills are required. Had these students been quizzed on the current period of history they were learning about in Social Studies, they would have probably fared better. When I read the interviews, I also recognised the errors I continue to make – the same errors that francophone colleagues have corrected me on when speaking over lunch in the staffroom. For me, the question then becomes: If I am making these errors, if I feel uncomfortable in social situations in French, how can I expect my students to speak French with their peers in class? And of equal import, how can I teach them the vocabulary and structure necessary to facilitate their informal productive language if I am challenged in this area? I believe that Lyster's approach may be the way.

Language Instruction Models.

If we, as teachers, can design lessons to teach sociolinguistic and discourse competences – perhaps students leaving our programs will be less disadvantaged than I was. Once again I agree with Lyster (2007), proactive intervention is not enough. We must also be reactive to the students' needs and desires to communicate. We need to be open enough to listen to what they want to say and be flexible enough to change our own predetermined direction in order to meet their needs. When I was taught idiomatic expressions at various points through my education, they were taught in the analytical or grammar-translation manner. We learned expressions, we memorized them, and we reproduced them in worksheets and tests. I remember none of these expressions now. What we need to do for students is to locate and teach them expressions that they want to learn, and then provide them with the opportunities to use them in both oral and written contexts. I have taught in the FI program for 12 years and each class communicates the same frustrations with oral language production as I experience in my own life. They want to try and communicate but they lack the competence to do so effectively and then feel uncomfortable, stupid, incapable... and they switch to English when they are stuck.

Sousa (1995) lists four ways that teachers can help learners practice to improve performance:

1. Start by selecting the smallest amount of material that will have maximum meaning for the learner
2. Model the application process step by step

3. Insist that the practice occur in their presence over a short period of time while the student is focussing on the learning
4. Watch the practice and provide the students with prompt and specific feedback on what variable needs to be altered to correct and enhance performance (p. 44).

Ewart and Straw's (2001) research adds another layer to considerations for the improvement of oral productive skills. Their study of two FI classrooms found that a classroom which combined both written (print) and oral literacies produced a higher level and frequency of L2 usage by students. When designing the lesson sequences for teaching informal language, attention needs to be given to print as well as oral language. Oral and written language need to support each other in order to develop a rich linguistic experience for students. Like the experiential learning model, this is frequently addressed in formal academic situations and less so in reference to informal language.

Selecting the Experience.

As formal language needs to arise from observations of student need, so does informal language instruction. In my experience, students in FI are much more motivated to learn the informal language necessary to participate in the activities of their own choosing than the activities deemed useful by the teacher. I taught a grade 4/5 class two years ago who were very interested in playing soccer. They knew the words in French for 'soccer ball' and 'net' but they lacked the language to authentically "play" soccer. I asked the students to play a game of soccer in English, being mindful of what they were saying to each other and what they couldn't equally express in French. We built a classroom lexicon of soccer terms and expressions which reached past basic vocabulary to include interjections such as "to me!" and "oh no!" This exercise is what has inspired

this research. Once the students learned how to play in French, they were willing to do so and their oral French improved. One student, who was not a particularly keen player, taught me a second lesson: Students must have the power over their own language development. This student was becoming a true “novice” in our community of practice but hadn’t quite realised that, as a novice, she had a respected and valuable place to construct language until the following situation occurred.

In the grammar-translation model, teachers are the keepers of “correct knowledge” and students are the empty vessels. My student asked me how to say that she was “cactussing the goal”. She explained that they had decided to call it “cactussing” if you were just standing around being useless as a cactus in the game. She wanted the ‘correct’ way to express this in French. It lead me to ask the question, “Who has the power to manipulate their second language?” In our first language, we play with words, develop expressions and slang. We have the power to do so without fear of repercussion because we feel we have the right to our own language. Do we have the same rights in our second language? I asked my student how she would say this in French and she immediately produced the following sentence: “Je cactussais le but.” Being that the original sentence was based on creative play with language, her French sentence is equally correct, but only if we are allowing students to have power over their L2 as we allow them when using their L1. After this, the same student began to “play” with language more often and her French language production in general increased with her confidence. A few months later, when creating a journal in role as an early immigrant to Canada, she asked me the following question, “Est-ce que je peux théer mon papier?” (Can I tea my paper?). She wanted to make her project look old and with a lack of a way

to explain the process, she conjugated the noun “thé” (tea) as a French verb. If she had not felt the right to play with language, she would have simply asked the question in English - which would also have been grammatically incorrect since “tea” is no more a verb in English than in French!

Teaching Informal French.

There has been very little research done on the subject of teaching informal French to FI students. The majority of FI research is focussed on reading and writing production, language production skill level, and approaches for improving academic experiences. Tarone and Swain’s (1995) research is one of the only studies focussing specifically on informal language production in a FI context. They recognise that students lack the vernacular for peer-peer informal conversation creating a diglossia in which, “a second language is the superordinate, formal language variety, and the native language is reserved for use in informal social interactions” (p. 166). They suggest three possible answers, the first being that it is impossible to correct or fix the problem. They then suggest that either students get involved in opportunities to speak with francophone students in order to learn ‘correct’ vernacular from authentic speakers (through exchanges and/or online interactions), or that the teacher could consult with francophone adolescents on how they would say an informal expression ‘correctly’. They point out that Lyster himself is pessimistic about the actual result of these approaches. Tarone and Swain (1995) question whether either of these approaches result in increased usage of L2 for peer-peer interactions. I feel that the power issue is of central importance to this question as I don’t think students who question their place as novices in the language

learning community would have any more confidence with which to use and learn the language when faced with peers who were francophone than they do within their own language community. In fact, many students in my own experience are even more self-conscious and self-deprecating in these situations because they feel the power dynamic between the experts (francophone peers) and themselves as novices who know less. Following Hellerman's (2008) point about reification and participation, until a community of practice was formed between the Francophones and the French Immersion students, there would be little movement forward or true participation in dialectic tasks. This would only be possible if the two groups were in contact over a sufficient period of time to build a relationship based on trust. Teachers must also allow themselves to both become a member of the community and see their students as valued members of the community if there is to be any growth or change in the area of second language production and skill improvement.

Both approaches suggested by Tarone and Swain (1995) continue to rely on an 'outside expert' in language: a Francophone. Will students be more motivated to use the L2 for peer-peer interaction if they are taught the expressions they seek and are given permission to create their own? A grade 4 student in my class last year exclaimed at one point during a work period to a peer, "OMD!" explaining to his peer, when the peer seemed confused, "O, mon dieu!" He was playing with his knowledge and construct of new English slang and applied it to his French. If we allow such play, will the students build the skills and confidence to practice? The students in my class used this student's expression from that point on – seeking out times to use it because they found it both appropriate and useful for their needs in the community and it was fun (they use OMG –

Oh my god – all the time when interacting in English). They also gave credit to the student who had proposed it, which boosted the student's confidence and provoked him to try to use French to interact more often. The acceptance of the community of his cleverness and value changed his own attitude and participation rate.

Classroom Community.

The *experiential model* is only successful in a classroom community which functions as an effective community of practice, one which values respect, as well as the contributions of all of its members. A recurring problem in FI is the difficulty in motivating students to interact with each other in French without a teacher present. For the student, this requires a sense of safety in which they feel comfortable enough to take risks with their language rather than 'default' to English out of self-consciousness or frustration. This community of respect is also paramount when encouraging students to correct their peers. Lyster (2004) points out that the majority of French spoken by FI students occurs between peers who possess a similar level of French. This is the precise reason that many errors become fossilised over time; students not only make the same mistakes without correction but also hear peers doing the same, solidifying the language pattern even further. For students to correct each other effectively, they must be shown how to do so respectfully. Without teacher modelling, students often feel as if their peers are 'attacking' them and the exercise of peer self-monitoring becomes negated by issues of friendship, conflict, and hurt. Teachers need to teach students to give respectful feedback if this is to function correctly and not detract from the students' sense of community. Students must understand and embrace their position as novices, defined by

communities of practice, who have valuable skills and knowledge to contribute to their peers. A classroom community which fosters these skills becomes a low-risk environment for L2 learning, and teaching peers to coach peers significantly increases the amount of times a student is reminded *not* to make certain errors daily. Following my student's introduction of 'OMD' to the class vernacular, the rest of the students began to use it. This, I feel, was because the classroom community was such that language play was acceptable and encouraged and therefore became a low-risk rather than high-risk activity.

Motivation.

The motivation for this research stemmed from the fact that, in my experience as a FI teacher, FI students are reluctant to speak French during informal situations. Tarone and Swain (1995) wonder if FI students simply find it cognitively more challenging and so they switch to English out of frustration. This does not explain the phenomena outlined in their paper which is summarized below:

1. If it is more difficult, why do studies indicate that younger children use their L2 more frequently than older students? If ease of communication is the issue, wouldn't older students find it less cognitively taxing than younger ones?
2. FI students frequently use French to interact during academic situations requiring a more complex vocabulary and syntax and switch to English for social interactions which require a less sophisticated vocabulary and syntax even during the same conversation.

Tarone and Swain (1995) state that the vernacular spoken by students is in contrast to the academic language used in lessons and is therefore not appropriate for conversations with the teacher. A graduate of the FI program interviewed in their paper stated that the FI program did not teach her the language she needed to interact with her peers making the distinction between how different speech is in informal situations (vernacular, slang) and formal situations (academic language, language used to interact with adults). Following Tarone and Swain's views, it is perhaps a lack of instruction on the part of the teacher that contributes to a lack of motivation to speak French in informal situations. Tarone and Swain describe these informal situations as less complex yet the student they interviewed simply described the two types of language as 'different'. Tarone and Swain's research had a significant impact on the design of my study; if informal situations are significantly different in terms of language vocabulary and syntax, should we not then better teach students how to interact more effectively in these situations? If something is difficult for our students, should we not attempt to remedy the situation?

If difficulty of vocabulary and syntax in informal French contributes to a lack of motivation for student use, socio-emotional factors are equally important. "Our students have discovered through their experience that not all voices are equally welcomed, equally valued, equally influential, neither in the adult world nor most of all among their fellow students" (Finders, 1997). Social roles in middle school have a significant impact on student behaviors. If students in a FI class feel that they will be judged by their peers for speaking French, they will use English instead. In my experience, this sense of judgment in FI classes can be either about the quality of a peer's French or if students perceived by their peers as 'leaders' do not use French in informal situations, the majority

of the other students will not either. In Do and Schallert's (2004) research, students identified themselves as *talkers*, *midtalkers* and *nontalkers*. The *nontalkers* and *midtalkers* identified feelings of anxiety and low self-esteem in class discussions. They expressed worries that their ideas would not be accepted by their peers or were not "good enough". The added pressure of now 'talking' in a second language adds further anxiety to the equation when not only your ideas may be questioned but also your ability to express yourself. The alleviation of this anxiety and worry further supports my proposal of the necessity for communities of practice to function effectively in the second language classroom.

Schmakel's (2008) research on motivation in early adolescent learners provides another piece of the puzzle. Students indicated in her research that fun, interest, and use of student input were all integral to student motivation at the grade 7 level. Students suggested strategies such as playing games to learn new concepts and listening to student ideas and input. If FI teachers were equally "cognizant of the element of fun in the early adolescent classroom" (Schmakel, 2008, p.743) when designing lessons and activities to improve informal French, student motivation might increase. Treating informal French with the same attention as is given to formal French and valuing it as a 'different', and perhaps equally complex language, combined with a 'fun' classroom community where students feel safe and have input may be the answer.

Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

Action Research

The ongoing problem of poor productive skill and lack of effort or ability to use informal French by students is a concern shared by all French Immersion teachers. It is a topic often revisited at meetings and workshops. This shared concern and frustration with the issue made it perfect for an action research project as I was asking teachers to explore and examine their own practices. Hansen and Brady (2011) describe the benefit of the use of action research in educational situations in comparison to traditional types of research: “More traditional types of research tend to be conducted in such a way that the results may be generalized to a broad range of contexts and variables. Action research, in contrast, focusses on specific situations and localized solutions” (p. 83). Because my research is specifically targeting informal French use, in a FI context, at a middle school level, I felt the action research model was an appropriate approach as I was not attempting to make generalizations about second language learning outside these specific circumstances. The individuality of teachers and teaching styles is another key reason I chose this methodology for my study. Bridget Somekh (2008) describes action research as research “from inside [the] setting carried out by the participants themselves” (p. 89). The nature of teaching is so inextricably linked with the personality and skills of the teacher that Action Research is a useful tool for change. Each teacher involved could adapt and change his/her own practice in personalized ways while sharing insights and findings with colleagues, which could be taken up by each participating teacher in his/her own style and manner.

Vivekananda-Schmidt (2011) describes the Action Research cycle as the ongoing cycle where participants diagnose/identify the issue, plan action, take action, and evaluate action leading to new diagnoses of the issue (p.153). This cyclical approach to collaborative planning allowed teachers to build on their existing abilities and skills while learning new approaches and techniques from others attempting to meet the same ends. Although the original issue was identified by me at the outset of the research – how do we teach informal French and encourage the use of French in informal situations? – the subsequent issues that arose in this research were driven by the participants. This action-reflection cycle is similar to what most teachers do on a daily basis in their professional context but it was formalized in this study: teach a lesson, reflect on its efficacy, and modify the lesson for the next time based on these reflections. Beyond lesson planning, the teacher-participants in this study examined other contributing issues such as beliefs about informal French use, student motivation, teacher expectations of student French use and the examination of ‘spaces’ in which students and teachers function in FI classrooms and learning communities.

When participating in an action research project with other educators, a community of practice begins to evolve. Wenger (2004) describes a community of practice as, “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (p.1). A community of practice, like an action research team, seeks to improve practice through dialogue and the sharing of experiences. It was my belief that for this research to be successful, the teacher participants as well as the students in each individual class needed to function as a community of practice. As a class, students need to learn from each other in a safe and

supportive atmosphere in order to improve their L2. As an action research group, the teacher-participants need to function in the same manner.

During the past 6 years, I have had the opportunity to participate in action research through district and provincial initiatives. My involvement in Victoria School Board's "Learning Initiatives" has given me experience as both an action research team member and facilitator through my position of 0.1 Literacy/Numeracy mentor. I conducted my own research following a model based on the one described by Vivekananda-Schmidt (2011) and my own experience working as participant and facilitator in action research teams.

Action Research Model:

1. *Diagnose/Identify the Issue:* At the first focus-group meeting, I led the group by providing the following questions for discussion:
 - How often do you observe your students using French during spontaneous informal situations?
 - What are your expectations of the level of their French skills in this area?
 - On a 4 point scale, where do you feel the majority of your students are currently:
 - 1 – Below your expectations
 - 2 – Minimally meeting your expectations
 - 3 – Meeting your expectation
 - 4 – Exceeding your expectations
 - What do you currently do as part of your practice to encourage/assist/teach students to communicate in spontaneous informal situations?
 - Do you believe that it is possible to teach students the informal language skills required to improve in this area? Why or why not?
2. *Plan Action:* Share lessons, strategies and observations during focus-group meetings. Based on the reflections and discussions, plan new lesson sequences and approaches to try to improve informal French use in individual classrooms.

These lesson sequences varied from participant to participant allowing for the individuality of each teacher and class to be valued and respected.

3. *Take Action:* Participants returned to their classrooms to try new ideas, lessons and sequences. Participants kept notes in their personal journals to bring back to the next focus-group meeting.
4. *Evaluate Action:* Lessons, ideas and experiences were shared at subsequent meetings. Participants shared their observations on the effectiveness of the pedagogical approaches they attempted but also the reflections they had made on broader issues such as student motivation and the quantity and quality of French spoken by their students.

The evaluation portion of the action research cycle provided the framework and the content to develop and identify new issues which arose in the participants' experiences and the cycle continued.

I participated as a co-participant with my action research team throughout the study, following the cycle described above in the same manner as the other members of the group. I shared my role as co-participant with the role of researcher by taking notes during the focus group meetings and prompting participants to provide more detail where needed. I also made a concerted effort to facilitate the meetings in a manner that would encourage equal participation by all members. The aspect of community has been integral through my experiences with action research because unless the participants feel safe and respected in the community of learners, teacher participants become hesitant to share and question for fear of negative reactions from their peers. Similar to a middle school classroom, when the environment seems high-risk, progress and dialogue are

hampered. Also similar to a classroom, it is impossible to insist that participants be respectful and supportive; however, I discussed the issue with the participants in our first meeting, as I do with my students, in a hope of setting the expectations of the environment from the outset. At each meeting, I attempted to create a space where each participant had the opportunity to speak and share his/her ideas without allowing any participant, including myself, to monopolize the discussion.

Participants.

Because this research question focuses on whether or not informal language can be taught, and if it can, how to approach teaching the vernacular, my participant group consisted of teachers rather than students. As previously noted, as part of the action research team, I participated as both researcher and co-participant. Our action research team consisted of 5 teachers (including myself), teaching in the FI context in Victoria, BC, from both early and late Immersion streams. My co-participants were teaching in the Middle School context (grades 6-8) so that the developmental stage of all of the students was similar. I chose to include both Early Immersion (entry in kindergarten) and Late Immersion (entry at grade 6) in order to provide insight into commonalities and differences between these two subsets of French Immersion. I had originally wanted to work with teachers from a variety of schools in the Victoria School District; however, I decided to restrict my study to one school for multiple reasons. Since an action research study required multiple meetings over a two month period, I felt it would be easier for teachers to coordinate their schedules when it was possible to meet at lunch hour or after school at their own workplace. This removed the complication of finding a communal

meeting place that would be convenient for everyone involved and I also felt it would allow the participants to feel more comfortable in the group as their co-participants were colleagues with whom they were already working. The challenge of involving participants who had already established a relationship with each other was that preconceived ideas and impressions of each other were present from the beginning as well as the entrenched roles normally taken by each participant in a meeting situation. I was mindful of these limitations and made an effort to facilitate the meetings in a manner that would respect existing relationships but also foster the development of new connections and roles. Another challenge in involving participants with whom I had a preexisting relationship, was in respecting researcher/participant boundaries; I sent the request for participants to all of the FI staff at my school by email. I respected those who did not respond and only approached colleagues in person who had responded to my email indicating that they were possibly interested in participating in my study. I answered potential participants' questions and made a conscious effort to not coerce or try to convince them to participate based on our pre-existing relationship. This relationship was a benefit in some ways during our focus group meetings as the teachers involved were already used to participating in meetings and workshops led by me in my role as the literacy/numeracy support teacher at our school. The challenge of this shared history was maintaining during focus group meetings a co-participant role in which I equally shared talk time with the other members of the group. This shift between expert and novice in our community was challenging at times for me as I was accustomed to taking the expert role when presenting workshops to the same group of teachers who now were participants in my study.

My co-participants also reflected a mix of both francophone teachers and teachers who have learned French through either French Immersion or alternative educational second language programs. Like the inclusion of both Early and Late Immersion programs for comparative purposes, including both francophone and anglophone teachers, provided a variety of personal experiences and L2 knowledge to enrich our discussions. The participants in this study all indicated in their consent form that they wished to be identified by name in the study for the purposes of this thesis. Co-participants were asked to attend focus group meetings, keep personal journals and participate in a final interview as part of this study.

Table 2: Participants

Participant	Grade level at the time of the study	Program	French language background
Allison (researcher/co-participant)	Grade 7	Early Immersion	Anglophone, French Immersion
Charlotte	Grade 6	Early Immersion	Anglophone, French as a second language programs, England
Julie	Grade 6	Late Immersion	Francophone parent, learned French at home
Katherine	Grade 8	Early/Late Immersion combined class	Anglophone, French as a second language programs, Canada
Gabe	Grade 7	Early/Late Immersion combined class	Anglophone, French Immersion

This research has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Board of the University of Victoria as well as the Victoria School Board and the principal of the middle school in which the research was conducted.

Methods

Research Journals.

As a co-participant and researcher, I kept a dialectical notebook as a research journal throughout the process. My co-participants were also asked to keep a dialectical notebook throughout the research process in order to record their reflections and ideas. Dialectical notebooks are personal reflective journals which focus on not only taking notes of what a participant learns or believes but encourages the participant to revisit and reflect on previous thoughts. It is a “continuing effort to review [the] meanings we are making in order to see further what they mean. The means we have of doing [this] are – meanings. The dialectical notebook keeps all our meanings handy” (Berthoff, 1987, p. 12). They are particularly conducive to action research because they provide the framework for recording personal reflections and building meaning from those reflections by encouraging participants to reread previous entries and comment on their own writing.

Co-participants were encouraged to include a range of data in their dialectical notebooks including observations, reflections, found items, contextual information and teaching plans. Co-participants brought their journals to our group meetings to facilitate discussion and conversation as we planned and reflected. Co-participants were asked at the end of the study if they wished to volunteer portions or their entire journal as data and all willingly did so. Co-participants were informed at the outset that only selections from their notebook that they wish to share would be included in the data. I wanted participants to feel comfortable being honest and open in their dialectical notebooks

without the pressure of feeling that they were writing for an audience other than themselves. As part of my own dialectical notebook, I recorded reflections and ideas that arose during my group meetings.

Focus Group Meetings.

The study took place over an 8-week period during May and June of 2011. I waited until the second half of the school year so that my co-participants had the opportunity to get to know their students in order to facilitate both our initial data/questions and to be able to determine an appropriate individual context for informal language learning based on student interests in each class. During the first meeting, I supplied the guiding questions which we used to engage with the first 2 steps of the action research cycle: diagnose/identify the issue and plan action. Co-participants returned to their classrooms to complete the third step in the cycle: take action. They tried the lessons and ideas discussed and recorded their ideas and reflections in their personal journals. They returned to subsequent meetings with their reflections and stories and as a group we completed step 3 of the cycle: evaluate action. As the participants shared their stories, we began to identify and diagnose new issues (Step 1) leading us back through the action research cycle. We met as a group every two weeks throughout the eight weeks of this portion of the study. Notes were taken by me during the group meetings as well as by some of co-participants. Although the goal was to have all co-participants present at each focus group meeting, this was not always possible due to both personal and professional circumstances. This was challenging as group members indicated feeling 'out of the loop' when they had missed a meeting and although I

summarized the discussion for them, it did not replace actual participation in the conversations held.

Individual Interviews.

At the end of the study, individual interviews were conducted with the participants. These interviews were unstructured; I prepared a list of questions to act as a guide for the interview but allowed the participant to guide the direction of the interview when possible. The participants were asked some of the pre-prepared questions but not all. As the participant talked, I asked further questions to attempt to draw out detail or clarify participant responses. Hansen and Brady (2011) describe the benefit of this type of interview: “The unstructured interview which has open-ended questions, is flexible, and more conversational in tone. The advantage here is that the research subjects get to express themselves freely which can yield a rich set of data” (pp. 87-88). This flexibility allowed each participant to more organically share the ideas and reflections that they personally valued as they shared their stories. I felt that a structured interview, with each participant being asked the exact same questions would have biased the data to value my own preconceived views and reflections. The interviews ranged in length from 14 to 24 minutes. The final interviews included some (but was not limited to) the following questions:

1. Since our first meeting, have you seen a change in your students’ use and skill level of French in spontaneous informal situations? Why do you think that is?
2. Have your expectations changed with respect to the level of your students’ French skills in this area?

3. Which pedagogical approaches and/or strategies, if any, have you felt were successful in teaching students informal French? Why do you feel they were effective?
4. What considerations, if any, should French Immersion teachers be aware of when teaching at a middle school level in either Early or Late French Immersion classrooms?

One of the challenges of this study was that because the focus groups occurred at the end of a school year, individual interviews happened over the next 3 months as the participants were busy with holiday and family commitments. This impacted the data because due to the time elapsed between the focus group meetings and the interviews, the reflections were more generalized. The benefit of this more generalized reflection was that participants not only had time to think about the study, but they also had started a new school year and could put into context the implications of the study and the long-term impact it was having on their pedagogy.

Representation of Findings.

“The truth about stories is that that is all we are.”
(King, 2003, p. 2)

Once upon a year, during a normal day and an average lesson, a student asked me, “Do you have a story for everything?” I paused, thrown completely off guard as I’d been about to launch into a witty little anecdotal tale in order to better get across a point I was making about something abstract and academic.

“Uhhh, ya, I do.”

But I really do always have a story. It really is, as King (2003) so deftly puts, “that that’s all we are” (p.2). Throughout the course of this research, it has been the

collections of stories that have formed the data, inspired the participants and created a community of practice between the members of my action research team. Stories move us. Stories capture our interest like nothing else. Stories tweak a portion of our brains or our hearts that cries out, “Yes! Me Too!”

“For the reader [or listener] the story speaks the truth, [and] creates a verisimilitude for the phenomenon examined” (Hopper et al., 2008, p.228). I have chosen to share my findings from this research through creative nonfiction. According to Sparkes (2002), creative nonfiction is often chosen by authors when they wish to “provide a forceful and coherent rendering of events that appeals to aesthetic criteria (among others) rather than simply reporting the ‘dry facts’” (p.6). I wanted my findings to be accurate but also enjoyable to read and conducive to connectivity between the researcher/writer of this paper and the reader. The second reason I have chosen creative nonfiction to represent my findings is that I wished to give each participant their own voice. According to Agar (1995) one aspect of creative nonfiction is that of *character development* where “the writer centers the story on a few rounded characters, real and complicated characters that the reader gets to know” (p. 118). Through the direct quotes from each interview merged with participant words from journal entries and notes from focus group meetings, I hope that the reader of my findings begins to get to know my participants as each has a distinct and individual voice. This voice emerges not only in their particular ways of speaking but also in the themes that arise from the stories they tell. I felt it was important that these voices were heard in my findings. Creative nonfiction seemed a perfect fit for an action research study as the participants’ voices were key in every step of the process; it was their stories and their ideas that guided the

study and directed each focus group meeting. The participants were also sent copies of this paper so that they could read and suggest any changes to their stories in an effort to provide the reader with the most accurate portrayal of each participant as is possible to achieve in text. I have also included a found poem as the topic of 'French Spaces' because I needed a representation that allowed me to "reveal a voice that is both the researcher's and the participant[s]" (Hopper et al. 2008, p. 225). This particular theme arose in many contexts throughout the study and I felt this theme saturation could only be felt by the reader when the individual voices were woven together as one.

Analysis.

This research lent itself to using grounded theory as a tool for analysis as the original questions of not only *how* one might teach informal French in a French Immersion context but *if* it was possible were purposefully broad and open-ended. Juliet Corbin, in her chapter on Grounded Theory in Somekh and Lewin (2008), states that grounded theory "is not only a reconstruction of events, but also a co-construction between researcher and participants" (p.49). As our action research team met, theories and ideas evolved through the participants' discussions. I took note in my own journal of the themes as they arose and reflected on these themes between meetings. The participants took each new set of 'data' back to their own classrooms, reworked their lessons and attempted new sequences and techniques that they had previously not considered or were unaware of. As the action research cycle was repeated, categories and beliefs began to emerge for all of the participants including the researcher. I then used axial coding, "the process of weaving the data back together around groups of concepts," (Corbin, 2005, p.

50) to define the main categories from our focus group discussions and participant journals. Corbin defines theoretical sampling as: “data gathering directed by emerging concepts” (Corbin, 2005, p. 51) in order to create theory. I found that this approach to data collection enabled me to more easily facilitate each focus group discussion. The memos and notes I had made during previous discussions were used as prompts. My participants would then revisit or revise their opinions based on new experiences that had occurred in their classrooms since our last meeting. My findings were in an ever-evolving state of being as the study progressed; my participants took the beliefs, ideas and lessons from each other and morphed them into new beliefs, ideas and lessons. This cycle was repeated at each focus group discussion until a common vocabulary and perspective presented itself. My study reached a saturation point, “the point in the research process when no new concepts emerge from data,” (Corbin, 2005, p.5) during the interviews when I saw that further interview questions produced only reiterations of previously explored concepts. After the interviews were completed, I chose the stories I would include in my findings. I coded these stories and organized them by themes. I then returned to the research data (journals, interviews and notes) and looked for further stories that supported the emerging theories. This process of story selection, coding and categorizing was repeated three times before the final draft was made.

One of the challenges to using grounded theory as a research methodology is that it is “a lengthy and time-consuming process and a researcher must be willing to live with ambiguity until the analytic story begins to fall into place” (Corbin, 2005, p. 5). Because my initial study took place over a period of 8 weeks, I was able to analyse the data between each focus group meeting and allow the ambiguity of the themes to exist without

feeling any pressure to make meaning from them immediately. I shared my reflections and possible themes with my co-participants at each meeting which provided space for all the participants to reflect and share their personal interpretations. Between the focus group meetings and the final interviews, I had time to re-examine the focus group notes and the personal journals and continue to code my data. The process of theory development took place over a period of 7 months between the initial focus group meeting and the final analysis of the data. The themes of 'spaces', which are presented in my findings, were further analysed and the theory of the importance of communities of practice for both teachers and students emerged.

Chapter 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

“The most significant intellectual achievement is not so much in problem solving, but in question posing,” (Eisner, 2001, reprinted in Flinders and Thorton, 2004, p.301)

My original research questions, *“How can informal language be taught in the French Immersion Context in Western Canada? Will teaching informal language in a systematic way in a Classroom Community of Practice improve the frequency of second language (L2) use by FI students in peer-to-peer interactions? Can we teach students to actually **speak** French – to spontaneously communicate in informal situations?”* formed the starting place for our inquiry as an action research team. My questions led to more questions. Questioning became the axis around which our team rotated and reflected. As we interacted as members of our own community of practice, each question led to a collaborative effort to find answers. My findings illustrate the complexity of the human experience and the interconnectivity of events. The stories told by my participants create a greater narrative that surpasses simple lesson planning: our stories highlight the importance of space. I began this research with the firm belief that informal French **can** be taught; what interested me was the **how**. The **how** that I was seeking went beyond questioning and developing **what** lesson plans and sequences would work in isolation; I was interested in whether or not there was a magic combination of qualities that would ensure success in the teaching of informal French, regardless of individual teachers or students involved. Although there is never one perfect solution, the theme of spaces emerged from my research data. Through these shared spaces, I developed a better

understanding of French Immersion and the search for bilingualism. My findings are presented in a dialectical journal format. The left column includes participant stories directly quoted from their individual interviews and personal journals. In cases where the participant's meaning needs clarification, I have added details from the focus group notes. In the right column are my thoughts and reflections. This column is an attempt to make meaning for the reader, draw the reader's attention to important ideas that contributed to theory development and to facilitate the reader making connections between the data and the literature review. The findings are grouped by the themes which emerged during my coding and analysis.

Themes:

Structured Spaces: Extrinsic Motivation
 Structured Spaces: Intrinsic Motivation
 Safe Spaces... Fun Spaces
 Authentic Spaces
 French Spaces
 Space for Assessment
 Space for Teachers

I chose to introduce the findings with Gabe's journal entry as it very succinctly describes the problem which originally prompted my research.

Table 3: Findings - Introduction

Participant Stories	My Reflections
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Introduction: The Problem

Gabe's Story

“Advisory today – I was keen to see if any of the kids would speak French in this 15 minutes window of unstructured time (which I purposely left as such).

Nope.

Not a single student spoke in French with their friends. The only French that was student directed (i.e. The student chose to speak French) was a girl who came to offer me a cupcake.

Thoughts: **What is the root of the problem here?**

Causes as to why the kids aren't speaking French:

- Simply don't want to
- They live in an English reality/city/continent
- It's easier to talk to friends in English
- They aren't forced to speak French
- They haven't had a taste of speaking French for the mere pleasure of it”

(Gabe, Personal Journal).

“Not a single student spoke in French with their friends.” It is a sentence spoken by FI teachers everywhere. It is this same utterance that led to my research. “What is the root of the problem?” That is truly the question I am posing in this research. It is also the question that provided common ground for our Action research team.

Structured Space: Extrinsic Motivation

FI teachers have tried a multitude of systems to ‘force’ students to speak French.

These systems are the ‘carrot and stick’ of French immersion programs since I was a student. Is it possible to encourage students to speak French by establishing a shared routine based on extrinsic motivation?

Table 4: Findings - Structured Space: Extrinsic Motivation

<p><u>Cha-ching!</u> Charlotte’s story:</p> <p>“The children get 10 billets (tickets) - a strip of billets, on a Monday morning and I’m very, very conscientious that that is the very first thing they get on Monday morning because if, the minute they don’t have a billet in their hand, they can’t cha-ching, and you lose the magic bubble... We do the tirage (draw) last thing on a Friday afternoon, literally, we collect all the tickets and while they’re tidying the classroom but I don’t actually pull the tickets until the bell is about to go because the moment I pull the tickets, and I’ve recycled all the other tickets, there’s nothing to keep them speaking French... So I deliberately ... delay pulling out the tickets... It’s like currency... if somebody speaks in</p>	<p>There are a multitude of versions of the <i>billet</i> (ticket) system in FI classrooms. The basic premise behind these systems is that students take <i>billets</i> from each other when they hear a classmate speaking English as a classroom tax or payment for the English speaking transgression.</p> <p>The majority of conversations concerning motivational structures for FI classrooms resemble Charlotte’s story of her <i>cha-chings</i>.</p>
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<p>English [and] if it constitutes a whole sentence [they must give up a ticket]... For example, I count “whatever” as a whole sentence because it encompasses an entire idea and it is in English; but if it’s... ‘Tu a laissé ta book par terre’... that’s not a whole sentence so that’s not a cha-ching. If for any reason I’m going to switch into English, give them some complex instruction or talk about fire alarms or earthquake drills or anything like that, I will say... ‘I’m speaking in English now and you can ask me questions in English’ and so I will announce...the start and end of the English speaking bubble in the classroom. And basically they self-regulate. They cha-ching each other all week for speaking English. They exchange the tickets and whatever you’ve got left by Friday afternoon... you write your name on the back, they all go into the bag and I pull out 4 and they win chocolate. Not enormous chocolate! [In the other] class – they get massive ones!! Mine are just little Halloween candies, they just get two of them...</p> <p>We have a chart up on the board so if</p>	<p>Cha-ching: Picture the sound of a cash register opening or of comic book character with dollar signs in his eyes and you will have an approximation of the proper intonation of the expression ‘cha-ching!’</p> <p>The benefit of these systems is the agreed upon norm within the classroom community. The members regulate the system alleviating the need for the teacher to function as the sole expert in the group.</p>
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<p>anyone gets cha-chinged and they don't have any tickets left, their name is written on the board and who they owe it to, and then when they get their billets the following week, they pay it back. I'm amazed at how effective it is... This is the third year I've used it, and the only time it didn't work well was when I had a 7/8 split and the 8s thought they were too cool... It was more of a grade 7 thing, and those were kids I'd had the year before as well, and so they were, well... 'we've grown out of it now' and so, I'd find it hard to keep them... but with grade 6s, it works brilliantly." (Charlotte, interview, focus group notes)</p>	<p>The difficulty with the system is when students don't buy in. Hellerman's (2008) point about <i>reification and participation</i> in a Community of Practice is a key for success; if students do not believe in the system, they will not participate and the system itself ceases to function. His sense of ritualistic history explains, in part, Charlotte's experience of her students having "grown out of it" by upper grades.</p>
<p><u>Haricot!</u> My story – a response to Charlotte</p> <p>I had a system that worked brilliantly with grade 4 – 6s that I tried with my 7s. The same idea as tickets but instead we used beans (haricots). The beans were particularly handy to me since it did not require photocopying, cutting and distributing</p>	

every Monday morning. The kids kept the beans in a little container and they followed the same rules as the cha-chinging that Charlotte does although instead, they would yell, “Haricot!” The one issue I had with a zero-sum system like the tickets was that there were only a finite amount possible to gain and you gained only at the loss of another. When I had done this system successfully (for years before teaching grade 7 again) the students could gain more beans from my jar if they either corrected a friend or provided a missing/unknown word. It was fantastic! The goal of students working as a community to help each other was spectacular! All of a sudden instead of busting your friend for not speaking French and taking payment from them, you could correct them and still win a bean. My reward was to give them ‘fake money’ at the end of term which they would spend in a class garage sale. Every week we would record the amount of beans each student had amassed and they would restart at 5 on Monday. The amounts recorded also counted towards their French grade. The garage sale consisted of students bringing old books and toys in to sell to their friends. It actually amazed me that students would not only have enough old stuff to sell, but that purchasing these items would provide such a great motivation for others. Sigh... but those were the days before serious hormones took over my students! When I tried it with grade 7s... their reaction was similar to what Charlotte experienced: No thanks! This is not cool.

(Allison, Personal journal, focus group notes)

Does this count for Gabes?

Gabe’s story:

“Looking at the report card, it would be nice if there was more freedom to include oral

When my *haricot* system failed, I

tried to simply outline how much

spoken French would count towards

their report cards and that they would

<p>French AND informal French. But with only 3 spots for comments, it's somewhat limiting." I tried to put names on the board and dock them Gabes for speaking English. The students could recoup the Gabes by staying in at recess and speaking French. I found this worked to a certain degree but it was not the answer. But what is the answer? FI teachers have been trying since my days in FI to cajole, coerce or threaten us into speaking French. These reward systems work for younger students but for those in older grades, when a friend's opinion is much more important to you than a teacher's, what can be done?</p> <p>(Gabe, personal journal, focus group notes)</p>	<p>not be able to have an 'A' if they did not speak French in 'French situations'. This worked for a select few but many just shrugged their shoulders at me and moved on.</p> <p>When the 'carrot' – <i>billets, chachings and haricots</i>, doesn't work... try the 'stick' – lower grades. In part what motivated my research was to move past these systems and try to discover a way in which a deeper sense of intrinsic motivation could be triggered in students with the hope that we could not only improve the amount of French spoken in informal situations but also the quality of French.</p>
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Structured Space: Intrinsic Motivation

The carrot and stick techniques which focus on extrinsic motivation of students provide one piece of the puzzle yet fall short in creating a classroom community where students speak French for French's sake. There is little to no intrinsic motivation built into these systems and therefore the amount of French spoken rarely transcends the walls of the classroom. Through structured informal French lessons, my participants attempted

to create a space where students wanted to speak French without receiving a prize or a punishment besides the simple joy of speaking French with their peers.

Table 5: Findings - Structured Space: Intrinsic Motivation

<p><u>Too young?</u> Gabe's story</p> <p>“Are middle school students too young to appreciate the joy of speaking French informally? Just as I wish I had kept up with my piano since I learned as a kid, maybe students don't recognize the gift that they've acquired after growing up learning the language.</p> <p>Do FI [French Immersion] students enjoy the experience of speaking French? Reading in French? If we as teachers are always coming up with new ways to motivate them to speak French in class, then can we honestly say that they enjoy speaking French? Is FI in schools a false reality? A façade? It is an artificial context though isn't it?”</p> <p>(Gabe, personal journal)</p>	<p>Perhaps it is an “artificial context” which leads to the question, what is an authentic context in a FI setting?</p> <p>Can we, as teachers, choose activities within the classroom that are more authentic and will those choices motivate students?</p>
<p><u>Casino Royale</u> Charlotte's story:</p> <p>“Card games were “it” in my classroom. Kids wanted to play cards all the time... all these</p>	<p>Charlotte has chosen an experience</p>

<p>card games! ... and I have this thing where they have to speak French as they come in the door in the morning. They can choose not to come in until the bell, if they want to speak English, they can stay out in the corridor and speak English but if they choose to be in my classroom, they have to speak French.” It was during these times that I had noticed that many of them enjoyed playing cards. “So I set it up so they had to teach somebody a new card game... They had to find somebody who couldn’t play one of the card games they liked to play and they had to teach them the card game.” No one was allowed to play solitaire, so every member of the class was engaged with someone. “While they were teaching the card game, they had to write down all the words they didn’t know [in] French.” We came back together as a class and brainstormed all the words and expressions that they didn’t know and made a master list. “I gave each child three or four words, just randomly chosen, that they had to go off and research. How do you say those words or phrases in the context of a card</p>	<p>that connects to her students as they are already interested in card games. Rebuffot (1993) proposed using significant activities that promote an authentic use of language. The use of card games as an activity values informal French and also provides a means in which to address the gaps in sociolinguistic competence as described by Canale and Swain (1980). Students were not only taught the vocabulary needed to identify cards but also the language necessary to correctly interact in a social context.</p> <p>Language during this activity was co-constructed with students allowing them to function as both expert and novice in the language community.</p>
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<p>game? And some of them were really hard to find; it was a good exercise in dictionary skills because if you just look up “clubs”, for example, in a dictionary, it’s not going to give you “trèfle” straight away. You need to...discover what that is in that context of a card game.... Some of them didn’t know how to look for context within a dictionary so we were able to bring that lesson in... There were the odd words that we just couldn’t find a translation for, that were for specific games, very specific words that they used and they just couldn’t find a satisfactory translation for them... We asked various francophone people what they would use in that context and for some of them it just came back to actually just using that word.... I had typed up my original list and photocopied onto an OHT and we had that up and we wrote the translations next to them. All the children had to write down the completed list of all the words and phrases and all the translations.” The students retyped their own versions of the list to ensure that each student had the experience of writing the words</p>	<p>The act of working through the context of unknown words and expressions provided Charlotte with a way to teach language form within the content area as proposed by Lyster (2004). In this case, the content is card games rather than a Social Studies or Science topic, however, the students are still improving their grammatical competence through their construction of vocabulary lists as they are consciously improving their knowledge of the L2 code.</p> <p>Charlotte has the students write their own copies of the list to assist them in further learning and retaining the vocabulary necessary as proposed by Ewart and Straw’s (2001) research on the connection of print and oral</p>
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<p>out more than once to better learn this new vocabulary. “We had a series of lessons where we would have 20 minutes of our normal French lesson and then the last 20 minutes they were allowed to play card games as long as they only spoke French. They were very, very motivated to do this – they thought it was a fantastic thing to be able to do in their French lesson - far more exciting than grammar... and they were really good... and they would use the lists! They would actually put the list out on the table at the beginning to remind them of what the words were... What they hadn’t realised is that I was sneakily [listening in during unstructured times] because they would play the card games in the morning, before school started in my classroom... because they had to speak French in my classroom... [I could see that] they had internalized them - they were using them [on their own time] as well... We did it over three weeks... [and] it was a very effective way of using something they were already doing, doing something they thought was fun, to build a whole</p>	<p>literacies.</p> <p>Sousa’s (1995) list of four ways to improve student performance are all present in Charlotte’s lesson sequence:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A small amount of material is chosen: card games specifically 2. Teacher modelling: how to both find the unknown vocabulary and how to use it in context 3. Practice over a short period of time: students practiced during every French class over a period of a few weeks 4. Provide timely feedback: Charlotte monitored student French use during the process and provided immediate feedback
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<p>bank of vocabulary. It's not necessarily going to be terribly useful to them unless they work in a casino but you know... it added to the Frenchness of the classroom... One of the main things that prompted me to do it was that they were playing cards in my classroom in the morning and they didn't have the language to play cards in French... It fed back into the circle... there were those kids then, in the morning, sitting playing cards in French quite happily because they had the vocabulary. So, to me, it was very satisfactory. I liked the whole ... beginning, middle and end and where it led to." I really enjoyed how it helped with difficult friendships. Since they were not permitted to play solitaire, they began inviting each other in to play. Beyond the boundary of the French lesson, the card games became an important element of community building in our classroom. It strengthened friendships and gave those students with weaker interpersonal skills a way to interact more easily. Whether they still remember that vocabulary, I don't know... but I think most of</p>	<p>(Sousa, 1995, p. 44)</p> <p>Hellerman's (2008) list of characteristics of a community of practice are consistent with this lesson sequence.</p> <p>The activity of playing cards holds <i>mutual engagement</i> for the students and is a <i>joint enterprise</i> with a <i>shared repertoire of language</i> and encourages <i>participation</i> by the members of the community as they were not permitted to play in isolation. Because the students all had access to the vocabulary and French expression lists, the novice members of the community (the</p>
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<p>them will remember some of it, so... I would certainly, if a similar craze arises in my class again... do the same thing again.”</p> <p>(Charlotte, interview, focus group notes)</p>	<p>students) could also function as experts as they played the games, correcting and assisting their classmates to improve their informal French (<i>economies of meaning</i>).</p>
<p><u>RISK</u> Allison’s story:</p> <p>I think that they may, for the first time, be enjoying a French activity! (I held my breath as I even dared to think these thoughts, let alone voice them aloud.) I had this group of boys... awkward, hoodie wearing, unmotivated boys. I had tried to threaten them with lower grade – whatever – I had tried to bribe them with free time or candy – whatever... nothing could spark an interest in speaking French. I had thought to use Charlotte’s idea from our focus group to teach the students to play cards in French... but these boys didn’t want to play cards any more than they wanted to do homework. “RISK? Could we play RISK?” one of them had asked. I personally love RISK so I could appreciate the</p>	<p>If I had insisted that this group of boys play cards, when they did not find it appealing, I would have lost the notions of <i>mutual engagement</i> and <i>joint enterprise</i> in the community of practice. For these students to</p>

<p>enthusiasm with which he asked. We decided on yes and one boy was charged with bringing in the game the next day. It really threw off my lesson plan though – how could I teach the vocabulary systematically as I’d planned and have the whole class playing the same game if the boys wanted to play a game of which I owned no copies and that was ridiculously expensive to run out and buy for the rest of the class that evening. Sigh... I would make it work. The next morning I got the rest of the class on their way to playing cards in French, and then went over to help the boys set up their “French experience” of playing RISK. Luckily enough, the instructions AND the board were bilingual so we used the instruction manual as a French-English dictionary to pull out the words they needed to actually play in French and not the Franglais they had started with before I could come over to help. Before my intervention, they sounded a bit like this: “Ok, je vais attack ton territory en Asia.” “Oh no! ce n’est pas fair! Get your own territory!” (Ouch! Miserable franglais fail!!) I sat with them</p>	<p>fully engage in the activity, they needed to be able to give input. Because they chose a game they loved, they were more personally invested in the activity and were motivated to speak French throughout the times they played RISK. They were motivated to <i>participate</i> fully.</p> <p><i>Economies of meaning:</i> The boys adjusted their roles within the community once I had provided the support with their vocabulary. When</p>
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for about 20 minutes, doggedly repeating their français sentences in French and having them repeat after me. It even took some convincing for them to use the French continent names, which were written on the game board, instead of the English ones they knew well. I sat with them as their personal secretary, taking note of each technical word they didn't know and needed to know, producing for them the list they had created orally during the 20 minutes I had joined them. They played all morning. I actually let them out of their math lesson just to allow them a bit more time to play – RISK is a very long game! I could hear them helping each other, reminding each other to speak French... I had never seen these particular boys so motivated. They asked me again to play a couple of weeks later. They played RISK every second Friday for two months and I can safely say, it was the ONLY time they made an effort to speak French, without nagging, all year. And the best part? Their skills improved!

On the very last day of class, one of the

left on their own with the list we had created, they took turns in the role of expert – coaching each other and reminding the groups to not only speak French but to speak as correctly as they could.

<p>boys presented me with a gift certificate to a local games shop in town. He told me that maybe I could buy my own copy of RISK with it so that my future students could learn French in such a fun way.</p> <p>(Allison, personal journal and focus group notes)</p>	
<p><u>Bubble talk</u> Julie's story:</p> <p>“LUN 30 mai</p> <p>Français: petit jeu pour après le lunch; nous avons joué à « Bubble Talk² »</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Démonstration + explain the game +exercises 2. Teams of three with postcards + some English bubble cards (10 min) 3. Go around and check out what they came up with. Some are hilarious! Hand out slips with empty bubbles (x6 per kid) <p>Niveau 1 – not inspired? Translate a few cards</p> <p>Niveau 2 – skip the cards, make statements for the postcards you have in front of you.</p>	<p>It is interesting to note that because all the members of the action research team are bilingual, focus group meetings and personal journals were done in both languages such as this example of Julie's. The teachers</p>

² *Bubble Talk* is a board game where players are asked to match up funny speech bubbles to photos in an effort to produce the funniest match judged by the group

<p>Niveau 3 – ah ha! Be creative. Invent your own one liners</p> <p>4. Mark their work... get them to correct (rewrite)</p> <p>The ‘good copies’ will be used by other students later, so they need to be legible.</p> <p>They loVed it! Mais, (hélas!) ils n’ont pas pratiqué parlé en faisant cet exercice. Juste écrit. Bof! C’est un début. Next round will have them reading other’s cards, placing them and reporting back to the class (en français) about their reasoning.”</p> <p>(Julie, personal journal)</p>	<p>would switch between French and English mid-sentence. While being interviewed, I noticed that participants made a particular effort at times to continue in English rather than slip in to French which did not happen in the more informal focus group meetings.</p>
<p><u>Discutez!</u> Katherine’s story:</p> <p>“I’m not teaching English to my class next year, well they don’t have English since I’m teaching a different level [Late Immersion, grade 7]; but even if they did, I wouldn’t want to [teach them English] because I think it does change the tone [of the class].” When they get used to interacting with you in English, during English class, they</p>	

have a harder time remembering to speak French to you in other times! Especially if the ‘other times’ are unstructured like *flex block* (independent work block) or *advisory (middle school – first 20 minute block of the day with a homeroom teacher)*. “I [will] have a lot time with my homeroom so I want to foster that environment of, ‘this is a safe place to try out your informal French.’ [I want them] to be silly with the language and enjoy the language rather than just using it for academic purposes... One idea I was thinking of is have a conversation day once a week where... they’ve generated some ideas of topics they’re interested in [discussing] and then [brainstorming vocabulary that they’ll need].” I have tried French book clubs in the past but they “were not very successful because they said they couldn’t express their thoughts well enough... [it was] too superficial.” I want to make the topics “something interesting to them that they could use in everyday interactions.” It might be a good idea to give them time to journal first so that it gives them time to think on a

Like Charlotte, Katherine values informal French as important to improving student productive skills – not all content needs to come from academic coursework. She is interested in finding out what the community members (the students) wish to discuss to encourage *participation* and a sense of *joint enterprise*.

Students are aware that they struggle in discourse competency. Gabe’s question about whether or not students do not use French with their

<p>personal level before sharing with the class.</p> <p>“Maybe [then they can share their ideas on] the <i>who</i>, the <i>what</i>, the <i>why</i>, the <i>how</i>... and they will all go off and have time to find the vocabulary. We share it, they make a class list, they share it, typ[e] it up, maybe making questions with it or something, and then have discussions using those words.... [My goal is] that they’re using these words over and over but they’re also recognising that they are making this effort...I was thinking of having different groups each month so they are talking with everybody in the class... [to] break down the barriers... and then the comfort level [will] just keep growing. So I think, hopefully, that will work.” I liked how Charlotte had the students making the lists and driving the discussion and I want to provide my kids with time to discuss but support them as much as possible so that they feel confident enough to participate. “That’s my goal.”</p> <p>(Katherine, interview, personal journal, focus group notes)</p>	<p>peers because it is “easier to talk to friends in English” is a common theme in FI classrooms. Rather than allow the notion of ‘difficulty’ to hold her back, Katherine plans to build in scaffolding and support so that students feel they can discuss meaningful topics in their L2. Like the card games, Lyster’s (2007) notion of form-focussed instruction is present in this lesson sequence plan: draw attention to how language is constructed within a significant content-driven activity.</p> <p>The teacher participants of this study also functioned as a community of practice, building new ideas from each other’s stories. This interaction became increasingly more evident as the study progressed.</p>
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Allez! Allez!

Julie's story:

“I'm teaching grade 6 and it's late French Immersion so my experience so far with these students is that they are very keen. They are very happy to be there and they want to learn so they're ready to try things. Of course, there are some students who struggle and, um, I'm still wondering what they're doing there. They're probably there wondering the same thing so, although they are struggling, they're still keen to try those few sentences or those few words that they do know. I think when they grow up a little more in grade 7 or grade 8, you know, there are changes that happen that make them... [well] all of a sudden they are cool and sometimes it's not as cool to try stuff! ... I find in grade 6 they are still very much excited to try stuff. I'd compare the level of content that I am teaching them is comparable to grade 4 or 5... I'm going back down a couple of grades... As a joke to my students this year, I'm telling them: we started in kindergarten with the alphabet and numbers, en

Late immersion programs begin in grade 6 in British Columbia. The students have little to no experience in French before beginning the program; however, by the beginning of grade 8, they join their Early immersion peers who have been enrolled in the program since kindergarten. The students in this program have chosen to become a member of the language community, it is by nature a *joint enterprise*, therefore, their motivation to try to communicate in French is often more intrinsic in nature. They are also aware that after 2 years of FI, they will be expected to interact entirely in French both in terms of productive (speaking and writing) and receptive (reading and listening) skills. Julie and Gabe's experiences throughout

<p>français, and now we are in grade 1 - learning... the bits of sentences we need to make a [full] sentence... and soon I'll graduate them to grade 2... That's one thing with late French Immersion... they need to be comfortable so I have to start them very, very, slowly into integrating the French pieces... [It's] a strict routine mixed with lots of fun, liked activities [so that] you can easily jump in and participate... During PE class, we tried to integrate just some short sentences that the students could repeat, so encouragements like when you are cheerleading on the sideline and instead of saying, 'Go for it! Go for the goal!' you can say 'Allez! Allez!'... So we would practice every PE class depending on the sport – one sentence or two sentences would be good just to work on for that one period so it wouldn't prevent them from enjoying the PE lesson and just enjoying doing the physical activity but they could still have one sentence that they could proudly cheer, or use... [They used it in later PE classes] kind of as a joke but in the end, they [did end] up using it."</p>	<p>this study were therefore different from Katherine, Charlotte and myself. Julie, in a late FI context was building language at its base where I, Charlotte and Katherine were working with students who already possessed strong strategic and discourse competencies. Gabe's situation was further complicated by his blended early/late FI class at a grade 7 level. As Julie compares the development of language as moving through the grades at a quick pace, Gabe was then faced with a portion of his class at a grade 7 level (early FI) and the other half still building basic language skills functioning, in my own experience, at approximately a grade 3 level in terms of language production when they entered grade 7 in September.</p>
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(Julie, interview)	
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Safe spaces... Fun spaces:

Katherine also mentions the importance of feeling safe within the language community. This notion of feeling “confident enough to participate” arose throughout the study both in reference to the classroom community as well as the community of teachers participating in the action research model. Charlotte also mentioned the interpersonal impact of the card games on her class and their importance for building a safe place for students to speak. She describes the activity of playing cards in French as one that, “strengthened friendships and gave those students with weaker interpersonal skills a way to interact more easily.” This construction within each community of a sense of participation and membership is important for all the participants in the study. Julie’s story about teaching even one word for cheering during gym class to assist students in feeling comfortable interacting in French is equally important. For all the participants, this safe sense of community was a key to success. It was equally important to participants that the learning community be a ‘fun space’: a space where community members (teachers and students) could enjoy the process of learning and working in a second language.

Table 6: Findings - Safe Spaces... Fun Spaces

<p><u>C’est comme ça!</u> Charlotte’s story:</p> <p>“I’ve only ever taught early [immersion], I’ve never taught late French... I came from a background of teaching secondary FSL, but in</p>	<p>Charlotte brings an interesting perspective to the question of quality</p>
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Britain where it's taught to a much higher standard than generally it is here... There [are] some very noticeable differences in how immersion children spoke from how children spoke who had been taught in the system that I was used to... I was very struck by these differences when I first arrived and one of them is the *franglais* and the expressions that arise in the group and the classroom... [The language] that the children have found as solutions to [express] what they want to say... [One] thing that I found really interesting when I first started teaching immersion kids was that they would say, "Comme," all the time and I couldn't work out for about 2 weeks what they were trying to say. They constantly said "comme" and then I translated it into English to "like" and it suddenly made sense. And they would just literally translate the "like" they would say in English and they would say "comme, c'est comme.. ah, oui et puis comme... j'ai fait ça, comme..." I wasn't used to it being used in that context because, obviously, French people

of spoken language in FI. It is the students' strategic competences that surprise her. Although FI students make many errors in their spoken French, they are able to employ the strategies necessary to fill language gaps without losing the essence of their message.

<p>wouldn't use it in that context so it was a very obvious borrowing from English which I found very interesting. [Another] thing I like about French immersion kids is they kind of invent their own verbs... An example of that is the verb "pwner" in English, which is a very 'new' verb in English... We had some inter-house competition or inter-team competition where we won, and we won by some considerable margin, and we came back to class and the kids were really excited and one of the boys said, "Nous les avons pwné!" And I thought this was such a great, great verb, and I asked him how he would conjugate it and he wrote it on the board pwné: Nous les avons pwné! And we thought this was great and so we used that, in class, and I would say, "Je t'ai pwné!" when I'd beaten somebody... I like the idea of taking a verb that was a slang word in English anyways and not a real, acceptable word in English and conjugating it and, and making it [grammatically correct yet invented]... In the same way as they'll conjugate words like, "Je l'ai googlé,"... and with my cha-chings ... that</p>	<p>Once again, Hellerman's (2008) sense of <i>economies of meaning</i>, the shared role of novice and expert by students and teachers is evident in Charlotte's story. By allowing students to create language, they are not only building a community lexicon but also investigating grammatical competency. The student's ability to properly conjugate his invented word, demonstrates that he has command of the language form and can then work within it. This is in contrast to the errors mentioned by Charlotte such as "Ça regarde bon" which needs correction as it is grammatically incorrect and based on English syntax. It is important for the fun and the play to have its place alongside the</p>
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<p>becomes a verb, “Je t’ai cha-chingé!” C’est conjugué au passé composé mais (It is conjugates in the past tense but)...I find that is a particular feature of immersion that I hadn’t really noticed with FSL kids, because FSL kids are not forced into the same amount of situations where they have to make the language adapt to what it is they’re trying to say... that just really interested me!... The kids [just] do that – and I think it’s quite funny as well... [So]I correct them for something like, “Ça regarde bon.” Just because it’s incorrect. I might tease them for saying something like saying, “comme,” all the time but something like, “pwné,” because we all knew it was ‘wrong’ and they were not under any impression that that was a French word... we can create that as a sort of class joke.”</p> <p>(Charlotte: interview)</p>	<p>correction of errors. Lyster (2007) outlines the importance of reactive form-focussed teaching and the correction of errors in a manner that assists students, in context, to adjust and improve their L2 usage.</p>
<p><u>French Fun for 200, Alec</u> Gabe’s story</p> <p>“The best way to build community is through laughter in my mind. And it’s keeping things light, it’s keeping things fun... in my experience</p>	<p>The sense of community building through laughter and shared experiences should not have to be</p>

<p>but it's also being clear with expectations...</p> <p>The other thing we can do is have more, and we've had them in the past, French assemblies... In the past... I've done [this] on two occasions where I've made a game show in French and it's the kids, some of the students, against some of the teachers in sort of a very fun, light, humorous game show... <u>So You Think You're Smarter than a Fifth Grader</u> was one year, <u>Jeopardy</u> was another one... The whole audience were all the French immersion kids and so that's a fun opportunity where the teachers get to... you know, they get teased a little bit, it's very light and humorous. But the whole assembly is run in French which is nice. So that's another way that the FI kids and teachers are coming together in the school, for an hour, an hour and a half, for an afternoon, and the kids quite like it and I think it helps create a strong sense of French culture in our school.”</p> <p>(Gabe, interview)</p>	<p>limited to the classroom. When the community of practice is extended beyond one teacher and his or her students, a greater French language community develops. The ‘shared jokes’ Charlotte mentions become school-wide shared jokes when assemblies of this nature occur. The willingness of teachers to be active member of this community, alongside students, further demonstrates to students the value the teacher holds for both informal French activities – such as playing Jeopardy – and for the importance of the contributions of the student members of the language community.</p>
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Authentic Spaces

Our focus on the classroom and pedagogical strategies often only extends as far as the doorway and then our students exist into their ‘English realities’. It is possible to create fun, engaging communities within these walls but are those language communities authentic? What defines authenticity in a second language classroom community?

Table 7: Findings: Authentic Spaces

<p><u>An English Reality</u> Gabe’s story</p> <p>“What’s an authentic context then? Surely not being immersed into an anglophone reality. A francophone one is needed. Do we have many in Victoria? Not really. So this means leaving the city. Quebec perhaps? ...</p> <p>It would be great to somehow build in informal French language into the class all year. In the past it’s been so hard to get the kids to speak French on their own accord in the classroom. As soon as they’re out of class, it’s English right away.”</p>	<p>Does authenticity require authentic francophones as proposed by Tarone and Swain (1995). Many FI students have the opportunity to visit Quebec as some point during their time in the program, but what happens when financial and organisational constraints make a trip across the country improbable? Is it possible to have ‘authentic’ experiences at home?</p>
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(Gabe, personal journal)	
<p><u>Radio Radio</u> <u>Gabe's story</u></p> <p>“Today we had a great example of authentic French from the outside world and it was a francophone pseudo-rap group. It was fantastic because for a good solid week, [class time] was looking at the lyrics to the songs, it was decoding some of the language, which is a very unique language, Chiac (Chiac is a language derived from Acadian French and heavily influenced by English structure and vocabulary, spoken in Eastern Canada), and it was studying the teacher packages that were distributed... the resources, the lyrics, all that kind of stuff, the background... so that really... propelled the kids to speak more French, to realize, ‘Oh! there is more French outside the world, outside our classroom, that really exists.’ And so when you have an authentic experience like the French concert we had today at our school... wow! Talk about a genuine piece of French immersion,</p>	<p>The importance of the connection between print and oral literacies from Ewart and Straw's (2001) research has been a key element during our experience with French music this year. My own class has been difficult to motivate to speak French in informal situations; however, they have embraced the world of French music. They pour over the lyrics, asking questions about vocabulary and informal expressions used. I have observed the transfer of informal language as they try to use some of the vernacular they have learned in the lyrics to express themselves in informal situations. If I play music for them without providing the lyrics, they are visibly less engaged.</p>

<p>right, and it's not the teacher nagging the kids and it's not a textbook, it's actually pure fun.</p> <p>The kids respond immensely to that. And they did today. [Radio Radio] is a much more authentic experience because a) it's hip, it's cool... There's English as part of the lyrics so they're getting a small taste of what they want, they're getting some English and they're getting some French as well. It's a perfect marriage of their two realities right now – their English reality in the outside world and then their French reality in school.</p> <p>It's that duality that exists.</p> <p>Maybe it's because these kids are so attached at the hip to their iPods and their music. Maybe that's the way to win them over is by just bombarding them with more and more music, in French, because every nutrition break I have kids who turn on the radio and they have their iPods connected to my stereo... but it's all the current songs from, you know, CoolFM or whatever, but the last few days it's been, 'Monsieur, can we listen to Radio Radio?'"</p>	<p>Without the print text to support their aural comprehension, meaning is lost.</p> <p>This 'authentic' experience has moved beyond classroom walls as they are downloading the songs to their own iPods at home or searching out the videos on YouTube.</p> <p>Watching them at the concert Gabe is describing was inspirational – FI students singing along and dancing to current French music. It is the "pleasure of the language" that Gabe wondered if it was possible at this age.</p> <p>What happens though when there is no 'authentic' experience such as this concert available to us? Can we create authentic 'French spaces' in the midst of our English reality?</p>
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(Gabe, interview)	
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French spaces

A true community of practice must provide the setting in which students and teachers can feel safe taking risks, communicating in informal situations and playing with language; furthermore, there must be clear expectations as to what constitutes a ‘French space’ and these need to be communicated to students. This ‘French space’ needs to be seen as transcending classroom walls and also needs to be valued as an authentic space for change in informal French use to occur.

Table 8: Findings - French Spaces

<p><u>Bubble tea</u> Katherine’s story:</p> <p>I love chatting with kids in French on a field trip. It just seems more natural than in the classroom. You actually get the chance to interact without the pressure to get through a lesson, or answer a question about homework. Charlotte had mentioned that one of the biggest struggles to field trips is that the kids immediately switch to English because they’re no longer in a ‘French space’... maybe we could change this by just adjusting our own expectations. The other challenge is that parent</p>	<p>In Katherine’s story, she shows that by simply ‘telling’ the students that</p>
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<p>volunteers also often only speak English – which definitely bursts the French bubble. Thinking of bubbles brings me to the bubble tea excursion.</p> <p>After one of our focus group meetings, and by after, I mean <u>immediately</u> after... I took a group of students for a historic walk in Chinatown. I had just enough time to make it clear to them that it was a Social Studies trip and therefore the expectation was that they would be speaking in French. If I'd had even a whole block of time, I would have tried to brainstorm some vocabulary and expressions that might be useful but, for this trip I decided that all I could do was set the expectation of French speaking and go from there. "It was all of the kids who weren't on the band trip, so it was a smaller group with lots of adults around... [Luckily,]the adults, even the parent supervisors, spoke French so we tried to enforce French at all times... We were chatting with them in French and they would chat back in French, so it was one of the first times that we were on a fieldtrip and they were [even] joking around in French -</p>	<p>the fieldtrip was a part of their French-speaking community, her students made a greater effort. Charlotte and I had the same experience when we redefined fieldtrips and the playground as 'French spaces'. This shift in understanding by the teacher combined with its communication to students was the first step. The community of practice was enlarged to include non-classroom spaces and more French was spoken by students as a result of the transference of the same <i>mutual engagement</i> and <i>joint enterprise</i> norms they respected within classroom walls.</p> <p>This term, 'French spaces' arose during several group meetings, in participant journals and during interviews.</p>
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and that was pretty cool to see!” We spent a lot of time just discussing language and as they needed words, they would come up to an adult and we would brainstorm different ways to say colloquial expressions. “At one point, I remember, one of the students wanted to know how to say, ‘personal bubble - you’re in my personal bubble,’ and she didn’t know how to say it so she came up to us [to get some help]... Would it be ‘bulle personelle’ like bulle for bubble or like, how would you say that? Like ‘espace personelle’? Would you have to translate it word for word, or... [it] was pretty funny... We ended up with “bulle personelle”. [At least,] that’s what we decided on... ‘personal bubble’ is a made up idea so you could translate it literally, because, why not? It’s made up in one language” so why not make it up in a second language? They were so ‘into’ the French space that when we were getting off the bus at the end, many said ‘merci’ to the bus driver... and then ‘oops! Thank you!’ A few weeks later, “while we were camping, we told

Katherine is also functioning as a member of her classroom community. In line with Hellerman’s *economies of meaning*, she provides space for her students to be both expert and novice in the community to co-construct the language necessary for discourse.

Like students in other participant classes:

- Playing cards outside class hours
- Listening to French music at home
- Creating expressions from English slang

<p>them they should be speaking French, they weren't as good at it as they ought to have been but, I did hear every so often, 'C'est ma bulle personnelle!'</p> <p>...Pretty funny!"</p> <p>(Katherine, interview and focus group notes)</p>	<p>Katherine's students transferred the co-created language to new situations.</p> <p>The <i>joint enterprise</i> of realizing a common goal of language acquisition may in part be enabled by a sense of ownership over the language created in these situations.</p>
<p><u>French Spaces: a found poem</u></p> <p>Je parle en anglais ou français? Are we cha-chinging Does this count? It becomes complicated, In a non-classroom environment, In this little magic universe. Is it a French space?</p> <p>What's an authentic context? I'm just delighted when they try, To humour me. I was more conscious of getting them to speak I make the time zones very distinct If you are going to be in here, you have to speak French.</p> <p>Defining, the start and end of the English speaking bubble. It added to the French-ness of the classroom.</p> <p>I'll be more aware from the get-go, I want to foster that environment, and be silly with the language, enjoy the language, this is a safe place to try.</p> <p>What is this place? I never thought to expect it on a trip, On the playground,</p>	<p>As the theme of 'French spaces' arose multiple times in my research data, I felt the most effective way to share these data was in form of a found poem. The lines of the poem are quoted directly from participant interviews, focus group notes and journals.</p> <p>This duality of reality for teachers and students is a key element in the language community of FI classrooms. Expectations are explicit in terms of when it is necessary to speak French and when it is</p>

<p>Four walls equals French... but outside? High hopes? I realized, I decided, I set the expectation. I create the French space.</p> <p>(Interviews: Charlotte, Julie, Catherine; Personal Journal entries: Allison, Katherine, Gabe; focus group notes)</p>	<p>permissible to speak English. The participants of this study all discovered the power to shift the understanding of what constituted ‘French spaces’ by shifting their own expectations. If they expected French, there would be some effort on the part of students to comply. Without the support and structure within those French spaces, it required either carrot and stick techniques of motivation or nagging on the part of the teacher; however, if the expectation was not clearly stated that students were expected to speak French – little to no French was spoken by any of the participants’ students.</p>
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Space for assessment

The focus of this study has been about *how* to teach informal French rather than how improved the French spoken became. From the outset, the sheer task of motivating students to become active members of the language learning community became the

central focus of our action research group. As a group, my participants defined *success* in terms of the amount of French spoken during informal situations and the improvements to student lexical and grammatical abilities. Assessment of these improvements was largely informal and qualitative including anecdotal observations while students were interacting and the reflections of participants of student interaction with themselves during unstructured times.

Table 9: Findings - Space for Assessment

<p><u>Willing and Able?</u> Gabe's story</p> <p>“There should be some way to properly assess the kids... on their ability to speak French in informal situations. But as you are alluding to in your research, there's a big difference between ability and willingness. Isn't ability = OC (Oral Communication – the competency) and willingness = PR (Personal Responsibility)? ...</p> <p>What if we assessed the kids on their ability to speak French in an informal situation? But then is that – a one-on-one conversation with a student – an informal situation? Maybe not; it's probably more of an interview. If anything, the students might feel more pressure...”</p> <p>(Gabe, personal journal)</p>	<p>Gabe raised some interesting questions: how do we assess both willingness and competency? Perhaps with new technologies it will be possible to record students as they interact rather than assess their informal French in an interview situation such as Hammerly (1989) attempted. In my experience, in an interview situation, students as well as adults, tend to either become nervous or attempt to adjust their language to align more closely to the interviewer. It may be through valuing these informal spaces that we will develop more adequate tools for</p>
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	assessment.
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Space for teachers

Although this study began with a focus on how to teach informal French in the FI context, new understandings of the role and needs of teachers have arisen through the findings. While we work to create a classroom community of practice where students and teachers can feel valued and where they can work to co-create language, we also need to create communities of practice for our teachers. Like our students, we also need a safe, structured and fun space in which to grow and learn as professionals.

Table 10: Findings - Space for Teachers

<p><u>Our teacher community</u> Gabe's story</p> <p>"The teacher community is always [important]. My job is fun for two reasons, it's the kids, first and foremost, but to me second it's the staff that I work with... I know there have been efforts made in the past, particularly with the French immersion side, to seek out... not specific teachers [but] teachers who are like-minded, who have a passion for the French language...who are keen to work with others.</p> <p>There were conscious efforts made to build a very cohesive French immersion team [at our school] and I think we have, and the numbers</p>	<p>Gabe's story provides an important insight into what is valued and what creates a successful French immersion program. It is not test scores, but a team of teachers working as a community that leads to success.</p>
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<p>reflect it! If you look at Judy Mas' newsletter she sent out in October, [our middle school] has the highest French immersion population of middle schools, of all the middle schools, so I think that speaks well to how well the French immersion staff is working at the school.”</p> <p>(Gabe, interview)</p>	
<p><u>What's important</u> Katherine's story</p> <p>“I liked bouncing ideas off people um, and sometimes I'm feeling at a loss and someone else will say something that triggers an idea. Like with our very last meeting, and Julie said that she had done something with videos... no! it must have been someone else, because I asked Julie about it after, because I'm teaching her class next year, are they at a level that that would work..</p> <p>So, you get really cool ideas from even stemming off what other people have done in their classrooms because nothing is going to work exactly the same in your classroom as it does in someone else's but you can develop ideas a lot easier when you are bouncing those ideas off of</p>	<p>As the action research team met, it became less important 'who' said something as 'what' had been said and what new ideas would emerge. I observed some of the teachers involved in this study discussing on the fly in the hallways and seeking each other out after focus group meetings to borrow a resource that had been previously discussed.</p>

someone else and hearing what worked in their class and what really fell flat to get you to the next level. That's really helpful.

It's important to let everyone have a voice, which I know you tried to do, because if one person dominates the discussion, it becomes harder for the other people to have that growth and development of ideas because they feel, "My stuff isn't as important to contribute or I don't have enough to contribute," because I'm not talking as much as the other person. So it totally depends on personality and people being willing to share their stuff and put themselves out there just as much as the kids are."

(Katherine, interview)

Equally important for teachers as for students, each member of the community must feel that they are a valued member of that community that shifts between the role of expert and novice.

Chapter 5: ANALYSIS

The most significant understanding that arose from my finding in this study was the importance of viewing both the classroom and the action research team as communities of practice. Hellerman (2008) proposed 5 elements integral to a community of practice in a second-language learning context: *mutual engagement, joint enterprise, shared repertoire, reification and participation, and economies of meaning*. These defining characteristics were supported in my findings.

Classroom Communities of Practice

Lessons and activities required *mutual engagement* by students and teachers. Students and teachers need to understand their roles in the classroom community of practice. The teacher must be an active part of the classroom community of practice but must also provide structure and support at all points in the learning for an activity to be successful. In this research, I am considering ‘successful’ any activity or lesson sequence where the students both willingly participated in speaking French without ‘*carrot or stick*’ tactics and where the students demonstrated a better command of the French language by employing new expressions and vocabulary accurately during that practice. The students must also understand their roles and be able to adjust these roles as they participate in activities and lessons. They had to be willing to take a novice role as they acquired new vocabulary and expressions but then needed to shift between the role of novice and the role of expert during activities by helping classmates communicate by correcting each other and helping each other with forgotten or unknown vocabulary.

Teachers must be willing to listen and observe their students looking for needs and interests in order to choose activities which are meaningful and appealing so that language acquisition could become a *joint enterprise*. Students in Early FI may not have chosen to be in the second language community as Late FI students have, but in choosing activities together, students had a chance to give input and were therefore more engaged in the activities. All the successful lesson sequences and activities - Charlotte's card games, Allison's RISK game, Julie's *Bubble Talk*, Katherine's discussion classes – had elements in common including the fact that the activities had been chosen from observation and inquiry as to what the students were interested in doing. The situations chosen for students to practice informal French cannot be a one-size-fits-all decision. Lyster's (2007) discussion on being reactive as well as proactive stands firm in this research. Especially at a middle school level (students aged 12-14), student interests and wants drive motivation.

The significant amount of time spent preparing students and co-creating vocabulary and expression lists provided the classroom community with a *shared repertoire* from which to work. This *shared repertoire* was most effective when students had to research vocabulary and write their own lists. When I brainstormed the list of vocabulary for playing cards with my class and I was the only *expert* (I provided the 'correct' answers – the French words they needed), my students made less use of the list while they played and more quickly reverted to English. Charlotte's lesson sequence for playing cards was much more successful as she provided space for students to be the expert and bring back the 'correct' answers to the class. The print aspects of this and other activities such as the song lyrics used by Gabe and myself, Katherine's discussion

classes and Julie's *Bubble talk*, all support Ewart and Straw's (2001) proposal that the connection between print and oral literacies is important for success.

Hellerman (2008) also discusses the impact of long ritualistic history on a community of practice. In FI classrooms, informal spaces are often less valued by teachers and students as important language learning times. There was an important shift in teacher thinking that activities such as fieldtrips, society and playground games were important times for students to improve their *grammatical, discourse and socio-linguistic competences* as described by Canale and Swain (1980). Students have historically demonstrated excellent *strategic competences* in informal situations (Lyster, 2004) yet the participants of this study indicated during focus group meetings that they had not considered 'play times' as the *significant activities* outlined in Rebuffot's (1993) work. By giving value to these spaces as 'real learning' and by taking the counterbalanced approach proposed by Lyster (2004) of teaching grammar and vocabulary in context rather than separately, student *participation* improved as did the quality of their spoken language. Students valued these spaces as 'French spaces' when the teacher set the expectation as such and structured the activities and prepared students by developing vocabulary expression lists to support their oral language development.

Finally, it was important for teachers to be an active member of the language community as both expert and novice. The allowance for language play and language creation empowered students and created a safer learning space. The creation of language such as 'Je t'ai powné!' and 'bulle personnelle' allowed the student to be the expert and encouraged the teacher and the student to create a new *shared repertoire* in the classroom. The teacher 'allowing' language learning to be fun, engaging, and

personally meaningful to the students created a classroom community where members, teachers and students alike, wanted to participate and learn.

Teacher Communities of Practice

The participants in this action research study also became a community of practice which was equally important as the community they were building in their classrooms. As Gabe shared in his interview, “The teacher community is always [important]. My job is fun for two reasons, it’s the kids, first and foremost, but to me second it’s the staff that I work with.” Action research teams lend themselves easily to developing *mutual engagement* because participants drive the direction of the inquiry through their reflections and questions. The teacher participants in this study all had a shared frustration with the amount of French spoken by their students in informal situations. They viewed the study as a *joint enterprise* and shared their experiences and resources with each other with a common goal of improving the quantity and quality of French spoken in their classrooms. It was equally important for the teachers to feel valued in this community by the other members and to take the role of novice as well as expert. Katherine shared in her interview that, “It’s important to let everyone have a voice [in an action research group]... because if one person dominates the discussion, it becomes harder for the other people to have that growth and development of ideas because they feel, ‘My stuff isn’t as important to contribute or I don’t have enough to contribute because I’m not talking as much as the other person.’ So it totally depends on personality and people being willing to share their stuff and put themselves out there just as much as the kids are.” The sense of value as a community member is important to

adults as much as it is to children. These *economies of meaning*, moving between expert and novice, created a safe space for teachers to share both their successes and failures. I observed with the participants, the change in demeanor and posture in focus group meetings when one member was given credit by another for an idea or activity. As the group worked, this sense of confidence in each other grew and spread beyond the confines of the focus group meetings. I observed and have been part of these conversations between members in hallways and classrooms after school hours. These informal spaces became a part of the study and this communication and sense of community continues into a new school year. The sense of membership in the community has encouraged members to continue to share successes, without feeling they were bragging, and asking for suggestions and help, without feeling like a failure. Teaching can be a very isolating profession when teachers are not working as members of a community of practice. Gabe shared his vision of what would be ideal in his interview: “The ideal situation would be... where you don’t necessarily have classrooms with four walls, you have a much, much more open space and you can have two or three classes in one physical location in the school at a time... I’ve seen this at the beginning of the year...[with] the three FI classes in grade 6, the teachers took them to the cafeteria and they did some activities there. So that’s a great example where you have more than one class, working together, teachers working together, and you’re not separated by classroom space. It would be nice if there were more spaces like that...

We’re starting to see what that looks like with our project-based learning where you have a class going into the Tech-Ed shop, and working with the Tech-Ed teacher, and that’s a neat experience because then you have two staff with one class. I just started this

with our Art teacher this week and it's fantastic and lots of fun. And when you have two staff, or multiple staff in a room at the same time you can bounce off each other and the kids, I think, respond much more positively...

It's much more fun when you're working with another colleague who has that same enthusiasm, [and] the same passion."

Gabe takes the idea of the community of practice further than an action research team where only teachers are the members. What would be the ideal educational situation? Perhaps a greater community of practice composed of teachers and students working together to realize the common goal of teaching and learning.

Chapter 6: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH DESIGN

This study was conducted over a period of eight weeks, and involved five participants working at a middle school in Victoria, BC. I had originally wanted to find teachers at different schools to participate because I felt that this would provide a wider range of experiences. I decided to work with teachers at one school because I hoped that the greater access to each other as teachers would encourage the discussions and collaboration to continue beyond the focus group meetings. It proved a benefit for many reasons, however, to have all my participants at one school. The action research model encouraged the teachers involved to develop their own community of practice. Katherine commented during her interview that, “you get really cool ideas from even stemming off what other people have done in their classrooms... Nothing is going to work exactly the same in your classroom as it does in someone else’s but you can develop ideas a lot easier when you are bouncing those ideas off of someone else and hearing what worked in their class and what really fell flat to get you to the next level. That’s really helpful”. The focus group notes reflect how one idea was discussed and transformed by the group as each member made connections to lessons and activities they had already tried, creating new ideas to try in their classrooms. The frequency of our meetings was also beneficial to progress throughout the study; the action research teams I have participated in over the years at a school district level have been motivating yet meetings are infrequent enough that some of the creative energy is lost. Another result of almost weekly meetings within one school was that the collaboration between these teachers was not restricted to the bounds of our focus group meetings. I observed conversations and

the sharing of ideas continuing in hallways and in the staff room. My participants are all members of the same staff this year and they continue to discuss ideas that arose during the study. One of the difficulties we discovered was finding times to meet when all teachers could be present due to the demands on teachers during school days including before and after school time as well as lunch hours. We did not always have all our group members present as many were involved in sports teams or were called away at the last minute to attend a meeting or resolve an issue with a student. This impacted participants and the study because although they were brought up to date on the ideas they had missed, nothing could replace being a part of the conversation. Further research needs to be done on the effectiveness of creating action research teams within schools and the impact of providing time for teachers to meet frequently as a possible direction for more effective professional development.

The participants involved in this study taught in both the Early and Late French immersion programs. This created considerable differences in the activities and lessons the participants chose to attempt in their classes. The Late immersion teachers needed to build more language at a basic level where the Early immersion teachers were working with a strong language base and needing to focus primarily on specific vocabulary acquisition. I chose to include both programs as the concerns shared by teachers were the same in both: frustration with the amount of French spoken during less structured times. The age differences between the grade 6 students, who were more motivated by extrinsic techniques and the grade 7 and 8 students who were primarily influenced by intrinsic motivations also created differences in my findings as what was successful in grade 6 might not necessarily be the case in grade 8. Future research needs to be done isolating

these groups; a study where all participants are teaching Late immersion or a study focussed on grade 8s solely would provide more information on the uniqueness of each group.

Chapter 7: FINAL THOUGHTS

I began this study by asking the question: *How can informal language be taught in the French Immersion Context in Western Canada?* Based on the lesson sequences shared during this research, the following general guidelines for planning have emerged:

1. Choose a specific activity that the students have indicated, through observation or direct inquiry, they are interested in.
2. Ask students to try the activity and keep a list of vocabulary they felt they did not have but needed in order to be successful.
3. Compile the list as a class and assign 3-5 words/expressions for students to research.
4. Compile the new list of French words and expressions as a class and have students make their own copies. Allow the lists to be living entities – adding new words as they arise in context.
5. Provide opportunities to practice the activity within a short time period. If the activity is a fieldtrip – plan a similar fieldtrip with time for reflection and addition of vocabulary to the list in between excursions.

These lessons and activities need to be realized in the context of a classroom community of practice that provides a safe place for students to experiment and play with language. The teacher needs to provide support and structure but should also consider themselves a member of the community and should not solely view themselves as the expert of the group. This combination of pedagogical structure and philosophical beliefs and settings are equally important to success.

My second question was focussed on the impact of teaching on student French use; *Will teaching informal language in a systematic way in a Classroom Community of Practice improve the frequency of second language (L2) use by FI students in peer-to-peer interactions?* The battle between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is fought on the informal French battlefield. Although this study demonstrated the effectiveness of *carrot* techniques such as Charlotte's *Cha-chings* or Allison's *haricots* for younger students, older students were not motivated by this type of extrinsic motivation. The students in grades 7 and 8 were motivated by support (vocabulary development lessons) and participation in activities of their own choosing. Students in the study did speak more French during these activities and their motivation came from a desire to be able to continue to do the activity as part of their French class. Fellow students kept peers accountable because they had been told in each situation that the goal was peer-to-peer interaction in French and if they chose to switch into English, the activity would cease. Since the end of this research, my new class has expressed an interest in music; like the card games or the game of RISK, they will happily make an effort to speak French if they are permitted to listen to French music videos as part of their French instruction. In one of his journal entries, Gabe raised the question of whether the students are simply too young to appreciate the joy of speaking French. It is perhaps not age holding them back, but instead the disconnect between what an adult (the teacher) and the students view as enjoyable. Rather than viewing informal French use as a battle fought against our students, shifting our perspective to collaborative approach in which we are fighting in the same side, may win the war.

Finally, *can we teach students to actually **speak** French – to spontaneously communicate in informal situations?* In order to truly answer this question, we must decide how we view bilingualism. Pavlenko (2000) sees individuals in multilingual settings “in perpetual tension between self-chosen identities and others’ attempts to position them differently” (p. 88). If we desire our students to spontaneously communicate in informal situations and to sound indistinguishable from a teen growing up in Paris – the answer is no. If we can value the communication skills FI students possess and nurture these skills in an environment that does not belittle their efforts – the answer is yes. The goal of FI is bilingualism – the ability to speak both French and English - not the creation French people indistinguishable from Francophones from any particular chosen area. Even were this the goal, which area would we chose? Would we be attempting to create *petit Parisiens*? Or perhaps *little Québequers*? A peculiarity of the francophone community is a constant critique of the French spoken by other francophone communities.

Like the vocabulary necessary for understanding Math and Science courses, informal speech has its own distinct lexicon. Rather than criticise the FI program for not producing bilingual adults, it is perhaps time to re-examine what we are teaching students and how. Students who are asked to only conjugate verbs and formally respond to print texts during their 13 years of French instruction in the program will not be equipped to successfully pass an interview where they are being asked to spontaneously converse. The notes, personal journals and interview transcripts of my participants demonstrate that even when an interviewee is proficient in a language, they make both grammatical errors

and code switch between French and English when it seems more natural to do so.

Success in FI cannot be measured by a quantitative analysis of the percentage of errors any more than comparing the student to an ‘authentic Francophone’ of a similar age. If I am asked if I can read, I would not answer, “Yes, but not War and Peace.” What you may not be able to do yet at any given point in your learning does not negate the skills you have already acquired. FI students develop this negative view of their own bilingualism in part because it is the message they have been getting from teachers and Francophones their whole lives. Language research has often pointed to the diglossia that occurs in FI classes, or more negatively as the classroom pidgin or inter-language of childhood that develops when students use both French and English to express their ideas. This language separation approach to bilingualism needs to be challenged. Gafaranga (2000) challenges us to reconsider this approach, stating that “language alteration can be a code in its own right” (p. 82). Rather than embrace the notion that they speak French as well as English, FI students focus on the fact that they do not speak French as well as they do English. They view their successes in comparison to the sum of their shortcomings; they focus on the vocabulary they don’t know rather than celebrating what they can communicate. They, as well as their teachers and future employers, do not recognise that ‘French immersion French’ may be a code in its own right – a French that differs from francophone communities but has its own inherent value. For us to actually **teach** students to **speak** French, we as teachers need to shift our goals and values, readjust our priorities and realign our pedagogy.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Invitation to participants

The following invitation was emailed to potential participants with the consent form attached.

“Dear colleague,

I am looking for participants for my Masters research in Language and Literacy. I would like to put together an Action Research team consisting of 4-6 teachers currently teaching in middle schools in the Victoria School District, in either Early or Late French Immersion programs. Your participation would include:

1. Keeping a reflective journal throughout the study of your thoughts, questions and ideas
2. Meeting with the Action Research focus group 6-8 times over a period of 8 weeks, April-June, 2011. Each meeting will be held at a convenient location for all of us and will last no more than 60 minutes.
3. Willingness to meet, reflect and co-plan during these group meetings
4. Participating in an individual audiotaped interview at the end of the 8 weeks.

The focus for this study is the use of spontaneous informal French by our students. My research questions are:

- (1) How can informal language be taught in the French Immersion context?
- (2) Will teaching informal language in a systematic way in a Classroom Community of Practice improve the frequency of students' use of French when talking with peers?
- (3) Can we teach students to actually **speak** French – to spontaneously communicate in informal situations?

This Action Research group is intended to be a meeting and sharing of knowledge and ideas between colleagues. We are embarking on the study as equals and with the understanding that we all have valuable knowledge and experience to contribute and share with each other.

Please let me know if you would like to participate in this study. I have attached the official consent form to this email for your perusal. If you decide to participate, I will bring consent forms for you to sign at our first meeting. If you wish to read my entire proposal for research, please let me know and I will forward it to you. If I do not hear from you, I will understand that you have declined this invitation and will not send you subsequent emails about this research.

Please note that if you choose to participate or not to participate in this study, it will hold no bearing on our future or current professional relationships.

If you have any questions, please respond to this email or give me a call at _____.

Thanks!

Allison Balabuch”

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

Exploring the Potential for Informal Language Instruction in the French Immersion Context

You are invited to participate in a study entitled **Exploring the Potential for Informal Language Instruction in the French Immersion Context** that is being conducted by Allison Balabuch.

Allison Balabuch is a Graduate Student in the department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by email or by telephone.

As a Graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Masters of Arts degree in Language and Literacy. It is being conducted under the supervision of Kathy Sanford. You may contact my supervisor by phone or email.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research project is to explore the following questions:

- (1) How can informal language be taught in the French Immersion context?
- (2) Will teaching informal language in a systematic way in a Classroom Community of Practice improve the frequency of students' use of French when talking with peers?
- (3) Can we teach students to actually speak French – to spontaneously communicate in informal situations?

Importance of this Research

Research of this type is important because it addresses a common frustration shared by French Immersion teachers: How do we both help and encourage students to use French when talking to their peers in informal situations such as during group work, sports and games in the classroom, and when interacting outside the classroom context with fellow French speakers. As a group, we will try to problem solve and co-plan lessons and activities to help students improve the quality and facility of their French language use in spontaneous informal situations.

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you currently teach French Immersion, in the Victoria School District, as an enrolling teacher with a continuing contract, at a middle school level (Grade 6-8).

What is involved

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include:

1. Participation in an Action Research team of 4-6 teachers where you will discuss, share ideas, co-plan, and reflect on teaching practices and lessons.
2. 6-8 focus group meetings, at 2 week intervals, over a period of two months (April – June, 2011), each meeting lasting no more than 60 minutes
3. Keeping a reflective journal of your observations, thoughts and ideas for the 8 week period of the study.
4. Participating in an individual open-ended interview of no more than 45 minutes at the end of the 8 weeks which will be recorded in audio only.
5. Audio-tapes/and-written notes will be taken. A transcription will be made and copies of notes will be available to the participants.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including the time required to write in your journal, participate in focus group meetings and in the individual interview.

Risks

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

Benefits

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include contribution to the body of knowledge concerning pedagogical practices and approaches in French Immersion. You may benefit personally as the Action Research cycle provides a framework in which to examine, analyze and improve teaching practice. As Canada is a bilingual country, society in Canada will benefit from an improvement in skill and use of French as it is learned and used as a second or additional language by Canadian children. French Immersion students will benefit with a potential increase in skill, ease and confidence in their second or additional language.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will not be used in the analysis and will be destroyed. When linked to group data (e.g. focus group discussions), it will be used in summarized form with no identifying information. Include this agreement in the consent form.

If you decide that you do not wish to share part of or your entire research journal, you may decline to turn it in or remove the sections you do not wish to share at the end of the study.

On-going Consent

To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, I will ask you to sign this consent form at or before the first group meeting. I will remind you at each point of contact about the option to withdraw from the study.

Anonymity

Loss of anonymity is required for this study as you will participate in focus group meetings where both myself and the other participants will know who you are and which ideas, comments come from you.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected with limits. The data collected will be stored in a locked storage unit and all computer files will be password protected. You will be given a pseudonym for all data collected if you choose. If you wish to have your data and information collected attached to your own name, you will be given the right to have your identity revealed in the study. This choice is included on this consent form. You will be asked to keep your reflective journals devoid of any third-party names or identifications to protect the confidentiality of non-participants (your students).

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: My Master's thesis, presentations and workshops, lesson plans and guides, articles for publication.

Disposal of Data

All data including paper records, audio files, coded data, computer files, will be destroyed. Paper records will be shredded, audio files erased, and coded data and computer files will be deleted, 5 years after the study is completed.

Contacts

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include:

Allison Balabuch, Researcher

Kathy Sanford, Supervisor

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers. Please initial any other considerations you agree to.

Waving Confidentiality:

For the purposes of this Master's Thesis and presentations of the results of this study,

I agree to be identified by name / credited in the results of the study.

I agree to have my responses attributed to me by name in the results.

_____ (Participant to initial)

Dissemination of Results:

If the data and/or results are used in the creation of teacher resources to be shared with teachers as part of a workshop or presentation handout ,

I wish to be identified by name / credited in the results of the study.

I wish to have my responses attributed to me by name in the results.

_____ (Participant to initial)

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix C: Initial Focus Group and Individual Interview Questions

Initial Focus Group Questions:

1. How often do you observe your students using French during spontaneous informal situations?
2. What are your expectations of the level of their French skills in this area?
3. On a 4 point scale, where do you feel the majority of your students are currently:
 - 1 – below your expectations
 - 2 – minimally meeting your expectations
 - 3 – meeting your expectation
 - 4 – exceeding your expectations
4. What do you currently do as part of your practice to encourage/assist/teach students to communicate in spontaneous informal situations?
5. Do you believe that it is possible to teach students the informal language skills required to improve in this area? Why or why not?

Individual Open-ended Interview Questions:

The following questions were included in the final individual interviews; however, they form only a base for a more open-ended discussion.

1. Since our first meeting, have you seen a change in your students' use and skill level of French in spontaneous informal situations? Why do you think that is?

2. Have your expectations changed with respect to the level of your students' French skills in this area?
3. On a 4 point scale, where do you feel the majority of your students are now:
 - 1 – below your expectations
 - 2 – minimally meeting your expectations
 - 3 – meeting your expectation
 - 4 – exceeding your expectations
4. Which pedagogical approaches and/or strategies, if any, have you felt were successful in teaching students informal French? Why do you feel they were effective?
5. What considerations, if any, should French Immersion teachers be aware of when teaching at a middle school level in either Early or Late French Immersion classrooms?

Appendix D: Human Research Ethics Approval



Human Research Ethics Board
Office of Research Services
Administrative Services Building
PO Box 1700 STN CSC
Victoria British Columbia V8W 2Y2 Canada
Tel 250-472-4545, Fax 250-721-8960
Email ethics@uvic.ca Web www.research.uvic.ca

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Allison Balabuch	ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER: 11-137
UVic STATUS: Master's Student	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE: 05-Apr-11
UVic DEPARTMENT: EDCI	APPROVED ON: 05-Apr-11
SUPERVISOR: Kathy Sanford	APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE: 04-Apr-12
PROJECT TITLE: Exploring the Potential for Informal Language Instruction in the French Immersion Context	
RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS: None	
DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING: None	
CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL	
This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.	
<p>Modifications To make any changes to the approved research procedures in your study, please submit a "Request for Modification" form. You must receive ethics approval before proceeding with your modified protocol.</p> <p>Renewals Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.</p> <p>Project Closures When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.</p>	
Certification	
This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Participants.	
 <hr/> <p>Dr. Rachael Scarth Acting Associate Vice-f resident, Research</p>	

11-137 Balabuch, Allison

Certificate Issued On: 05-Apr-11