

**ACCESS TO FRENCH IMMERSION PROGRAMS AND INCLUSIVE TEACHING
PRACTICES IN THE CLASSROOM**

by

LINDSEY L. KIPPAN

B.Ed (Elementary) The University of British Columbia, 2005

B.A. The University of Victoria, 2003

A GRADUATING PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF EDUCATION

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
Department of Language and Literacy Education

We accept this major paper as conforming
to the required standard

.....
.....

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April 2010

© Lindsey L. Kippan, 2010

ABSTRACT

French Immersion programs are becoming increasingly popular in British Columbia schools but most still view this as a program for students who do not require any special attention, (non-learning disabled and non-English speaker). This paper looks at the accessibility and suitability of various types of students to French Immersion programs and includes a review of the literature on students in French Immersion with special needs such as learning disabled students, gifted students and English language learning students. It has been shown that students of every type are able to be successful in French Immersion programs, provided that the teacher varies the approach and strategies used in the classroom (*differentiated instruction*) and recognizes the theory of *multiple intelligences*. Finally, a presentation of the Late French Immersion program is offered to inform prospective students and parents of the program.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	6
Learning Disabilities in French Immersion.....	8
Gifted Students in French Immersion.....	13
English Language Learners in French Immersion.....	15
Differentiated Instruction in French Immersion.....	21
SECTION 3: CONNECTIONS TO PRACTICE.....	24
SECTION 4: CONCLUSIONS.....	28
REFERENCES.....	29
APPENDIX A – PARENT INFO MEETING POWERPOINT PRESENTATION.....	30
APPENDIX B – DISTRICT BROCHURE ON FRENCH IMMERSION..	Error! Bookmark not defined.
APPENDIX C – INFORMATION MEETING FOR LATE FRENCH IMMERSION.....	Error!
	Bookmark not defined.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge several people who have helped me along the way. Reaching this point could not have been possible without the support of Monique Bournot-Trites, my supervisor at the University of British Columbia, who encouraged me tremendously to undergo this study and gave me the confidence to pursue my interests in the field of education and French Immersion. Margot Filipenko has given me guidance and advice throughout the writing process and it has been much appreciated.

I would also like to thank Katie Grant as a colleague and friend, for tirelessly listening and sharing ideas with me. Finally, thank you to John Bogunovic for his technical assistance, his love and emotional support and my parents for their encouragement, love and financial generosity. Thank you all so much for believing in m

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

In 1969, Canada passed the Official Languages Act, giving English and French equal status within the country. Shortly after this bill was passed, French Immersion programs began with the purpose of encouraging bilingualism across Canada. Explained by Fred Genesee in *Language in Canada*, the purpose of the French Immersion program was to enhance the level of proficiency of English to students in French so that they could function effectively in a francophone community (Genesee, 1998). The French Immersion program actually began with an English-speaking parent group from a school outside of Montreal, Québec, who proposed a prototype for a second-language instruction model and thus created the idea of French Immersion as we know it today. Genesee states that “it was intended to be an intermediate goal leading to improved relationships between English and French Quebecers and, thus, ultimately to a breaking down of the two solitudes that prevailed” (p. 306), and it goes without saying the economic and sociocultural benefits that the students gain through the knowledge of two *lingua francas*, English and French. Enrollment in French Immersion programs has increased in almost every province and these students continue to perform better than their English program counterparts (Genesee, 1998).

Since the inception of the French Immersion program, students of all abilities have been welcomed into the program. Today, there are many different types of French Immersion instruction and they vary from province to province. Models such as Early French Immersion, Late French Immersion, and Intensive French Immersion have all been developed to capitalize on the ability of students to acquire the French language in the classroom.

The Early Immersion program has students beginning in Kindergarten or in Grade one into a total language immersion setting. French is the only language of instruction, and formal

English instruction is slowly phased in at the Grade four level. The Late French Immersion program has students beginning to learn French at the Grade six level, (around eleven years of age). These students may have had limited exposure to the French language previously, but the program will begin with French language basics and the entire curriculum content is covered in their new language. The emphasis on language acquisition is heavy during the first few months of Late French Immersion, but the content is identical to an English program curriculum.

Students in the Late French Immersion program receive two years of French instruction at the Elementary level, (with 100% French instruction at the Grade six level, 80% French instruction and 20% English instruction at the Grade seven level) and are joined with students from the Early Immersion programs to carry on French Immersion at the high school level.

The Intensive French program began in Newfoundland and Labrador in 1997 and has enjoyed much success across Canada. Similar to the Late French Immersion program, the students in Intensive French Immersion begin in Grade six. The difference between these programs is the order of instruction; in Intensive French, students learn the French language intensively and exclusively for the first half of their school year, (with exception of mathematics instruction in English) and their second half of the year is instructed in English for other content areas such as social studies, science, health and career education, and French Language Arts instruction is maintained for the remainder of their year.

It is strongly emphasized that students enrolled in these programs need not be able to speak French prior to entering the program - in fact, there are no pre-requisites at all. This means that French Immersion classrooms see just as much variety in the abilities of the students as a regular English classroom would. Any given French Immersion classroom includes students who are at many different levels; from struggling readers to advanced learners. When we take into

account the different learning styles such as oral, visual, and kinesthetic, different thinking styles and *multiple intelligences* (Gardner, 1983) and we can see there are many factors that teachers today tackle on a daily basis. Current teaching philosophies are accounting for these differences in the classroom. The term *differentiated instruction* has taken the teacher-centered approach to teaching and given teachers a way to instruct the diversity of students in a way that can reach their individual needs. “Differentiated learning accommodates the learning habits, attitudes, interests, prior knowledge, [and] personal preferences of learners” (Moarif, 2009).

In my experience as a Late French Immersion teacher at the Grade six level, I have worked with students who, for the most part, are extremely motivated to learn a second language. Each year, my classroom has had several students designated as “Gifted”, meaning that they have been tested as exceptional and advanced learners. There are, however, often students in my class who either struggle academically, linguistically (an English Language Learner who is learning French) or behaviourally in this challenging classroom. In addition, classrooms are increasingly multicultural and multiethnic, which means teachers need to be aware of different learning needs based on cultural values and the importance that different cultures may place on education. I feel strongly that the French Immersion program should be accessible to any student wishing to learn the French Language. This means that my role as a teacher is to meet the educational needs of every student and this can be very challenging. In such diverse setting, I feel there is a profound need for teachers to accept the unique individuality of each student, and adapt instructional strategies to better meet the needs of all learners. It is crucial to make an educational impact on each and every child.

Purpose of the Project

With this in mind, I will explore current literature on French Immersion programs and *differentiated instruction* to identify:

- who has access to the French Immersion programs;
- whether access to French Immersion programs is fair and equitable for all;
- how *differentiated instruction* is used in French Immersion programs in order to meet the needs of all learners in an equitable way, and finally;
- the benefits and the challenges teachers meet when using differentiated instructional strategies in the second language classroom.

Overall, I am particularly interested in how *differentiated instruction* can be used in the Late French Immersion context to best meet the needs of all students. It is my belief that *differentiated instruction* is a strategy that needs to be used more actively and frequently in the ever-changing classroom. Teachers need to be equipped with strategies that are culturally sensitive and can reach the native English speakers, as well as the English language learners within the second language learning context. Given that every student has different strengths and weaknesses, and that each student learns in a different way and at a different pace, *one* instructional strategy, *one* option for an assignment, or *one* method of assessment is not enough.

Theoretical Framework

I will be looking at the literature through the lens of Vygotsky's (1978) framework and Gardner's (1983) Theory of *Multiple Intelligences* to emphasize that not all instructional strategies will reach all students. I relate to these scholars' work because I believe that not all students' strengths are the same and that each student offers specific talents and should be encouraged in their individuality to optimize their learning. In the second language classroom, I believe that language acquisition occurs through and during social interactions with a more capable other. Vygotsky (1978) refers to this as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which is a way of conceptualizing the relationship between learning and development (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Bodrova & Leong, 1996). Bodrova and Leong write:

Vygotsky chose the word *zone* because he conceived development not as a point on a scale, but as a continuum of behaviours or degrees of maturation. By describing the zone as proximal (next to, close to), he meant that the zone is limited by those behaviours that will develop in the *near* future. *Proximal* refers not to all possible behaviours that will eventually emerge, but to those closest to emergence at any give time, (p. 35, emphasis in the original)

Vygotsky (1978) writes that ZPD "is the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86).

Gardner's (1983) work on recognizing that humans have more than one way to show their intelligence is especially important when working with children. The children in any given

classroom have a vast variety of needs and abilities. By identifying that children show strengths in different ways helps teachers to understand that a student may not be able to explain a concept in only way. When teachers allow children to show their strengths through learning, the results are promising.

After reviewing the current literature, I will use what I have learned about access to French Immersion programs and incorporate differentiated instructional strategies into a presentation to offer prospective students of the Late French Immersion program and their parents to share with them what I have learned. It is hoped that this presentation will be useful to parents when making the decision to enroll their child into the Late French Immersion program and to inform them that their child can be successful in the program, no matter their ability. In addition, it is hoped that this work will help with the understanding that French Immersion is an extraordinary program and should be accessible to all learners.

SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This section is organized into four parts. In the first section, I will discuss the suitability of students with learning disabilities in the French Immersion program. In contrast, the second section will explore gifted students in the French Immersion classroom. The third section will discuss the English Language Learner in this program and will look closely at the literature on language learning in French Immersion. Based on the review of these topics, the last section will discuss whether *differentiated instruction* can or cannot meet the needs of all learners in a French Immersion setting.

Before going in-depth into the suitability of various types of students in French Immersion, it is important to look at the British Columbia Ministry of Education's (2009) policy on pupil eligibility to French Immersion programs. Their policy states that:

Kindergarten to Grade 12 students in the British Columbia school system are eligible to enter an immersion program at the appropriate entry points, if the program has been made available and if there is space at the appropriate grade, subject to the registration policies of the school district in which the student resides. (p. 11)

French Immersion is offered in forty-five out of a total of sixty school districts in British Columbia, with enrolment increasing every year (Ministry of Education, 2009). In some cases, French Immersion entry at the Kindergarten level has seen parents who will camp out the evening before the enrolment is to begin in order to get their child a place in the program. Some parents believe it as a private school within the public system.

In the literature, it is said that French Immersion is a 'unique phenomenon' - a program that fosters a greater understanding of the country's official language duality, even gently

conveying to the public that unilingualism can be a disadvantage (Mannavayaran, 2002). But, is French Immersion for every student?

Learning Disabilities in French Immersion

The focus of this section is to bring to light the various misconceptions that surround children with learning disabilities in terms of what they are capable of. I believe it is commonly thought that children who have a learning disability should not be put into a situation that would be too challenging for them; better, their instruction should focus on how to be successful and to address their individual needs. French Immersion would not appear to be the first choice of program for a child who is struggling with their learning. However, contrary to this general assumption, the literature published on this topic shows that there are some surprising results of studies looking at children with learning disabilities in French Immersion.

First, in an article by Barik and Swain, originally published in 1975 and later reprinted in the *Journal of Disabilities* in 2001, the performance of French Immersion students is discussed. The researchers from the Bilingual Education Project of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education wanted to investigate whether the French Immersion program had any harmful effects on native language skills and to compare the French Immersion program with the Core French program (where French is taught as a subject and all other instruction is in English). At the time of the original publication, the research was not thoroughly inclusive. Barik and Swain (2001) write, “Children identified by their teacher as having visual, hearing, or emotional problems were not tested. Also systematically excluded from the evaluations were pupils whose native language is not English and who were judged by their teacher to have too poor a command of the language to be tested” (p. 430). It is interesting to note that in previous studies, children with learning disabilities were excluded from research on student progress in the French Immersion program

In Bruck's (1978) frequently cited work, she affirms that children with learning difficulties benefit from French language instruction. Furthermore, her work suggests that removing a child from their French Immersion class when difficulties are perceived is educationally unsound. She argues that because they would still face the same struggles in the English program and because in French Immersion there is naturally a delay of English language instruction, the child would have delayed English language skills, therefore causing emotional distress and lowering the child's self-esteem. Bruck found no significant negative effect on a child from having been instructed in a second language and suggests that French Immersion is a viable option to students with learning disabilities because they continue to build their basic skills of language and acquire the asset of a second language in the process.

More recently, Deanne Sauvé's (2007) study revealed some fresh information on the suitability of students with reading disabilities (RDs) in French Immersion. Sauvé compared Grade four, five and six students with reading disabilities to non-disabled students both in and out of the French Immersion program. The outcome of her study revealed that there were no significant differences between the students with reading disabilities who remained in French Immersion and the students with these difficulties who transferred out of the program. Her study clearly found that switching out of the program did not improve their academic performance; therefore she found that French Immersion does not place students with reading disabilities at a disadvantage. Sauvé states:

These results suggest that students with RDs in French immersion programs do as well as students with RDs in core English programs, albeit less well than non-disabled students. Moreover, transferring out of French immersion does not appear to improve their academic skills, English language

development, behavioural conduct, or perceived social acceptance among students with RDs. This suggests there is little advantage to switching at-risk students out of French immersion. (p. 140)

Even in Europe, the same issues of suitability of learning disabled students in language programs are being raised. Heather McColl (2005) reminds us that, according to the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2001), “the aim of language teaching is to make learners competent and proficient in the language concerned” (p. 4). McColl supports every student in language learning because she feels that it is not just for the sake of learning the language itself, but it is more important to see the context as a whole and therefore the need to communicate drives the language learning. McColl asks for what purposes do we need to learn a language. She even considers that students on the autistic spectrum should be encouraged to learn a language as a communicative competence to understand the different perspectives and viewpoints of other people in the world. McColl writes of policy and curriculum development, of community and staff development; all of these are crucial in language learning in Europe. She states that “we need to be more aware of individual learning needs and to accept that we may need help to understand these before we can provide effectively for the wide range of abilities and disabilities which characterize our learners” (p. 107).

French Immersion schools in Canada are allotted time and funding for a Learning Support Teacher to help students who have learning difficulties, however the amount and extent of remedial time varies from school to school and at times, is not provided at all. In British Columbia, the funding for French Immersion Learning Assistance, Library Funds and other such grants come from the Federal Government. Dependent upon the number of students enrolled in French Immersion at a school, there should be one or two support blocks per week that students

in French Immersion who require support can access for extra help. French Immersion programs are generally very well funded and schools with this program enjoy a healthy amount of financial support each year, in areas from library and learning resources to supply and growth grants. For example, in the 2007/2008 school year, French Immersion programs received \$9.1 million in federal funding (Ministry of Education, 2009). This factor could have a significant impact on whether students with learning disabilities are able to be supported in the French Immersion program and therefore remain in the program to continue their second language learning.

In Edmonton, Alberta, a French Immersion Learning Disabilities Program (FILDP) was established to assist students with learning disabilities (Rousseau, 1998). Evidence to date confirms that the FILDP is a success because it has shown to improve student's academic success by changing their self-image and providing students with an increasingly positive attitude toward learning French, by acknowledging their differences and focusing on the improvements of individual weaknesses and by improving students' French passage comprehension and word identification skills. Parents, students and teachers were very satisfied with the FILDP and anticipate its continuation.

In Nancy Eaton's (2002) doctoral paper entitled *Learning Disabilities in French Immersion: Are they compatible?* she considers the early research conducted in learning disabilities and French Immersion. Her results are inconclusive; some research suggested that students with learning disabilities would have no greater difficulty in French Immersion than they would in the English program. On the other hand, she found studies that demonstrated these same children would be more successful in the English program. As educators, she reminds us that we need to look at students with learning disabilities as individuals and provide the best education for each child. Access should not be denied to students who may struggle in their

language learning endeavors because it has been shown that these students will continue to have difficulties in an English program. Language learning is a right of each child regardless of his or her capabilities: “The real point to consider is that all children are unique as are all schools and teachers, and while all the research will help us make choices, the child’s profile and context should be considered” (Eaton, 2002, p. 24).

In the same year of Eaton’s publication that concluded that students with RDs in French Immersion should be looked at individually, Mannavayaran (2002) published a book entitled *The French Immersion Debate: French for All or All for French?* in which she discusses the unique phenomenon of French Immersion and the controversy of transferring out of the program or remaining in the program, dependent on the situation of the child. The most frequent reasons for transferring out of French Immersion are either learning difficulties or an attitude toward learning that hinders progress (Vedovi, 1992, translated into English). Mannavayaran reminds us that the best educational course for the children is in the hands of the parents and educators because they are most familiar with the child’s life and school performance. As well, she points out that “the child himself should not be forgotten and should be asked to participate in the evaluation of his particular needs” (p. 52). Mannavarayan explores the debate of suitability of French Immersion for students but concludes that current research has not reached a consensus on the transfer of students out of the program and that the debate continues to unfold.

In summary, the literature on the suitability of students with learning difficulties in French Immersion programs is, for the most part, supportive of inclusion in this language learning program. Researchers remind us to look at each student individually and use professional experience and best practice to determine the course of action for the student involved.

Gifted Students in French Immersion

Initially, French Immersion might seem like an obvious choice for students who need an additional challenge. This section will review the literature that supports the inclusion of gifted learners within the French Immersion program. To begin, the British Columbia Ministry of Education's system for identifying gifted students requires that the child to be identified by a formal assessment test based on cognitive ability, spatial relations, expressive vocabulary, reasoning and math skills, as well as teacher or parent recommendation. According to the Ministry,

a student is considered gifted when she/he possesses demonstrated or potential abilities that give evidence of exceptionally high capability with respect to intellect, creativity, or the skills associated with specific disciplines...[they] often demonstrate outstanding abilities in more than one area (Special Education Services: A Manual of Policies, procedures and guidelines. Section E, p. 62).

Once a designation is given, an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is created for these students which highlight the learning plan throughout the course of the school year. The learning plan details how the student will be challenged in the curriculum, but often, the additional language learning component can be in and of itself, a challenge for the gifted student. This plan will also explain how the teacher will differentiate the instruction and provide enrichment opportunities.

In the classroom, teachers provide opportunities for gifted students to enrich their learning beyond the curriculum, modifying the content by integrating reading and writing, providing a rich variety of literature and eliciting critical and creative thinking. Research has shown that gifted students benefit from a pull-out model so that they can work with each other

and not be tempted to hide their 'giftedness' as some may do in the classroom, (Gauthier, 2006). The general population of students enrolled in a French Immersion classroom is often very strong academically, allowing gifted students a chance to feel more comfortable with their strengths and to work alongside students with the similar motivation and enjoyment of inquiry-based learning. However, Gauthier discusses that there are many more components to teaching gifted students in French Immersion. Her four year study of a young gifted girl explains that learning styles, teaching styles and general personality of the child were also factors in the success and well-being of her case study, beyond the challenge of being in French Immersion, (Gauthier, 2006). In the case study done by Gauthier, French Immersion was a positive choice to challenge this young girl, however it did not account for the only enrichment to her learning. Teachers focused on this child's interests, offered pull-out support to enhance her learning and provided freedom and a broader scope that took learning beyond the classroom (Gauthier, 2006).

In reviewing current literature, Wally Lazaruk (2007) concluded that additive bilingualism (for example, French Immersion) offers many cognitive benefits, heightened mental flexibility and creative thinking skills, which leads to overall greater metalinguistic awareness. The author writes, "This advantage notwithstanding, immersion programs facilitate access to a range of communicative, cultural, and economic opportunities unique to bilingual speakers in Canada" (p. 624). This confirms that French Immersion would be advantageous to students who are gifted as they will continue to develop these cognitive skills, those that they may not have had the opportunity to exploit if they were in the regular English program.

Lanmark-Kaye (1996) has an interesting perspective on this topic. In her master's thesis she concluded that second language learning did not appear to be a good match for gifted children. She writes that it did not appear as cognitively stimulating as some research would

suggest. She quantifies this statement, however, by stating that French Immersion could be a good match for gifted learners, provided that teachers used a ‘communicative’ approach in their language teaching. Further, she found that some gifted students found communicative activities to be boring, revealing evidence that “their diverse interests and aptitudes were not being addressed by the communicative approach alone” (p. 44). She suggests curriculum modifications, particularly in Science and Social Studies would better meet the needs of gifted students.

In conclusion, though gifted students most often rise to the challenges of language learning within their curriculum, it should not always be assumed that these students are being as cognitively stimulated as educators might think. Advanced learners should be encouraged to think creatively, to inquire and investigate areas of interest and to take their learning beyond the classroom, whatever the language of instruction.

English Language Learners in French Immersion

While there is considerable research on bilingual children, (English and French), who are enrolled in various types of French Immersion programs, (Early French Immersion, Late French Immersion and Intensive French Immersion), there is a paucity of studies on trilingual students’ identities and learning processes. Dagenais and Day (1998, 1999) are some of the few researchers that have been investigating trilingual children.

Initially, Dagenais and Day (1998) conducted case studies on three trilingual children enrolled in French Immersion in Vancouver, British Columbia. Using data from classroom observations, classroom documents, and interviews with the participants and their teachers, they found themes in both teacher perceptions regarding trilingual students and teachers’ general perspectives on trilingualism. The second study focused on the same case studies, but

investigated the home language practices of these children, (Dagenais & Day, 1999). Dagenais and Day used the conceptual framework based on recent interpretations of Vygotsky's (1978) conception of language as a social meaning-making process, which regards language learning as a complex cultural activity. Their studies revealed that the three students alternated between their languages according to context and communication partners; they usually spoke French at school, English in the larger community and their heritage language at home and on visits abroad and with relatives. All three children showed strong language awareness in auditory and surface features related to the code and a "metacognitive capacity to articulate their own language learning process" (Dagenais & Day, 1998, p. 382). The children who were studied were said to be becoming literate in three languages; "they are acquiring some knowledge about literacy in their family language in addition to developing French-English biliteracy at school," (p. 389). In interviews, the teachers described the advantages that they observed from their students' progress. They noticed that these students could use their three languages as a resource to draw upon, that they were more willing than their peers to take risks, they were more adept at using inferencing strategies and they could tolerate ambiguity in language. Overall, they found these students to have better problem-solving skills and were encouraging of their students' learning and achievement in three languages.

Similarly, Shelley Taylor (1992) examines the academic, sociocultural, psychological and linguistic adaptation of a young Cantonese speaker in French Immersion in Canada. Her single participant was studied over three years, beginning when he entered the school system at Junior Kindergarten. She conducted a quantitative analysis of his academic achievement in all subject areas, as well as his general behaviour. His teachers noted that he was "notably less aggressive than his peers, quiet, popular and a sought after member of the group who enjoys, participates in

and meets success in all classroom activities,” (Taylor, 1992, p. 742). Academically, he performed very well in math and receptive and expressive language; all school sources indicated that, linguistically and academically, he was an average to above-average pupil. Taylor concludes by acknowledging that with a high tolerance of ambiguity and a supportive environment, both from teachers and parents, this quiet Cantonese speaker adapted very well in the French Immersion program (realistically a double immersion program of English and French simultaneously).

Later, Dagenais and Moore (2008) discuss the literacy practices of multilingual children, particularly of French Immersion students and the dynamic identities of parents of Chinese children. They focused on the parents’ perspectives and beliefs within families who were able to write in Chinese. They “consider how discursive identity construction has multiple prisms that enable families to surpass minority group designations and participate as citizens in Canadian democracy without renouncing their inherited affiliation” (p. 11). The ethnographic study in the article contains a number of interviews with parents highlighting their attitudes towards their children learning Chinese and their literacy practices in the home. Those involved in the article were from educated families and had mentioned that they enrolled their children in French Immersion so they would not get ‘bored’. Most of these children had tutors in various subject matters and most attend Chinese school on the weekends or afterschool. Their parents were aware of the importance of linguistic practices for their child’s success in school and socially. The parents felt that their children could participate in Canada’s (imagined) bilingualism without renouncing their heritage language. The literacy practices in the home were a mix of English, French and Mandarin. The students would use English and French when speaking to friends on MSN (online chatting), but would practice Chinese characters in the home as well. The parent’s

attitudes were such that they wanted every advantage for their child; it was “a way of gaining an economic and social capital that would let their children be simultaneously advantaged on many linguistic markets over monolinguals and bilinguals,” (Dagenais & Moore, 2008, p. 20, translated into English). The authors found that the identity of these students was continually being reshaped and that, above all, they have a positive social and academic identity. One Mandarin mother from the study says, “to learn another language is to let him have another pair of eyes, ears and mouth, right?” (p. 28).

Swain and Lapkin (1991) report on two studies involving heritage language children enrolled in a French Immersion program, beginning in Grade 5 in the metropolitan area of Toronto. In this study, they stressed that the maintenance and development of the heritage language will enhance the learning of French, which is a third language for these minority language students. The outcome they found was striking: the students who were literate in their heritage language significantly outperformed those who spoke only English or those who were not literate in their heritage language. They also found that romance language speakers performed better than non-romance language speakers on French language acquisition. Swain and Lapkin found that minority language literacy has a generalized positive effect on third language learning, not necessarily in literacy-related activities in the third language, but in many receptive and productive language skills.

Swain and Lapkin’s (1991) work is strongly supported by Cummins’ (2001) whose research into mother tongue development in second language acquisition is known for several key concepts, as noted by Baker (2000) and Skutnabb-Kangas (2000): 1) bilingualism has positive effects on children's linguistic and educational development, 2) the level of development of children's mother tongue is a strong predictor of their second language development, 3)

mother tongue promotion in the school helps develop not only the mother tongue but also children's abilities in the majority school language, and, 4) spending instructional time through a minority language in the school does not hurt children's academic development in the majority school language.

Most recently, Goldberg and Noels (2006) have written about motivation and ethnic identity in post-secondary students who have graduated from French Immersion programs. The main objective of their study was to integrate their Self-Determination and Situated Ethnic Identity approaches to examine French Immersion graduates' motivations for continuing to learn their target language beyond high school and also to examine the students' sense of identity. They discovered that, in relation to their ethnic identity, that "once language learning has been well integrated into a person's self-concept, it would seem reasonable to believe that he or she will also come to identify with that language community" (p. 426). The students enrolled at the Faculté Saint-Jean or at the University of Alberta said that they found French personally valuable to them and that it were likely to help them achieve their long-term goals. However, the Faculté Saint-Jean students were found to have a stronger francophone identity, especially in the school domain, which affirms the earlier findings that these students had more strongly internalized French into their self-concept. Goldberg and Noels's study offers a look at French speaking students after their formal education and the choices they make influenced by their language, but they do not necessarily take into account the possibility that these students may, at one point, have spoken a minority language before learning French.

Overall, the literature suggests that there are more and more minority language speaking children in the Canadian school system and that their progress in learning English and French has been successful. The trilingual students are able to code switch dependent on the context; at

home they speak their minority language, with their friends in English and at school in French, changing with ease. They are advantaged because they can communicate with more people and are better able to tolerate ambiguity and they are constantly using their background knowledge base of languages. The trilingual children have a very positive view about themselves and they have adapted well socially and are highly viewed by their peers. In addition, parental involvement, support and encouragement have been themes throughout the literature. The parents are the ones who enroll their children into French Immersion programs and they express pride in their child's success. Most importantly, parents play an important role in their child's success in language learning; it has been seen that encouragement of the students' maintenance and development of their heritage language is crucial to their further language learning. The relationship between minority language parent and child may make the trilingual child's identity difficult to decipher, but these children are able to relate to many cultures and their language is seen as additive bilingualism, not subtractive. In Dagenais and Day's (1999) case study, they spoke of one boy's identity as follows:

On the one hand, Brian defines himself in terms of his family's exclusion from a Canadian identity based on language, culture, and religion. On the other hand, he claims a Canadian identity for himself, yet he defines his own membership in society in terms of difference marked by his accent in the majority language. (p. 112)

The research reveals the importance of maintaining and developing the heritage language of a child. The parents and teachers of these children need to support their child's linguistic endeavors by encouraging them to talk about their learning, to practice various literacy skills and strategies at home and to read and write in the language of their choice.

From the literature review, it is emphasized throughout that students are able to acquire more than one language, and they do so effectively and successfully. What needs to be stressed is for the parents and teachers of these trilingual children to not put too much pressure on them, and that they need a supportive and encouraging environment, but will not be as accomplished if the language learning is forced upon them. It is helpful to encourage them to identify with the language and culture that they choose (it might often be a *mélange* of different cultures and languages, dependent on the context and the child and it may change over time). The key for these students to flourish in their language learning journey is to encourage the maintenance and development of their heritage language. Teachers can encourage students to make connections between their languages and use their background knowledge to further their understanding. Jim Cummins' advice based on his research is to accept the student's heritage language and to spend instructional time in their heritage language, thus strengthening their target languages. In this way, students who are multilingual have an ever-expanding and dynamic identity, which may be a struggle to pinpoint at any particular place and time, but the advantages, both socially and economically, are greater. Some of the case study participants mentioned earlier might identify themselves as Chinese-Canadians who speak English and French or as trilingual Canadians. What matters is that they feel a part of one or all languages and that they are supported emotionally, academically and socially in their language endeavors.

Differentiated Instruction in French Immersion

In order to understand what *differentiated instruction* means, we must first understand the theory behind this type of instructional strategy. Much of what is understood by *differentiated instruction* is based on the work of Gardner and his work on *multiple intelligences* (Armstrong, 2009). Armstrong applies Gardner's theories in classroom settings, reminding us that Gardner

sought to broaden the scope of human potential beyond the confines of IQ scores. Gardner originally identified seven different areas in which students can tackle problem solving skills in real-life contexts; today there are potentially eight intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. Thus, *differentiated instruction* (that is, different activities, materials, strategies, and lessons) better serves the needs and learning styles of students.

Teachers who use *differentiated instruction* understand that students learn in different ways and through different methods. Such an instructional method requires strategic planning on the part of the teacher, but Armstrong suggests that *multiple intelligences* theory “opens the door to a wide range of teaching strategies that can be easily implemented in the classroom” (Armstrong, 2009, p. 72). Armstrong suggests over forty teaching strategies for each of the eight intelligences. For example, for a child who is visually intelligent and his class is learning about the water cycle, an assignment tailored to the child’s needs would involve creating a flow-chart of how the water cycle works or another visual representation to show what he has learned. “Because of these individual differences among students, teachers are best advised to use a broad range of teaching strategies with their students (p. 73). Armstrong says that *differentiated instruction* is worth adapting in the classroom because “as long as instructors shift their intelligence emphasis from presentation to presentation, there will always be a time during the period or day when a student has his or her own most highly developed intelligence(s) actively involved in learning” (p.73). The goal is to design learning to match the talents of the students, this way each student has an opportunity to show what they have learned in their own way.

While studies on *differentiated instruction* have been conducted in monolingual classrooms, it can be argued that such an approach provides all children with benefits, regardless

of whether children are enrolled in French Immersion or in the English program. When teachers teach to the student's zone of proximal development, there has been great deal of success in learning. Differentiating instruction helps both students who have mild or severe learning disabilities, as well as keep high-ability students challenged in the regular classroom. In this way, learning can be achieved by all children of capabilities, regardless the language of instruction. Given that French Immersion is accessible to all students, there is a variety of students who join; different cultural backgrounds, varying support from their home situation, different heritage language, and of course, different learning styles. By differentiating classroom instruction, the needs of every learner can be met in an equitable way. It is essential for teachers to provide diverse instructional strategies and create assignments with a focus on different formats while enabling student to acquire the same knowledge but have opportunities to show what they have learned in their own way.

SECTION 3: CONNECTIONS TO PRACTICE

The purpose of this section is to develop and implement a presentation for prospective Late French Immersion students and parents to show them that French Immersion is accessible to their child and that it offers great benefits to their education. To that end, I will first discuss the demographics of the school and students who are enrolled in this particular class currently. Second, I will provide an objective of the meeting and rationale behind holding the meeting and finally, I will follow up on the outcomes of this meeting.

This school district is situated in a suburb of a large metropolis in western Canada. The suburb is well-established and has high socio-economic status families, as well as refugee, immigrants and lower socio-economic status families. Our school community context is as varied as the district in which it is housed. Nearly half of the students who attend this school are from non-English speaking families, with nearly a third of the students attending English as a Second Language support. There is a diverse mix of cultural heritage with over twenty languages spoken by the students at this school. In addition to the regular kindergarten to Grade 7 English program, the school houses a Late French Immersion program and a district Alternative program for students with behavioural issues. There are a wide variety of programs offered at the school; sports teams, choir and dance, leadership and a junior credit union. The goals of the school are not unlike other schools across Canada: to improve reading comprehension and writing proficiency and to instill a life long habit of physical activity on a daily basis.

The Late French Immersion program draws students from several schools nearby, as well as students who are already attending the school. Typically, students who join the program have established good work and study habits, are looking for a challenge in the curriculum and have a firm basis of all previous grade's curriculums. Students do not need to have any prior knowledge of the French language to join the program; the students begin in September with the

fundamentals of the language and progress quickly throughout the year. Language acquisition is the priority for the first term, and at the half-way point through the year, students are able to read, write, speak and understand basic French. After a year of instruction in French, students are confident in their abilities and feel proud of their accomplishment of acquiring a second (or in many cases, a third) language.

In this particular school district, enrollment for all programs is during the month of February. By holding a parent meeting for Grade 5 students and their parents, I am able to inform them of what the program offers and to answer any questions they might have about the suitability of the Late French Immersion program for their child. Prior to holding this meeting, I have also had an opportunity to visit Grade 5 classrooms at schools in the region to inform the students themselves about this unique opportunity. It is especially important at their age to show interest in joining the program, as well as get supports from their parents. Often, if a student is forced into a language program without his or her own choice or initial interest, the child will likely develop a negative attitude towards their learning and therefore not benefit as they might have otherwise. After visiting the classrooms of many prospective students, the meeting is held to present the information a second time and to address any questions about the program at this time.

The parent information meeting will be held at the school's library, which has been recently renovated and is in a central location within the school. Seating arrangements will be folding chairs arranged in a semi-circle, with the projector and screen as a focal point. The meeting will begin at seven o'clock in the evening, allowing parents and children to attend after activities and dinner time. I will introduce the staff members in attendance (myself, the Grade 7 Late French Immersion teacher and the school administrator) and begin with the PowerPoint

Presentation, (see Appendix A). The presentation offers a visual aide to what will be said and parents will be given a brochure and an information handout to take with them. The PowerPoint presentation will be approximately 15 to 20 minutes in duration and it will be followed by a tour of the school to highlight the amenities it has to offer. After completing the school tour, any final questions will be answered, as well as speaking to some parents individually. The entire event will take approximately one hour. When parents and students are able see the school and the classroom, they can better understand the program and feel at ease, especially if their child requires relocating schools because of this program. Often moving schools is one of the biggest changes in joining the Late French Immersion program as friendships are crucial at this age of development and by being involved in the process and allowing students and parents to see their new school, fears and insecurities can be put to rest.

More specifically during the presentation, I will inform parents and students about discoveries I have made from the literature review. I feel that they should know what type of teacher I am and how I incorporate what I have learned in studies of French Immersion and how best meet the needs of my students. From Lanmark-Kaye's (1996) work, in terms of teaching approaches, I use a mixture of both the communicative approach (learner participation and student-centered communicative activities, tasks are meant to be interactive, motivating, substantive and integrative) and the linguistic or formal language approach (systematic language study, careful grammatical sequencing and language drill; echo, extension, modeling, repetition). These approaches, in conjunction with acknowledging students strengths using *multiple intelligences* and *differentiated instruction*, I feel that I am better able to meet the needs of all types of students in my classroom.

The outcomes of this meeting have been successful. At the time of completion of this paper, student registration is progressing: fifty percent of total class size capacity (15 registrants out of a possible 30 spots), and registration may continue until the fall of 2010. Parents and students have passed me in the hallway at school to inquire about the program or to tell me that they were registered and excited for their child to begin the program. Undoubtedly, the upcoming school year will be successful both in terms of registration in the program, but more importantly, in students acquiring the French language.

SECTION 4: CONCLUSIONS

French Immersion is accessible to all students living within a district that offers the program. The British Columbia Ministry of Education's policies indicate that students of any and all capabilities are eligible to enter any French Immersion (Early French Immersion, Late French Immersion or Intensive French Immersion) classroom and cannot be denied entry into such a program if the parents so choose.

French Immersion is suitable for most learners. The review of the literature has shown that, for the most part children with learning disabilities, though not specifically linguistic impairments, will successfully acquire the French language, though the learning difficulties will likely persist. Secondly, children who are considered advanced learners or gifted will successfully acquire the French language in a program such as French Immersion and are often surrounded with high achieving peers and may feel more accepted in this type of surrounding. Lastly, the student whose first language is not English has also been shown to successfully acquire the French language, becoming increasingly able to tolerate ambiguity in language and to transfer acquired vocabulary from their native language to the French language.

In terms of my professional practice, I have learned that students of varying abilities have shown that they can be successful in acquiring the French language. Typically, a high achieving student in the English program will continue to be a high achieving student in the French Immersion program. Similarly, students who struggle with their learning will likely continue to struggle with their learning whether in the French or English program. At the point when a child is having difficulties with their learning, a choice needs to be made on what would be the best course of action for that particular child. Educators and parents then need to look at what are the

most important key concepts that the child needs to learn and then determine if the child can meet those goals while remaining in the French Immersion program.

To that end, I have found that students who are successful in French Immersion often come from a background where there is support for second language learning at home. Parents will often ask me how they can help their child learn French when they do not speak it themselves. Emotional support and providing adequate resources for their child to succeed will help, but children are remarkable learners and have shown this consistently over the forty years that French Immersion programs have been running. Learning a second language is no easy feat, but with programs that immerse the young child in a language rich and authentic environment, the process of second language acquisition can occur and the results are astonishing.

REFERENCES

- Armstrong, T. (2009). *Multiple intelligences in the classroom*. (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Barik, H., & Swain, M. (2001). Language – bilingual programs: Three-year evaluation of a large scale early grade French immersion program—the Ottawa study. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 33, 429-430.
- Berk, L.E., & Winsler, A. (1995). *Scaffolding children's learning: Vygotsky and early childhood education*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Bodrova, E., & Leong, D.J., (1996). *Tools of the mind: The Vygotskian approach to early childhood education*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall.
- British Columbia Ministry of Education, (1997) *Late French immersion 6 & 7 integrated resource package*. Victoria, BC: Author.
- British Columbia Ministry of Education, (2007). *Language education in BC Schools: Policies and guidelines*. Victoria, BC: Author.
- British Columbia Ministry of Education (2009). *Edufacts: The facts about French immersion in B.C.* Retrieved Nov. 15, 2009 from http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/news/edufacts/2009/0903_french-immersion.pdf
- British Columbia Ministry of Education, (2009). *Special Education Services: A manual of policies, procedures and guidelines*. Retrieved Nov. 20, 2009 from http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/policy/policies/french_immersion.htm
- Bruck, M. (1978). The suitability of early French Immersion programs for the language disabled child. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 34(1), 884-887.

- Council of Europe. (2001). *A common framework of reference for languages*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Cummins, J. (2001). *Bilingual children's mother tongue: Why is it important for education?* Retrieved Nov. 13, 2009 from <http://www.iteachilearn.com/cummins/mother.htm>.
- Dagenais, D., & Day, E. (1998). Classroom language experiences of trilingual in French immersion. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 54, 376-393.
- Dagenais, D., & Day, E. (1999). Home language practices of trilingual children in French Immersion. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 56, 99-124.
- Dagenais, D., & Moore, D. (2008). Représentations des littératies plurilingues, de l'immersion en français et des dynamiques identitaires chez des parents chinois. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 65, 11-31.
- Eaton, N. (2002). *Learning disabilities and French immersion: are they compatible?* Unpublished master's thesis. Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. Johns, NL.
- Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gauthier, A. (2006). *A case study of the French and English literacy experiences of a gifted girl in an elementary French immersion classroom*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB.
- Genesee, F. (1998). French Immersion in Canada. In Edwards, J. (Ed.) *Language in Canada* (pp. 305-324). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Goldberg, E., & Noels, K. (2006). Motivation, ethnic identity, and post-secondary education language choices of graduates of intensive French language programs. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 62, 423-447.

- Lanmark-Kaye, S. (1996). *The appeal of the early French immersion program: A good match for gifted children?* Unpublished master's thesis. Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC.
- Lazaruk, W. (2007). Linguistic, academic, and cognitive benefits of French immersion. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 63, 605-628.
- McColl, H. (2005). Foreign language learning and inclusion: Who? Why? What? – and How? *Support for Learning*, 20(3), 45-51.
- Mannavayaran, J. (2002). *French immersion debate: French for all or all for French?* Calgary, AB: Detselig Enterprises.
- Moarif, S. (2009). Differentiated teaching in math. *The Vital Link*. 14(1), 10-11.
- Sauvé, D. (2007). The suitability of French immersion education for students with reading disabilities. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. McGill University, Montreal, QC.
- Silliman, E., Ford, C., Beasman, J., & Evans, D. (1999). An inclusion model for children with language learning disabilities: Building classroom partnerships. *Topics in Language Disorders*, 19(3), 1-18.
- Swain, M., & Lapkin, S. (1991). Heritage language children in an English-French bilingual program. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 47, 635-643.
- Taylor, S. (1992). Victor: A case study of a Cantonese child in early French immersion. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 48, 736-759.
- Vedovi, C. (1992). *Raisons des parents, des instituteurs et des orthopédagogues relatives au transfert des élèves du programme d'immersion française au programme anglais.* Unpublished master's thesis. Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind and society: The development of higher mental processes.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

APPENDIX A – PARENT INFO MEETING POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

1

Late French Immersion at [REDACTED] Elementary School

Parent Information Meeting
February 10th, 2010
6:30 pm
[REDACTED]

2

- Ms. [REDACTED] – School Principal
- Mme. Lindsey Kippan – Grade 6 teacher
- Mme. [REDACTED] – Grade 7 teacher

3

What is French Immersion?

- Early (Kindergarten) or Late (grade 6) entry
- Students follow the curriculum prescribed by the Ministry of Education, as well as learn a new language
- A unique approach to language learning
- **There are NO pre-requisites**; neither student nor parents are required to have knowledge of the French language to be successful

4

French Immersion Programs in [REDACTED]

- Early Immersion is offered in 7 elementary schools
- Late Immersion is offered in 3 elementary schools
 - [REDACTED] Elementary
 - [REDACTED] Elementary
 - [REDACTED] Elementary

5

French Immersion Secondary School choices

- [REDACTED] Secondary School
- [REDACTED] Secondary School
- [REDACTED] Secondary School

- In grade 8, students in French Immersion take 4 courses in French and 4 courses in English
- By grade 12, students will take only 1 or 2 French courses
- Students are awarded a Bilingual Dogwood Certificate at the end of Grade 12

6

What is Late French Immersion?

- Program begins in September of grade 6
- Students study French in grade 6 and grade 7
- Late Immersion students join Early Immersion students in grade 8 French courses
- Grade 6 LFI – 100% of instruction in French
- Grade 7 LFI – 80% French, 20% English

- Students follow the grade 6 curriculum in addition to learning French
- From September to December, the priority is on language acquisition
- By January of grade 6, students are able to speak, read, write and understand basic French
- At the end of grade 6, students have a very good grasp of the language
- In grade 7, students continue their linguistic perfection

Late French Immersion students

- Generally smaller class size
- Come from various schools in [REDACTED], as well as within [REDACTED]
- Positive attitude + high motivation towards language learning
- Show a strong commitment to their studies
- Late French Immersion program can be seen as a challenge
- Studies show that learning a language is best (and easiest) prior to 12 years of age

Research:

- Multiple Intelligences
 - H. Gardner finds that we are all intelligent in different ways:
 - For example: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, etc...
- Differentiated Instruction
 - Variety of activities, materials, strategies and lessons provides students with different ways to access their learning and show their understanding.

Benefits:

- Learning a second language
 - has been shown to strengthen the child's first language (vocabulary)
 - builds confidence
 - offers opportunities for travel and career
 - provides an academic challenge for students