

**French Immersion Oral Language Production: Effective Teaching
Practices in an Elementary School Setting**

by

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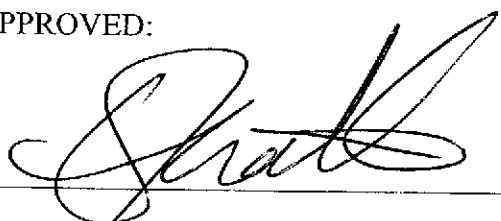
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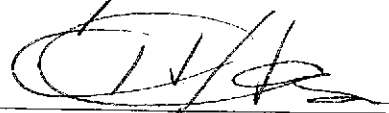
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Practices in an Elementary School Setting**

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Abstract

Since the beginning of French immersion programming, the oral language skills of the students have perceptibly differed from those of French native-language speakers. Students in second-language programs demonstrate a slower rate of speech and a lack of French colloquialisms in social contexts. Researchers have identified effective teaching strategies to build more authentic conversational skills. Targeted teaching using the Daily 5, project-based learning, balanced literacy, extended discourse, read-alouds, and assistive technology have all made an impact on French immersion students' language skills. Each of these teaching strategies requires more oral language production from students and less teacher-centered classrooms. An analysis of a variety of teaching strategies demonstrated that techniques that allow students to speak in French in a range of situations are beneficial. This capstone project shows that most researchers have encouraged more talk among the students in authentic and engaging structured learning situations to maximize mastery of the second language. Future research in this area could include the creation of a diagnostic evaluation of students' oral language skills in French to help teachers to create meaningful and authentic activities and standardize the levels of achievement of French fluency within the program.

Keywords: French immersion, oral language, literacy, teaching strategies

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Researchers have demonstrated that French immersion students are not able to communicate orally in authentic social situations as well as their native-speaking French counterparts can (Mougeon, Rehner, & Nadasdi, 2004). In Canada, formal French immersion education began in Quebec in 1965 (Lyster, Collins, & Ballinger, 2009). French immersion programming has grown across Canada and now includes over 300,000 students. Specifically, in Alberta almost 40,000 students have participated in a French immersion program since 2013 (Canadian Parents for French, 2013). In Alberta, entry points into the French immersion program began in kindergarten or Grade 1. To provide a strong base of French-language acquisition, the classes were taught strictly in French, and the students learned the same curriculum that their English counterparts did, with the exception of the French language arts curriculum. As the students developed literacy skills in French, as research has demonstrated, their reading, writing, and speaking skills transferred from their native languages to the newly acquired language (Harper, 2010).

Background to the Problem

Since the beginning of French immersion programs in 1965, the oral language skill acquisition of the students has perceptibly differed from those of French-language speakers (Blondeau, Dion, & Michel, 2013). Swain and Lapkin (2005) noted that this linguistic deficiency was demonstrated in the lack of grammatical accuracy, usage that became Anglicized, and the less complex sentence structures (Punchard, 2002). This research suggested that the goal

of a French immersion setting is to attain sociolinguistic competence in the French language. Furthermore, French immersion programming in Canada is designed to teach the French language in a safe and natural setting such as a school and to foster an understanding of the French culture. The ideal acquisition of the second language has been most evident with daily exposure to native speakers of the language (Blondeau et al., 2013). However, this has posed a problem in central Alberta, which does not have a large enough pool of Francophone teachers available to teach all of the French immersion programs that currently serve students (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). Many teachers in the French immersion program are Anglophones who participated in the French immersion program as students themselves.

To establish an understanding of the French immersion setting in Alberta requires a review of student-performance data. Genesee and Jared (2008) proposed that literacy instruction comes with a unique set of challenges and that French immersion students' reading development is notably lower than that of their English-only counterparts in the early elementary grades. The research further demonstrated that French immersion students typically outperform their English mainstream counterparts on the majority of reading proficiency tests in the later years of the French immersion program (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Genesee & Jared, 2008).

The typical French immersion classroom structure consists of a teacher who speaks to a class and shares information (Cummins, 1998; Pınard, 2002). Research further suggested that the teacher plays a key role in the development of students' language abilities, especially in the primary grades ("Acquisition of Oral Language," 2012). In classrooms such as these students have little time to produce authentic French conversations. Research that identified effective French immersion classrooms has pointed to specifically structured pair and cooperative group

tasks. Students need time to communicate with each other in authentic social situations, preferably with Francophone role models (Ragoonaden, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

French immersion programs across Canada have reported increased enrolment; however, French immersion students have not attained the same oral language skills that native French speakers have (Endler, 2008). The students' rate of speech continues to be slower, and they make many syntax errors. French immersion students also lack the French colloquialisms used in common phrases when they are engaged in authentic conversations. Mougeon et al. (2004) suggested that French immersion students lack the desired colloquialisms mainly because of the context of their French language learning. Their research further suggested that students have acquired academic French that is carefully scripted and less authentic. In addition, Mougeon et al. also demonstrated that, without communication in less formal situations such as within a community of peers, students will not learn the method of building authentic sentence structures.

Students in French immersion have typically remained dominant in their native language regardless of the support of an effective language teacher (Mougeon & Rehner, 2001). Mougeon and Rehner reported that the errors that most French immersion students make in French were a result of the influence of their English language skills. When French immersion students speak French, they often use Anglicisms, which are English structures transferred into French sentences. Another observable difference is that later in the French immersion program students transfer their literacy skills from the language of instruction to their second language ("Acquisition of Oral Language," 2012). They then incorporate their knowledge of literacy skills into both languages. Even with French as the language of instruction, students continue to rely on visual cues, nonverbal cues, cognates, repetition, and rephrasing to comprehend oral

instructions. Therefore, French immersion teaching strategies have continued to encourage creative and engaging approaches.

Purpose of the Study

French immersion classroom teachers use a range of instructional techniques and strategies to meet the needs of their students. Educators have used whole language, project-based learning (PBL), and many theatrical types of activities to help students to develop French language skills. They are all useful teaching techniques that, modeled strategically, can be very effective in lower-elementary French immersion settings (MacKnight, 2013). The whole-language approach uses guided reading, a teacher-led reading instructional technique, as well as self-selected reading opportunities. This teaching strategy also includes time for students to work on their writing and strategic phonics-based word games as a base for literacy instruction. However, no specific component of the whole-language approach promotes oral language skill development (Oak & Tosky-Mckinnon, 2007). PBL gives students time to converse in unstructured conversations. This teaching strategy results in high levels of student engagement and is therefore ideal in a French immersion setting (Punchard, 2002).

Research Question of Hypothesis

To achieve the goal of improving French immersion students' oral language skills, the researcher asked the following questions:

1. What targeted teaching strategies should be implemented to improve French immersion students' oral language skills?
2. How could the implementation of these strategies be effective in improving the overall language skills of French immersion students in Alberta?

Importance of the Study

Historically, research into French immersion education has identified many cognitive benefits of French immersion programs, such as higher academic achievement and more diversified intelligence (MacKnight, 2013). To further support the importance of bilingual programs, research has also proven that French immersion students achieve higher academically and demonstrate more mental flexibility and more diverse intellectual reasoning (Genesee & Jared, 2008). However, some children have had difficulty in achieving the academic competencies of two languages in the French immersion program (Harper, 2010). Harper suggested that the difficulties that students in the French immersion program face are similar in nature. They make errors in grammar, phonology, and syntax and lack lexical knowledge in both English and French (MacKnight, 2013). Research into the explicit reasons for these difficulties is necessary to understand the specific language-acquisition needs of French immersion students.

More problems have arisen in the French immersion program because of unforeseen circumstances. Many students lack the desire to continue in the program because of a disconnection with where they belong in Canadian society. The rate of attrition in the program is high because French immersion students do not consider themselves truly bilingual because their oral language proficiency does not align with that of native French speakers (Roy, 2010). Furthermore, Roy presented research on French immersion students who were comfortable with using French oral skills amongst themselves and their teachers, but who experienced great difficulty in using the language with French native speakers.

French immersion teachers strive to meet the needs of their students to attain an academic level of competency in French. To provide rich, intentional teaching strategies and exposure to native-language speakers, Britton (1970, as cited in "Acquisition of Oral Language," 2012)

contended that “literacy floats on a sea of talk” (p. 4). This suggests that ideal conditions such as a classroom with targeted oral language teaching strategies could encourage students to develop oral communication skills and give them opportunities to develop or transfer their reading and writing skills. The article “Acquisition of Oral Language” stressed the importance of students’ use of oral language to develop “reasoning and observation, prediction, sequencing, and other skills connected with reading and writing” (p. 4). After the researcher examined these statements, it became apparent that the oral-production skills of French immersion students is a crucial area for further study.

Definition of Terms

Anglophone: A native speaker of English.

Bilingual: The ability to communicate orally and in writing and, particular to this study, in French and English.

French immersion: A form of bilingual education in which a child who is typically non-French speaking receives instruction in French in school.

Grammar: The set of structural rules in a language.

Lexical knowledge: The meaning of a word or phrase.

Literacy: The ability to read and write.

Oral language skills: The skill of producing language.

Native language: An individual’s first language or the language that a person speaks best; it is often the basis of sociolinguistic identity.

Phonology: The organization of sounds in language.

Project-based learning: A model of instruction in which teachers organize learning through projects in response to a targeted question; it includes research-based discovery and authentic sharing of information.

Reciprocal teaching: An instructional reading activity in which a student and teacher dialogue to improve the student's comprehension.

Read-aloud: Interactive reading with specific literacy goals that occurs when students and teachers share the reading of a book out loud.

Scaffolding: A variety of instructional techniques used to move students progressively toward stronger understanding and, ultimately, greater independence in the learning process.

Shared reading: Interactive reading with specific literacy goals that occurs when students and teachers share the reading of a book.

Syntax (syntactic): The set of rules that govern the structure of a sentence.

Think-pair-share: A collaborative learning strategy in which students work together to answer questions about a shared reading.

Whole language: A teaching approach that incorporates targeted language instruction by encouraging students to read by sight rather than phonetically.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study was limited to French immersion elementary students in kindergarten to Grade 5 in a central Alberta school. It did not include students in Grades 6 to 12 in the French immersion program. This study included students who are primarily English-language speakers within an Anglophone community. Though some students in the program are from a non-native English-speaking background, this did not influence the strategies that the researcher used.

This capstone project was limited by a lack of current research in the field of the French immersion oral language field, as the work of Desrochers and Major (2008) identified. Much of the research on French immersion is outdated and is based on students who live in Eastern Canada and have many bilingual members of the community with whom to converse. French immersion in Alberta is taught in isolation because of the limited opportunities for authentic French-speaking experiences. Students have to learn the second language in the context of the school environment because they have few opportunities to speak French outside the program.

Summary

This was an investigative capstone project in which the researcher examined the use of various teaching strategies to improve French immersion oral language skills. In a French immersion elementary school in Central Alberta, an action research project was conducted, in which the teachers used strategic teaching strategies to improve their students' French oral language skills. They learned targeted teaching strategies through professional development and in-class support from a Literacy, Inclusion, Faith, and Technology (LIFT) co-teacher who supported them current teaching strategies to use with students of all abilities to encourage oral language skill development within an inclusive classroom setting.

Outline of the Remainder of the Capstone

In chapter 2 the researcher discusses the analysis of the data to identify practical instructional techniques for oral language learning in French immersion schools. The analysis demonstrates that a range of intentional and researched-based learning activities is integral to an effective oral language program. The elementary teachers considered a range of oral language teaching strategies to give their students an opportunity to practice speaking French in authentic social situations. In chapter 3 the researcher examines the research methodology and discusses

her analysis of various teaching practices in the elementary French immersion school. Finally, chapter 4 reports the possible implications for French immersion programs in Alberta and offers suggestions on how to improve the oral language skills of students who participate in the programs.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

The literature review is an overview of the research on the French immersion program and the difficulties that students might have to overcome in learning a second language. It also presents some possible areas of focus to improve the oral language production delay or inequalities that Anglophone students face compared to native French language speakers. The researcher also discusses teaching strategies such as PBL, Bouschey and Moser's (2006) Daily 5 model, read-aloud instruction, assistive technology, role playing, and the use of specifically modeled oral language building activities.

French immersion

In French immersion classrooms in Alberta, students have demonstrated lower scores in oral language proficiency (Punchard, 2002). Students in second-language programs have not performed as well orally as Francophone learners have for many reasons. Classroom teachers have been the only models for the French language because the students speak English at home and in their communities. Second-language teachers model correct oral language structure and give students opportunities to express themselves in a second language (Blondeau et al., 2013). These teachers have worked to develop a wide range of literacy skills within the classroom but struggle to ensure that students attain an adequate oral-French skill level to engage in daily conversations with their peers in French. With regard to the structure of a French immersion program, students repeat vocabulary and simple phrases, and teachers begin to teach the second language with a focus on verbal communication skills. A paradigm shift in traditional teaching strategies, according to Ragoonaden (2011), is required for students to learn another language. Originally, French immersion educators taught students to listen and repeat simple French

phrases, but this might not be as effective as researchers previously thought (Punchard, 2002). Pappas, Varelas, Patton, Ye, and Ortiz (2012) suggested that teachers need to be aware of students' previous knowledge of their native language and bridge it with what they need to acquire in the second language. Therefore, making connections with previous learning in a native language is essential to teaching a second language.

Vocabulary instruction is an essential strategy in teaching a second language (Llodrat, 2012). For students to understand and retain the new vocabulary, oral language production needs to be authentic and meaningful; children need to have time to apply their new vocabulary in natural conversations. If French immersion educators speak in the target language at all times, they must develop strategies to minimize the use of the English language. The author of the article "Acquisition of Oral Language" (2012) suggested that teachers use visual cues such as images, nonverbal cues such as gestures, and rephrasing to increase comprehension. As another oral language teaching strategy, classroom teachers should avoid translation. They must give their students an opportunity to communicate with one another to gain a better understanding of the new vocabulary. Students need to listen and respond to the language in many different scenarios to make the necessary connections and become confident in speaking French spontaneously ("Acquisition of Oral Language," 2012).

The Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers (CAIT) recognized deficiencies in French immersion students' oral language skills (Karsenti & Collin, 2007) and designed a diagnostic tool to assess students' level of oral French according to the following six parameters: general communication skills, vocabulary, grammar and syntax, presence of the first language, rhythm, and intonation and pronunciation. Although the students' results seemed to improve, an analysis of students' errors demonstrated that French immersion students have a limited

vocabulary, find it difficult to form complex sentences, and must often simplify their ideas to be able to communicate them in French. Karsenti and Collin determined that the next step was to develop an action plan to improve students' oral communication skills and prepare them to think critically in French. The principle goal was to target specific oral communication skills and knowledge in developing and teaching French immersion programs to help students at all levels to express themselves easily and accurately (Éducation Manitoba, 2010).

French immersion in Alberta

In Alberta, French remains the most common immersion program, with over 47 schools and 6.2% of the provincial student population enrolled (Côté, 2015). Even with its popularity, some challenges exist, because students and teachers lament the lack of specific French immersion resources. Furthermore, students rarely have opportunities to speak French outside school. Many writing or reading programs have been uniquely developed for either Anglophone or Francophone programs, but French immersion learners are unique and fall into neither of the aforementioned learner groups. However, despite the many challenges with the lack of French resources, the program is thriving and growing. The enrollment in French immersion schools has continued to grow since its establishment in Alberta.

Another challenge in Alberta is that school divisions have struggled to find competent teachers to meet the increasing demand for French immersion schools (Mehisto & Genesee, 2015). With the limited university-level French education programs, the province has not produced enough bilingual graduates to meet the needs of all of the schools. Teaching in a French immersion program is a complex and unique educational situation. Often skilled French teachers need a few years of teaching to fully understand the intricacies of the French immersion program. According to Erdos, Genesee, Savage, and Haigh (2010), French immersion teachers

need to understand the individual differences in the reading achievement of students early in their development. This can take beginning teachers some time to learn.

The French immersion student population has changed from an elite selection of students to now a more academically balanced clientele, and learners literacy levels range significantly (Pellerin, 2013). Parents who felt that their children needed an academic challenge or an enriched education once selected the program; however, in 2016 the French immersion program has become much more inclusive and supports students with a range of learning needs. French immersion teachers need to be aware of these changes and respond to the needs of learners. Inclusive teaching practices can meet the learning requirements of this new generation of second-language learners. Pellerin argued that the lack of inclusive and differentiated instruction in the French immersion program has failed to meet the needs of all learners. With the specific needs of the program, French immersion teachers require ongoing professional development to address the unique learning needs of their students. Schools should use the expertise within their own buildings, and teachers should collaborate to share new teaching strategies.

Studies have suggested that teachers should be Francophone to teach successfully in the program and immerse their students in a Francophone environment. However, Roy (2009) reported that second-language learners can very successfully teach French because they demonstrate that the language is useful in a career and that they must continue to be resilient and persevere. Many successful French immersion programs employ French native-speaking and second-language teachers, and the balance of the two types of language backgrounds is an asset in schools. The need for quality French immersion teachers is particularly challenging at the middle and high school levels, because teachers require a subject area specialty and must be bilingual (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). It would be very difficult for a school board to

implement a strict policy for the hiring of Francophone educators within such an Anglophone province. French immersion students have been successful with Anglophone teachers who are willing to attend professional development to continue to grow and learn new strategies to teach French.

It would not be fair to compare French immersion students with native French speakers. Most French immersion students in Alberta have access to French native-language speakers only during the school day (Mougeon et al., 2004). Mougeon et al. stressed that the professional development of teachers is essential to create a well-balanced program within the school system and that teachers must create opportunities for students to speak French outside school. Teachers should be aware that they are their students' first model for the language and offer them as many opportunities as possible to talk and express themselves. Finally, French immersion educators must accept that second-language learners will speak a different level of the language and encourage their students to push themselves to learn and be proud of their accomplishments (Mougeon et al., 2004).

Teaching Strategies

A multitude of targeted teaching strategies in French immersion programs can improve students' achievement. A focus on whole-language instruction, comprised of rich, interactive, student-based activities, increases fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. One possible teaching model is the Daily 5 (Boushey & Moser, 2006), which involves five literacy-based activities: reading to self, reading to a partner, working on writing, listening to reading, and working with words. In this model teachers differentiate their instruction by leveling students into goal-centered groups and train them to work independently by building stamina during their focused, self-directed work sessions. The researcher of this study also included the addition of

oral language skill-building sessions. A step-by-step approach guides students through several oral language activities, and teachers serve as models. They encourage the students to voice various personal opinions on subjects, retell a past event, or discuss any issues that might be of interest. Peer pairing creates social interactional opportunities for students to express themselves in authentic and more meaningful ways (Punchard, 2002).

Similar to the Daily 5 (Boushey & Moser, 2006) approach is the Balanced Literacy program (Oak & Tosky-McKinnon, 2007). This instructional strategy emphasizes the importance of the read-aloud as a vital opportunity for students to participate in literacy activities. Student achievement is high when they learn vocabulary related to a specific theme or actively participate in the learning. Teaching words in isolation does not create the natural setting in which the language is to be used (Oak & Tosky-McKinnon, 2007).

Extended discourse, which is extended communication in the discussion of a particular topic, is a possible benefit in French immersion classrooms. Punchard (2002) explained that creating an activity-centered classroom in a purposeful way allows students to choose their topics of interest, do whatever is necessary to find the information that they require, present their findings in a form that they have selected, and use other students, teachers, and community members as resources. Stevens (1983) verified that late French immersion students who participate in this type of instructional environment perform equally well with full-time French immersion students.

The interactive read-aloud is another approach that teachers commonly use in elementary classrooms. The read-aloud builds vocabulary, increases comprehension, and builds knowledge in particular subject areas. Fisher, Flood, Lapp, and Frey (2004) explained that read-alouds lead to growth in oral language development. In effective read-aloud lessons, young children gain an

understanding of the components of a story; they also help the students to make connections with others and enable them to express themselves as individuals. Simply reading a story to a class is not an effective read-aloud. Fisher et al. analyzed effective teaching strategies and compiled data in the form of seven strong components: reading books at an appropriate developmental level, previewing and practicing the selections, establishing a clear purpose for the read-aloud, stopping periodically during the reading to question the students, and ensuring that the students make connections from the story to independent reading and writing. The teachers in Fisher et al.'s study also chose high-quality books, such as award-winning stories, to read to their students. The oral language skills of students who participate in read-alouds in a second language improve: They acquire vocabulary, improve their sentence structure, and refine their language expression. Students also have an opportunity to discuss what they have read and apply their new vocabulary immediately.

Degener and Berne (2014) demonstrated the connection between speaking, listening, and reading. Students' reading must be supported with active discussion, opportunities to express themselves and ask questions, and time to absorb new information. Listening to reading is an important teaching strategy, because it builds vocabulary, activates students' prior knowledge, and models the structure of the language (Cummins, 1998; Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, 2011). Desrochers and Major (2008) emphasized the importance of oral narratives as effective teaching strategies. This type of instruction is effective in one-on-one situations, small groups, or large groups. The authors pointed out that sometime a focus on pedagogical content can overshadow the need for specific delivery techniques. Classroom teachers need to be aware of their students' strengths and weaknesses in literacy to design lessons that meet the needs of all learners. Providing teachers with the necessary framework and time to collaborate with other

teachers can have great implications for planning and the instruction of French immersion students.

The act of gesture-making in working with second-language learners can also be effective. Pantomimes and imitations are a part of physical literacy that typically originate with a personal experience in the world and are meaningful when there is a language barrier (Rosborough, 2014). Rosborough described gesture-making as a means to facilitate reactions and participation amongst the participants. Students at all levels gain knowledge and confidence with communication in another language when they use gestures. Rosborough also noted that spontaneous gestures arise in an authentic situation and therefore become meaningful to the learner. Gestures create a link between the physical action and the psychological connection to a language-learning environment.

Role-playing is an unscripted teaching strategy that encourages students to act out scenes with defined situations, either student generated or teacher directed. The subjects perform as though they are in a particular situation (Zazkis & Nejad, 2014). This technique is effective as a pedagogical strategy in a social studies setting where the participants create authentic experiences of historical events. Zazkis and Nejad reported that the students in their study felt better prepared, understood the more complex details, and generated more effective responses after they actively used role-play. In a second-language situation teachers can begin by scaffolding the learning with scripts and then move on to more of an improvised learning opportunity. Shapiro and Leopold (2012) suggested that in the area of second-language learning, role-playing gives students a chance to practice before they face any real pressure to produce oral language. Teachers can use this type of activity at any grade level or in subject area to introduce or reinforce a topic area. The learners gain collaboration skills and interact with the group

members. Li (2012) stated that collective imagination helps children to gain a better understanding of a situation. As a result, they generate feelings and perceptions about their environment.

PBL is a teaching strategy that promotes learning around the creation of a student-generated project to authentically present new information. To clarify authentic PBL in a current classroom, Thomas (2000) outlined its crucial elements. First, PBL is a structure that encompasses teacher instruction, scaffolding of learning, research, and presentation by the students. Second, a driving question is required to guide the students and connect them to the real-world application of the project. Third, the process that guides the project involves inquiry, problem solving, knowledge building, community connection, and resolution. Fourth, students must be free to choose how to develop their own learning and not to participate in a teacher-scripted activity. Finally, the projects should be realistic and incorporate real-life challenges to be authentic. With all of this in mind, second-language teachers can engage students in a safe learning environment.

French immersion students who participate in this type of project work collaboratively and answer a driving question in French, which result in authentic oral language situations that are ideal for the students to practice speaking to their peers. Though the researcher found no specific research on the subject of French immersion and PBL learning, MacKnight (2013) stated that

critical thinking has always been part of the learning and was most engaging for students when it was a natural element of classroom practice, integrated across topics, and not isolated to reading and writing tasks within a literacy teaching period. (p. 104)

Therefore, learning through discovery and group interaction produces the authentic oral language that teachers desire in French immersion classrooms. PBL projects often require the use of technology to support the research and presentation aspects of this learning activity.

Technology Use in Second-Language Environments

Assistive technology can also support students who struggle in the French immersion program. Many researchers have agreed that the appropriate use of technology and an emphasis on effective teaching practices can have long-lasting effects on student engagement and learning (Pellerin, 2013). In a two-year study on the effective use of technology with French immersion students, Pellerin demonstrated that using specific devices and digital technologies as an instructional strategy can greatly influence students' ability to think critically about their own learning. The importance of Pellerin's research is its focus on digital technology, not to replace classwork, but rather as a tool to enhance student learning. The use of technology helps teachers to individualize and shift their instruction to a more student-centered approach. Pellerin concluded that the teachers' assessment practices change when their students demonstrated their learning by recording themselves on an iPad. The teachers were then free to work with small groups and listened to the recordings at a later time. Technology also helped the students to listen to recordings of readings at their specified reading level. The teachers also created video clips when the students shared their understanding of several science lessons. Technology should be a tool that assists learning rather than replaces worksheets. With an inclusive approach, classroom teachers can scaffold their students' learning and maximize the opportunity to learn at a diversified level (Pellerin, 2013).

Another example of technology use with second-language learning is the incorporation of multimedia tools, e-mail, and online podcasts to improve language acquisition. Ragoonaden

(2011) reported that electronic networking can expose French immersion students to authentic communication with Francophone learners. Making connections with classrooms in other parts of the country can facilitate conversations to share cultural experiences or academic interests (Ragoonaden, 2011). The use of an iPod can give students access to a video podcast in French, and teachers can create their own podcasts with direct instructional content embedded to share with their classes. Digital enhancements to the program means that students will be more likely to become engaged and understand the importance of bilingualism. Research has also demonstrated that the French language becomes more relevant to learners, and the desire to communicate in the second language increases (Ragoonaden, 2011).

French immersion Students

Specific to French immersion students is the transfer of linguistic skills, including oral communication (Harper, 2010). The effectiveness of this transfer depends on how similar the languages are, the individual's proficiency in each of the languages, and the exposure or type of instruction that the individual receives. Therefore, the instructional strategies that teachers choose have a significant effect on the acquisition of the second language. Since the creation of the French immersion program in 1965, recitation, note-taking, and rote learning have become common in classrooms and have resulted in low participation, low retention, and passive learning (Agbatogun, 2014). Since 2010 educators have realized that emphasizing learner-centered critical-thinking strategies more effectively result in engaged students. Agbatogun argued that classroom interaction in which the students do more of the talking creates an environment of confidence and trust. The teachers in this study designed engaging, fluency-based tasks such as role-play, games, simulations, and problem solving. They became facilitators of learning because the students were now in control of their own learning. Authentic

oral communication became apparent in these active learning classrooms, and the teachers were responsible for monitoring and providing targeted language instruction. Agbatogun also noted that the teachers more successfully improved their students' communication skills when there were few negative criticisms. If the students perceived them as judges, they were less likely to make an effort to communicate. Feeling safe to make errors without consequences reduced the students' self-esteem and anxiety, and rewarding them for positive behavior and effort resulted in higher achievement (Agbatogun, 2014).

Conclusion

To meet the needs of French immersion students, teachers must use a variety of practices to differentiate their instruction (Punchard, 2002). Spending more time spent on small-group rather than whole-class instruction seems to meet the ever-changing needs of students (Oak & Tosky-McKinnon, 2007). Teachers' own learning must continue to grow. Ongoing professional development and schools' goal setting will help teachers to learn new teaching strategies. Furthermore, a collaborative and professional environment can help newer teachers to learn from their more experienced educational leaders. When collaboration time is available, teachers can share the workload and support each other to create a meaningful program (Côté, 2015). When teachers keep targeted learning goals in mind, they create learning activities that are meaningful and engaging for their students (Punchard, 2002).

Chapter 3 compares various targeted teaching strategies to address the effect on French immersion students' oral language skills. Strategies such as the Daily 5 (Boushey & Moser, 2006), PBL, role-play, think-alouds and shared reading, and the use of technology can affect the approach that educators use with second-language learners. Chapter 4 concludes with an

analysis of the possible implications and recommendations for future programming and research on French immersion oral language production.

Chapter 3

Results and Findings

The focus of this chapter is the various teaching strategies that instructors use to promote French oral language skills. The next step is to review the research-based teaching practices and compare how they can be most effective in a French immersion in school in Alberta. Chapter 2 described the French immersion setting in Alberta and the challenges that teachers and students face. A possible solution to improve the oral language of French immersion students is to focus on quality teachers who are willing to implement effective, research-based teaching practices. This chapter outlines suggested teaching practices and how they can be most effective in a French immersion school in Alberta, with the potential to create an engaging, creative, and meaningful French immersion program that stimulates students to develop more native-like proficiencies in their second language. The goal of French immersion schools is to infuse the French language into all learning environments and to develop learners who have excellent reading, writing, and oral-production abilities. Intentional and targeted teaching practices can help to achieve these goals.

Current Program

Through a mandate from the school district, the teachers in a French immersion kindergarten to Grade 9 school in Alberta focused on improving French oral languages skills to address the gap that French immersion students face in communicating in authentic situations. The teachers of these students were part of ongoing professional development to improve their students' French oral language proficiency. They were not required to introduce specific teaching strategies, but the administration asked them to examine their current teaching practices to create targeted lessons that would support student growth. This school's goal was to focus on

how oral language activities can improve students' motivation and ability to speak fluently in French. The division's central office provided resources in the way of allotting time for lead teachers in each French immersion school of the district to meet, plan, and support teachers. One of the results was the creation of a network of French educators across the district that influenced the professional development. The key contribution of this capstone project is a better understanding of various teaching strategies to engage second-language learners and motivate them to speak the language outside a non-educational setting.

The Role of the French Immersion Teacher

The role of the French immersion teacher in the French immersion network is to create a safe learning environment for students in which they feel comfortable learning the French language in meaningful and authentic situations. The school became a learning space where teachers observed the students' abilities and interests and helped them to develop their skills without the fear of making mistakes in the French language. Interactive learning and time for discussion in everyday lesson planning helped to develop the authentic oral language skills of the students. Effective teachers of French immersion understood their learners and made meaningful connections to discover what motivated them (Dillon, 2014).

Role of the French immersion Administrator

The Alberta Education (2014) *Handbook for French Immersion Administrators* stressed the importance of leaders' valuing French second-language learning and believing that French immersion is an integral part of creating world-class educated students. It also stated that these educational leaders should acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to support the program and be able to advocate and promote the French immersion program in Alberta.

The administrator of a French immersion school should first be a bilingual instructional leader. Nonbilingual administrators handicap the effectiveness of French-curriculum leadership (Safty, 1992). A unilingual administrator cannot evaluate their staff in another language or support them in implementing programming in French. The lack of a French-speaking administration team might result in less emphasis on the development of French-language teaching strategies in a school; thus, a bilingual educational leader is very important to the development of a French immersion program.

Leadership affects school climate and teacher effectiveness. A bilingual leader brings the knowledge and desire to promote the French-language acquisition skills necessary in a French immersion school. French immersion administrators can guide their staff in adopting appropriate literacy strategies for the program and ensure that they use them effectively in their classrooms. This leader can also supervise and evaluate teachers in the French language and make suggestions on how to improve certain skills and where to seek additional professional development and support. Côté (2015) recommended that administrators create opportunities to include culture in the programming in a French immersion school. Activities such as Carnival (a Québécois cultural celebration), French musical presentations, or celebrations of French feast days promote authentic oral language situations for students. Ultimately, the delivery of a quality French language program should be the primary goal of administrators in French immersion schools.

The Daily 5 Teaching Strategy

The researcher designed this capstone project to compare research on targeted instructional strategies to meet the needs of French immersion students' oral language development. The Daily 5 (Bouschey & Moser, 2006) includes many components that

encourage French immersion students to demonstrate their oral language skills. Aspects such as small-group work, teacher-led reading groups, and reading to a partner require that students speak to class members in French. Students who work at a higher level have a choice of appropriate novels and can make appropriate use of their time with differentiated activities. Some students who require beginner-level books and vocabulary-building activities should receive time and support from the teacher to improve their learning. Boushey and Moser explained how teachers can use the Daily 5 structure to train students to participate actively in five activities designed to accelerate reading and learning.

In French the Daily 5 translates to *Les 5 au quotidien* (Boushey & Moser, 2009). Although it is a translation of the original English book, it offers the same structure, but in French terms. In Alberta many French immersion elementary teachers have partaken in professional development sessions with the original authors and have adopted many of the practices that the program suggests. French immersion educators who follow the scripted lessons and structure now have a French guide available. Possible suggestions for the implementation of the *Les 5 au quotidien* structure include its schoolwide use. If all teachers in a school use the Daily 5, the students will learn the structure and progress from year to year. School librarians should incorporate the Daily 5 lessons and activities into the Learning Commons to stimulate authentic French language skills. When all of the students in a school learn reading strategies and increase their reading stamina, teachers can work on targeted reading instruction and goal setting. LIFT teachers and literacy coaches can assist classroom teachers in small-group and guided-reading activities, one-on-one conferencing, or many of the writing or word-work activities.

Small adaptations have been made to the Daily 5 structure (Bouschey & Moser, 2006), including an oral language component in the student's choice of work. The choice of oral language games and opportunities to engage in the French language could ideally promote authentic speaking situations. Students would have time for discussions in French to analyze books or work on developing phonics connections in their vocabulary words. Other adaptations to the Daily 5 program should include shorter sessions at particular stations to give the students an opportunity to work in more areas and with a teacher on a particular reading strategy more often. More group conferencing to master oral language structures is required in French immersion classrooms. Clustering students of similar reading abilities in small groups might make it easier for teachers to work on common strategies. Within these groups teachers would have time to check in with more students and build their oral language skills more efficiently. Students who do not work with a teacher need to manage their time independently and work effectively on appropriate and meaningful activities in French (Bouschey & Moser, 2006).

Project-Based Learning

The Ministerial Order of Learning (Alberta Education, 2013b) required school boards to develop 21st-century learners and create competencies for teachers to use in designing lessons; these competencies include the need for students to demonstrate the ability to become engaged thinkers and ethical citizens and develop an entrepreneurial spirit. The ministerial order stressed the need for individual learning to reach each student's full potential through a curriculum that is accessible in many forms. Project Based Learning (PBL) lends itself to these expectations. It is a learner-entered approach that is inclusive and responsive and strives for a more global understanding of the world (Krauss & Boss, 2013). PBL has the potential to create student engagement and foster learning experiences unlike those in traditional classroom settings.

Punchard (2002) described the use of extended discourse in an activity-centered classroom, similar to the design of a modern PBL. Creating a motivating student-centered learning opportunity could effectively improve French immersion students' oral language skills. Punchard explained that the activity-centered classroom should include student choice, time to find information, an appropriate presentation, and the use of multiple resources to complete a project. A PBL presented in a French immersion class should incorporate the same expectations and allow students to work in groups to complete their projects. In these groups the teacher should develop clear expectations and structures for students to communicate orally with their peers, and the students should have discussions and communicate with each other in authentic situations. Highly motivated groups of students who work and speak in French result in extended discourse (Punchard, 2002).

Role-Play

Role-play as a teaching strategy motivates students to participate orally and use their prior knowledge to create meaningful situations (Alberta Learning, 2002). Effective role-playing strategies can be implemented across the grades and meet the needs of a range of learning styles. Role-play should be implemented in a French immersion language arts classroom to stimulate authentic French-language situations for students. This teaching strategy could build communication skills and give students an opportunity to practice new vocabulary in a safe, nonthreatening group. Furthermore, this would give the students an authentic opportunity to express themselves clearly in French. To begin these activities, teachers should scaffold the students' learning by giving them appropriate vocabulary and modeling scenarios with correct grammatical structures. Scripts or costumes are not required, and no preparation is needed to

perform these tasks. Role-play is an authentic dialogue embedded in a make believe scenario (Zazkis & Nejad, 2014).

To improve students' oral language development, French immersion teachers should use role-play as part of a review of science or social studies lessons. Teachers can divide students into small groups and give them a specific scenario to reenact. When all of the students are engaged in the task, the teacher should circulate to guide each group and offer additional support when needed. Each presentation should be brief, only 30 to 60 seconds long. The only requirement to consider is each member's participation in the oral presentation of the role-play. Teachers should require the students in a group to have speaking parts. They might need further support to ensure that the sentence structure is correct when they present to their peers. When they work with their peers in a group, students need to use negotiation vocabulary to determine who will play each role. Assigning roles within the team and planning the script are part of the authentic conversation that teachers desire to foster among the group members. Role-play could become part of a daily review of concepts to reach the goal of authentic oral language.

Think-Alouds and Shared-Reading Teaching Strategies

Similar to the Daily 5 approach (Bouschey & Moser, 2006) is the balanced literacy program (Oak & Tosky-McKinnon, 2007). This instructional strategy emphasizes the importance of read-alouds as vital opportunities for students to participate in literacy activities. This researcher examined read-alouds as an effective technique to model the French language. Teachers who receive professional development in the various techniques of effective read-alouds allow their students to ask questions, make predictions, and tell a friend what they enjoyed about the story; they promote the production of authentic oral language skills. Students might require more modeling in French from the teacher to create correct sentence structure.

Careful planning and scaffolding and encouraging think-aloud strategies should create opportunities to build students' oral language abilities.

MacKnight (2013) explained the theory that French second-language students become anxious when they have to speak French because of their lack of confidence in their expressive vocabulary. Students are willing to participate in oral language discussions but often do not feel that they have the words to express themselves correctly. Therefore, strategies such as read alouds or shared reading can create an environment in which students can take risks without consequence and can learn new vocabulary, sentence structure, and how to construct meaningful language skills. If students actively participate in shared reading that targets oral language, such as a think-pair-share, in which the students can share their ideas verbally with other students, they are more likely to take risks and speak French (MacKnight, 2013). Shared reading can draw out many literacy strategies that increase students' motivation and engagement.

Technology

French immersion learners can take advantage of the new and improved technology tools at their disposal. The Learning and Technology Policy Framework (Alberta Government, 2013a) identified five directions in which school boards should begin to restructure technology use. The five pillars of technology integration are student-centered learning, research and innovation, professional learning, leadership and access, and infrastructure and digital learning environments. The government's policy directions facilitate the implementation of these technology recommendations in Alberta schools. Policy Direction 1: Student Centered Learning is especially pertinent to this study because it aligns with PBL (Alberta Government, 2013a). Students are expected to use technology not only to access information, but also, and more

important, to share and create knowledge. These outcomes are interdependent and help to develop technology and learners' global awareness.

The purpose of this capstone project was to address the gap in the oral language skills of French immersion students. One effective use of technology that supports oral language development in a French immersion setting is a voice recording on an iPad. The Daily 5 structure (Boushey & Moser, 2006) allows students to record their own readings. Because some students feel tremendous pressure when they read to adults, they could make numerous attempts to read, rehearse it multiple times, and, when they are satisfied with the recording, share it with the teacher at a later time. This can help students to gain self-confidence and produce a recording with which they are confident and proud of their reading ability.

Teachers can use Read&Write for Google Chrome™ to meet the needs of many levels of learners. This online technology tool offers students a range of supports for literacy that are used in reading and writing. Students can use the voice-recording speech-to-text application to complete writing assignments more independently and in less time. The use of this device might make the students more willing to speak in French and to share their product with others. This assistive technology focuses on language development and reduces the cognitive load of those who struggle with fine motor skills; however, not all students will find its use necessary to complete assignments. The differentiated instruction might help the students to stay on task for longer periods of time and gain confidence in their French language skills. Technology tools are becoming more effective and more widely used in French immersion classrooms.

Summary

The instructional techniques that the researcher has discussed in this capstone paper demonstrate that a range of teaching strategies can be effective in increasing oral language skills

in French immersion schools. The intentional selection of strategies such as PBL, the Daily 5 (Boushey & Moser, 2006), role-play and think-aloud, shared reading, and technology use is valuable in meeting the needs of a range of learners. It is important that teachers be prepared to participate in ongoing professional development sessions to ensure that they are correctly implementing these methods. Students require educators who are willing to accept the changes that will occur in the future, and teachers who are willing to adjust their teaching to allow all learners to participate and grow will need to have time to collaborate with their grade partners. By working together, French immersion teachers can continue to develop the language skills of their students in an Anglophone environment within an ever-growing second-language community.

Chapter 4

Summary, Conclusion, Implications, and Recommendations

Summary

This capstone project involved an examination of various targeted teaching strategies to designed to help French immersion students to acquire oral language skills. The Daily 5 (Boushey & Moser, 2006), role-play, think-aloud, shared reading, and assistive technology are all valuable strategies that teachers can use to meet the needs of a range of learners. However, using a variety of strategies requires that teachers differentiate their instructional techniques. To adopt new teaching strategies, teachers need ongoing professional development and to grow and develop their skills. Schools' goal setting guides teachers into areas that influence their pedagogy and creates authentic opportunities for students to speak French.

A school in Red Deer, Alberta, has experimented with these teaching strategies from kindergarten to Grade 5. The students were involved in a range of French oral-language focused activities, with support from a LIFT and French immersion lead teacher. A mandate from the school district required the teachers to focus on improving French oral languages skills. To address the gap that French immersion students face in communicating in nonacademic situations, the teachers examined the Alberta French immersion oral language outcomes and planned strategic lessons to improve students' proficiency. In support of this mandate, all French immersion teachers have partaken in ongoing professional development. When the administration asked the teachers to adapt their current teaching practices to create targeted lessons to support student growth, they responded by choosing appropriate lessons and teaching structures to support their goals.

Conclusions

Research on the acquisition of French immersion oral language skills has concluded that French immersion students are unable to master the language in the way that native French speakers do. Students in second-language programs demonstrate a slower rate of speech and a limited vocabulary, have difficulty forming complex sentences, and often simplify their ideas to be able to communicate in French (Éducation Manitoba, 2010). Students can improve their French speaking by practicing speaking it more often, listening to a native language speaker, and speaking it in authentic situations. Even with daily practice at school, students demonstrate a lack of the vernacular or French colloquialisms in common phrases in authentic conversations (Mougeon et al., 2004) because of the time that they spend in structured academic situations, guided by teachers, and their lack of social interactions in the French language. Teachers should engage students in more activities with their peers and teachers that require them to discuss, ask questions, and explain information. They might need support to ensure correct sentence structure, grammar, and vocabulary to avoid fossilizing potential errors.

To address the gap in the oral language acquisition of French immersion students, the researcher examined studies on a variety of teaching strategies. The Daily 5 structure (Boushey & Moser, 2009) gives students time to engage in conversations by reading and working with other students. Another possible teaching strategy is the incorporation of PBL based on group work that requires negotiation and problem-solving skills. Teachers should also use read-alouds and reciprocal reading to promote students' creative-thinking and prediction skills in French. Assistive technology is also a very effective tool that stimulates and engages students in their daily work. All of these techniques are valuable in French immersion classrooms because they encourage authentic conversations among the students. The implementation of these strategies

could result in an environment in which second-language learners can engage in authentic language experiences. An exploration of how French immersion teachers can incorporate these teaching strategies to improve oral language skills is required.

Collaboration

In Lyster et al.'s (2009) study, the French immersion teachers reported that they preferred more collaboration time embedded into the timetable. When teachers teach the same subjects often, collaboration can help them to plan effective lessons that meet the needs of a variety of learners. To implement new teaching strategies, they need time to discuss and analyze possible curriculum outcomes and how to achieve them effectively. Teachers should meet once a week in structured meetings with agendas and goal setting. If the schedule does not allot time, the overriding reality is that educators will be under a tremendous amount of pressure to cover large amounts of curriculum and respond to the ever-changing needs of learners (Lyster et al. 2009). Collaboration time also helps teachers to build on and grow the French oral language skills of their students. Time spent discussing students' needs and learning levels can generate creative solutions to the gap in the language abilities of French immersion learners.

Taking time to share the impact of new teaching strategies with colleagues can be beneficial because it holds teachers accountable for their choices (Pellerin, 2013). Educators should gather to share with others and reflect on why they selected their teaching strategies and how they can be effective. Perhaps teachers will feel motivated to try new techniques if others are successful and share new ideas. The creation of professional learning communities in which teachers communicate in safe and student-centered conversations can result in excellent learning opportunities. French immersion teachers who want to improve their students' oral language skills should participate in this kind of collaboration. Teams of grade-aligned educators should

have embedded time during the day to focus on building a well-balanced French immersion program.

Oak and Tosky-McKinnon (2007) described the need for collaboration time with a literacy coordinator. Coverage for the classroom teachers in their study was seamless and covered by the principal. This allowed the teacher to collaborate, knowing that they did not have to plan a lesson for someone else to deliver. This is possible in the French immersion school in Alberta. Teachers should be released for collaboration time if enough certified teachers are available to teach the program in their absence. A key conclusion in Oak and Tosky-McKinnon's study was that literacy coordinators support collaboration time. Their support and guidance are key to the development of goals and strategies for student improvement.

In a collaborative and professional environment in a Central Alberta school, the teachers had time to learn from more experienced educational leaders. With collaboration time embedded in the schedule, the teachers worked together to create a meaningful and targeted oral language program that was consistent among the individual grade teams. During these collaborative times, the teachers discussed effective teaching strategies to promote oral language development.

Implications

The possible implications for the teachers in this current capstone include the need for continued collaboration time and professional development to be able to continue to develop effective oral language lessons. Ongoing training and mentorship within the school enabled the teachers to meet the needs of a range of learner abilities. Collaboration time created opportunities for more experienced teachers to share their knowledge and experience with other teachers, and teacher collaboration and planning can lead to professional development within the

school. Grade teams have an effective opportunity to learn from colleagues when they share their skills and knowledge of oral language activities.

Limitations

Very little research has been conducted in the field of French immersion oral language acquisition. Teachers often use English resources and translated the for French immersion use. The findings of this capstone project can be used as a steppingstone to a larger study over an extended period of time to determine whether in fact these teaching strategies have an impact on French immersion oral language acquisition. Future study could include the creation of a diagnostic tool to assist teachers with testing and developing an oral language program for French immersion students in Alberta. There is currently no screening process to standardize achievement in the oral language skills of French immersion students.

Another significant limitation in the area of developing oral language programming for French immersion schools is that the implementation of ongoing, embedded collaboration and professional development can be difficult for every school to achieve. Not all budgets allow for the release of teachers during the school day, which means that grade teams would have to meet after school or during lunch to benefit from sharing knowledge and planning time.

Recommendations

The collection of some type of student data should be a part of the school improvement plan. The school in Central Alberta used the collection of GB+ results, a French diagnostic reading test. Though this test demonstrated consistent growth in reading abilities, no specific oral language test has been designed for French immersion students in Alberta. The results would be more concise if teachers had a specific diagnostic screening tool to measure students' oral-language outcomes.

Furthermore, future study of the oral language curriculum outcomes could be instrumental in the creation of a diagnostic oral language test. Research on expectations that should be measured and on how to develop a program that follows the typical language progression of French immersion students would benefit second-language educators.

Support for ongoing French immersion teacher training and collaboration could be a key component of a targeted oral language program. To teach effectively, second-language teachers need to work continually on creating meaningful learning environments for their students. Working and learning with colleagues could ensure continuity in the program and lighten the load for everyone involved. Collaboration times should be goal driven and student-centered to be the most effective. With all of these factors embedded in the weekly schedule, staff could work together to review the oral language abilities of their students.

Another area for further study is the effect of targeted teaching strategies on students' oral language ability. *Éducation Manitoba (2010)* cautioned that speaking French in the classroom is not enough for students to acquire the skills that they need to be able to communicate naturally and effectively in French. They also need a variety of oral language experiences in authentic situations to learn to take risks and to learn in an environment that is designed specifically to meet their learning needs. Creating opportunities for students to speak in social situations result in an ongoing learning experience. Using a range of teaching strategies encourages second-language learners to question, explain, debate, and inquire. The targeted teaching strategies that the researcher has discussed in this capstone paper help students to participate in conversations that require a knowledge of vocabulary and sentence structure and the ability to draw upon past experiences to be able to communicate effectively. The next step is to track these students in a longitudinal study to monitor changes in their oral language ability.

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