A study of program-related perceptions among parents who remove their children from immersion French.

Patricia Louise Eagle
University of Windsor

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A Study of Program-Related Perceptions Among Parents Who Remove Their Children From Immersion French

by

Tricia Eagle

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate Studies of Research through the Faculty of Education in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education at the University of Windsor Windsor, Ontario September, 1996
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ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF PROGRAM-RELATED PERCEPTIONS AMONG PARENTS WHO REMOVE THEIR CHILDREN FROM IMMERSION FRENCH

By

Trish Eagle

This study investigates some of the perceptions which may have influenced parents' decision to remove their children from immersion French programs. One known reason identified is relocation to another city with the child continuing in an immersion setting. Such cases were not included as participants. Reasons other than relocating have influenced parents to remove their children from immersion French and place them in a regular English school, special classroom, different school system, or a private school. Attitudes and concerns about the immersion French program among the considered group of parents were explored in relation to factors which may have influenced their decision to discontinue their child's education in an immersion setting. These factors were the following:

1) difficulties encountered by the child in the immersion French program
2) progress of English language skills development
3) progress of French language skills development
4) parents' own proficiency and ability to assist with their children's homework

Important concerns were uncovered in all these areas and in others of a non-pedagogical nature. The nature of these findings and their implications for teachers and administrators are discussed.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful for the many hours of assistance from Dr. Norman Diffey, my advisor. I am thankful also to Dr. Erika Kuendiger for her support during the statistical analyses of the study. The encouragement and guidance of both of these individuals made this research possible. I would also like to thank Dr. Richard Lewis for his contributions as an external reader.

I am gratefully appreciative of the parents of immersion French students who participated in this study. I would like to also thank my colleagues for their professional input.

My heartfelt thanks goes to my mother who always believed that I would attain a Master of Education degree.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Appendixes</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Rationale</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Context of Immersion French</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Objectives</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Overview</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Introduction</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Learning Difficulties</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 English Language Development</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 French Language Development</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Parental Expectations</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Concerns of Students Who Have Left the Immersion Program</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 Opinions of Immersion French Students Who Have Remained in the Program</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8 Summary of Literature Review</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9 Conclusion</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY........................................................................... 31

3.1 The Parent Questionnaire....................................................................... 31
3.2 The Teacher Questionnaire..................................................................... 32
3.3 The Research Process............................................................................. 32
3.4 The Sample............................................................................................ 34
3.5 Statistical Analysis................................................................................ 34

CHAPTER 4 - RESULTS.................................................................................... 35

4.1 Parents' Perceptions of Learning Difficulties in Immersion French......... 35
4.2 Parents' Perceptions of English Language Instruction......................... 40
4.3 Parents' Perceptions of French Language Skills Development............. 42
4.4 Parents' Perceptions Relating to Homework........................................ 43
4.5 Other Findings..................................................................................... 44
4.6 Results of the Teacher Questionnaire.................................................. 46
4.7 Reasons Given for Transfer.................................................................... 47
4.8 Timing of Removal................................................................................ 50

CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION.............................................................................. 53

5.1 Summary and Conclusions Regarding Learning Difficulties in Immersion French................................................................. 53
5.2 Summary and Conclusions Regarding English Language Instruction.......................................................... 55
LIST OF APPENDIXES

Appendix A: The Parent Questionnaire ................................................................. 72
Appendix B: The Parent Questionnaire showing references used in statistical reporting ................................................................. 77
Appendix C: Cover Letter Accompanying Questionnaire ........................................ 82
Appendix D: The Teacher Questionnaire .............................................................. 83
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Transfers from immersion school A.................................................................2
Table 2: Transfers from immersion school B.................................................................3
Table 3: Children identified with special learning needs in immersion French.........................36
Table 4: Difficulty reading in English and French.........................................................37
Table 5: Weak writing skills in English and French.....................................................38
Table 6: Difficulty spelling in English and French......................................................38
Table 7: Difficulty comprehending English and French...............................................39
Table 8: Removal of students who experienced difficulty in English skills development...............41
Table 9: Point at which parents dissatisfied with location of secondary school transferred their children.................................................................45
Table 10: Relative importance of reasons for entering the immersion program..................48
Table 11: Transfers due to learning difficulties and original expectations.........................49
Table 12: Initial consideration and removal from immersion program.............................51
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Rationale

The increase in Canadian bilingualism has helped build bridges between our country's English and French speaking communities. Today, 4.4 million Canadians are bilingual, an increase from 2.9 million in 1971. In April of 1994, 64% of Canadians gave our linguistic duality strong or moderate support (Commissioner of Official Languages, 1994).

Judging by increased enrolments in second language school programs, it is evident that many parents see bilingualism as beneficial to their children. Immersion French programs across the country have been an effective model of education which has increased bilingualism and promoted an appreciation of the French culture.

Immersion has been a popular choice of schooling for many Ontario students. Immersion French began in Ontario in 1977 with a total enrolment of 12,800 students. Its popularity increased remarkably over the following eighteen years. In 1993-94, 1.074 immersion schools offered second language programs to 147,125 students (Commissioner Of Official Languages, 1994). Although immersion French is no longer growing as rapidly as in the seventies and eighties, most boards of education are maintaining successful programs.

Since its implementation in 1985, the immersion French program of this study has grown rapidly in size and popularity. Nevertheless a number of parents have chosen to remove their children from the immersion setting and place them in alternate educational programs. Some transfers from immersion can be attributed to families...
who are required to move for job-related reasons. Children from these families usually re-enter an immersion French program in their new location. This study investigates reasons why other parents have made the decision to remove their children from immersion French.

Any increase in transfers from immersion programs or even a continuation at present levels could pose a threat to the continued success of the program. Without a better understanding of reasons for removal from immersion French, it would be difficult to adapt policies to counter the trend. Tables 1 and 2 indicate that transfers from the two immersion schools of this study increased slightly from 1991/92 to 1992/93. A decrease in transfers from both schools is seen between 1992/93 and 1993/94. This is not the trend for the school year 1994/95 which was not included in this data. According to figures obtained informally for both schools, transfers from the program are higher, once again, than in the previous year, 1993/94.

Table 1
Transfers from immersion school A

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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Out of country</td>
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<tr>
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Table 2
Transfers from immersion school B

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total transfers</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>42</td>
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Why do some parents become less secure about their original decision to the point of reversing it? What reasons underlay their original decision?

Do parents feel that their children are not receiving the necessary support in the immersion French program when learning difficulties arise? The process of identifying students with special learning needs can be lengthy. Children attending immersion French schools that are identified with a specific learning need generally receive special support from speech language pathologists, psychologists, social workers, and occupational therapists in English rather than French.

Do parents feel that their children are lacking in English language skills development in an immersion setting? Some immersion children in the early primary
grades who are involved in activities outside of school such as Brownies. Cubs, etc. may display more difficulty reading and writing in English than their peers attending English schools.

Do parents feel that their children are not adequately developing their French language skills? Not all immersion students become bilingual simply by attending an immersion French school. Furthermore, the city where the study took place is primarily English and students have little opportunity to practice their French skills outside the immersion French classroom.

Do parents feel anxious that they are not capable of assisting their children in French assignments because they lack proficiency in the French language? Many home assignments must be completed in French. Science Fair projects, speeches, Young Author books, and day to day homework are some examples of home assignments that immersion students must complete in the French language. Most immersion French parents are anglophone with little or no French background.

There could be other factors not directly related to educational progress. Are parents concerned about changes in bussing policy for the immersion French program? When the program under study was implemented, students were picked up at their door, which permitted parents to watch to assure their child made it safely to the bus. Due to transportation costs, twelve busses have been replaced by five larger busses that must make longer routes. Children must walk to a drop off / pick up location forcing some students to cross an intersection. Some students are on the bus for a longer period of time and others who were previously bussed must now walk. Transportation continues to be an area in which boards of education try to make financial savings.

Are parents concerned with the location of the immersion French secondary school? In the case of this study, the receiving secondary school is located centrally in
the city, close to one of the elementary immersion French schools. Some parents may feel the immersion secondary location should be located equal distances from both elementary schools.

Whatever the reason or combination of reasons, parents may not have had knowledge of some of these matters at the time of enrolment in the immersion French program. Ideally, any educational program will meet the needs of the people it serves. Information on some of the factors which lead to transfers from immersion French will allow the program studied to more closely meet the needs of other parents who may be considering transferring their child to an educational setting other than immersion French.

A board of education that is financially burdened could, at some point, use statistics of decreasing enrolment or increasing amounts of students transferring from the program to further cut and/or eventually eliminate an immersion French program altogether. Such questions have become more crucial in light of current government cutbacks. The board of education investigated in the study is required to reduce costs by $12,000,000 over a two year period. Immersion French and other "fringe" programs could be at risk in times of economic retrenchment.

1.2 Context of Immersion French

The board of education in which the study was conducted, implemented an immersion French program in the fall of 1985 beginning with two Grade 1 classes. To date, the program has grown in size to two immersion French elementary schools with a total of over 700 children. Facilities in these schools have been expanded to accommodate an increased demand for classroom space. The board now offers immersion at the secondary level.
Since the program began, bussing has been available for elementary students who live too far from the school to walk. The program now begins at the senior kindergarten level. Children attending junior kindergarten must attend a neighbourhood school and transfer to an immersion French school when ready to enter the senior kindergarten program.

The majority of students enrolled in immersion French programs come from English-speaking homes. Immersion schools are not intended for children from French backgrounds. A very small percentage of children in immersion French schools are native speakers of French, however most francophone students attend Catholic schools which offer French First Language programs. Students in immersion learn French as a Second Language. The language of instruction in the immersion program is 100% French in kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 2. Students are not expected to respond immediately in French at the kindergarten level. At this stage, much of their communication is in English. They are encouraged to use as much French as possible as their French vocabulary develops. Utilization of the French language during pre-primary and primary years is constantly reinforced and rewarded. Consequently most students acquire proficiency in their French language skills quickly in an immersion setting. It has been observed in the immersion program of the study that by Grade 2, most students are capable of using French language skills throughout the day.

English language instruction is introduced in Grade 3 for 25% of the school day. Many students have developed some English literacy skills by this time, particularly those students whose parents have read to them at home. At the Grade 7 level, the amount of English language instruction increases to half of the school day.

At the secondary level, immersion students have the option of taking specific courses in French. Other courses are offered in English. Presently, immersion French
courses at the high school level are offered in Grades 10 and 11. In the fall of 96, courses will be offered to Grade 12 immersion students. This structure is fairly typical of the early full immersion French models in place in Ontario boards of education.

1.3 Objectives

The aim of this study is to examine some of the reasons that may have led parents to remove their children from the immersion French program. It will look at parental attitudes towards various aspects of immersion French including:

- their initial reasons for enrolment
- English and French language development
- learning difficulties
- experiences with homework
- student progress
- program delivery
- accommodations and transportation

It is not the intention to identify weaknesses in the program itself or the immersion methodology, but rather to focus on parents' perceptions. Nor is it claimed that all possible reasons for transfer will be uncovered in the process. However, information gained may help in the formulation of policies to lessen the incidence of transfers in the future.

1.4 Overview

This research is a quantitative study of some of the reasons why parents may choose to remove their children from an immersion French program. The tool used to
obtain the data was a self-completion questionnaire. A second self-completion questionnaire was given to nine immersion French teachers for the purpose of obtaining teachers' views of parental perceptions of the immersion French program. The subjects of the first survey were parents who had removed their children from the immersion French program of the study and transferred them to an educational setting other than immersion.

Chapter Two reviews previous research on immersion which was consulted in the construction of the questionnaires. Learning difficulties, English and French language development, parental expectations, and student concerns and opinions appeared to be topics for focus. Chapter Three describes the methodology of the study. The parent and teacher questionnaires are described and the research process outlined. Chapter Four reports the results of the data analysis. Chapter Five contains a discussion of the results and their implications for policy recommendations.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

A number of aspects of immersion French programs could give rise to parental concerns and even contribute to a decision to switch to the regular program. Five aspects have been chosen for this study since they are often mentioned in the research literature and have often been mentioned in conversations between the researcher, colleagues, and parents:

a) learning difficulties: Are they adequately handled in the immersion class?

b) English language development: Is this negatively affected by immersion schooling?

c) French language development: Do immersion students become fully bilingual?

d) parental expectations: Are parents' expectations realistic?

e) student concerns and attrition: Do some students view the immersion program as being more difficult than the regular program?

f) other student opinions: Do students who have remained in the program feel positive about immersion schooling?

This chapter will look at what the research has to say about each of these.

2.2 Learning Difficulties

Much research has been conducted on the achievement of special needs
children experiencing learning difficulties in the immersion French program. Some of
the research focusses on children identified as having specific language or learning
disabilities, while other studies give a general description of learners experiencing
non-differentiated learning difficulties in the immersion classroom. Examples of the
latter are Trites (1976, 1986a), Genesee (1976), and Bruck (1978, 1979).

Trites (1976) examined primary school aged children with various learning
difficulties in the immersion French program. Thirty-two such children were compared
with children from the English program who were also experiencing academic
difficulties. Some of the students from the immersion French group had transferred to
the English program due to academic difficulties while others remained in the
immersion program. Those children who remained in the immersion French program
continued to experience academic difficulties. The results indicated that this group of
students did not make adequate progress in the immersion French program. The
follow-up testing showed that those students who had transferred to the English
program accelerated in academic progress. Trites' findings suggested that at least
some children who experienced difficulty in a primary immersion French program
would experience less difficulty if transferred to an English program.

Genesee (1976) on the other hand, in an extensive review of the research,
found that the progress of language disabled children in immersion was not
differentially delayed when compared to that of language disabled children in the
English program. These results indicate that at least some learning disabled children
can experience success in the immersion program assuming adequate resource
assistance was provided.

The results obtained by the studies conducted by Trites (1976) and Genesee
(1976) differ substantially. Trites indicated that the progress of the learning disabled
child improved once transferred to the English program, but Genesee found that
progress of the learning disabled child who remained in the immersion program was not hindered. It would be of interest to compare the severity of the learning difficulties of the students whose progress was apparently hindered by remaining in the immersion French program with that of the students who achieved normal progress in an immersion setting.

Bruck (1978) also discussed the suitability of early immersion French programs for the language disabled child. Learning disabled immersion French kindergarten children were compared with learning disabled kindergarten children from the English program. Children from the immersion program not identified with a learning disability were also examined. All of the children were evaluated annually on a battery of tests from Kindergarten until the end of Grade 3 to determine their progress in first and second language cognitive and academic skills. The results revealed that children with learning disabilities in immersion French still benefited from this educational experience. They continued to develop their first language skills, learned basic skills in the second language at a predicted rate, and progressed in their competency in French. It was noted, however, that learning disabled children in the immersion French program took longer than their non-learning disabled peers to acquire basic skills, and many experienced problems with reading, spelling, and math. Bruck suggested that rather than switching the child to the English program, support should be provided in the context of the immersion French setting.

In a later study, Bruck (1979) again reported that a special needs child can be successful in the immersion French program if adequate support is provided. These findings were based on several research projects, as well as from Bruck’s personal clinical experience with children who have had school related difficulties, and focused on the slow learner in immersion programs. Unlike the learning disabled child, the slow learner was defined as one who was slower than average in all areas
of development due to less than average intelligence. The slow second language learner was defined as a child who did not seem to progress easily in French language skills. However, it was found that with time and support even the most reluctant child would develop some French language skills. Children with behavioral or emotional problems were also examined. It was found that such problems did not improve following transfer to the English program. Bruck concluded that immersion French can benefit all children regardless of intelligence or special learning needs. However, special support would be necessary in such cases. Bruck's findings thus differ from Trites' claim that some students experiencing difficulty in immersion would experience fewer learning problems in an English setting.

Trites (1986a) in a follow up to the 1976 study examined learning disabilities and the prediction of success in primary immersion French. The same thirty-two immersion French learning disabled children were compared with other groups of children who experienced learning difficulties in school. The immersion French learning-difficulty group tended to be brighter and from more advantaged socio-economic backgrounds than the other children. The immersion French group obtained higher scores on physical coordination, strength, and sensory-motor functions than the other group of children experiencing learning difficulties, however performed significantly lower on a complex psychomotor problem-solving task, the Tactual Performance Test. Follow-up studies of the drop outs from immersion French indicated that their performance after age 9 or 10 reached normal limits on the Tactual Performance Test. It was shown that the type of learning disability in immersion French was different from the pattern of deficits seen in more traditional types of learning difficulties. These results raised the possibility that an early identification assessment could be developed. Such a tool could be a great value to boards of education that offer immersion programs. Some learning disabled students who have
remained in the immersion program for many years before transferring to the regular program may have avoided unnecessary frustration if they had been screened prior to their entrance to immersion French.

Tardif and Tardif (1993), in their assessment of the current status of immersion French in Canada, also considered learning difficulties in an immersion French program. They suggested that some children experiencing difficulties in the immersion French program may experience increased success in the English program. This research, once again, lends support to the view that each case of learning difficulties in immersion is individual in nature and the decision to transfer or remain in the program must be made with the best interest of the child in mind.

Several case studies have been conducted that focus on specific learning disabilities. Wiss (1987) examined Jenny, a nine-year old immersion French student, identified with a specific learning disability. The child’s reading and spelling were assessed in English and French, and significant deficiencies were found in both languages. The child was happy in the immersion French program and did not feel uncomfortable when separated from peers to receive resource assistance. Based on the diagnosis of the learning disability and the observation that academic and cognitive deficits were evident, the researcher advised that the child receive remedial assistance in both French and English but remain in the immersion French program. In a later study, Wiss (1989) examined the progress of a Grade 1 child experiencing difficulty in the immersion French program. This child was not identified with a learning disability but was developmentally delayed. The child was removed from the immersion French program and was placed in an English school where greater progress was noted shortly after the transfer. Once learning difficulties became less severe in the English school, the child was seen to be much happier. Wiss concluded that a language maturation lag may make learning difficult in a second language.
setting. These two studies demonstrate the importance of taking a close look at the actual nature of the difficulties experienced by individual students in the immersion French program. In the more recent study, it was clearly a wise decision to transfer the child to the English program. The child was happier and success experiences increased following transfer to the English program. Early identification of learning problems could possibly counter the trend of some learning disabled students transferring from immersion French following years of frustration in a program that was perhaps not suited for them.

Some boards of education adhere to the belief that students who have special learning needs are capable of successful schooling in immersion French. Other boards hold that learning disabled students should be screened out of immersion to experience more success in the regular program. Gibson (1988) looked at how boards of education across Canada dealt with special needs children in the immersion French program. Providing assistance within the program was supported by many boards. British Columbia employed the French Immersion Achievement Test (FIAT), developed in response to requests from learning support teachers to compare individual pupils' performances with those of their peers across Canada. The Edmonton Public School Board provided enrichment for immersion pupils designated as gifted and resource assistance for pupils identified with learning difficulties. In some cases, parents were advised to remove their children from the immersion French program. The Carleton Board of Education in Ottawa offered the immersion French program to all equitably. Special learning assistance was offered to children experiencing learning difficulties.

Two questions resulting from that of learning difficulties are a) how to identify children with special learning needs in immersion French and b) whether these children should remain in the immersion program. Trites (1986b) carried his research
of learning difficulties in immersion further and developed an assessment tool for the early identification of children at risk of failure in a primary immersion French program. The first phase of the study involved obtaining descriptive information on four-year old children enrolled in an immersion French program in Ottawa. The children were administered a battery of tests designated as the Early Identification Assessment Battery. The tests consisted of measures of intelligence, readiness skills for school, language abilities, and problem solving skills. The children were retested four times: at the end of kindergarten, Grade 1, Grade 4, and Grade 5. The types of children who experienced difficulties in the immersion program were identified as learning disabled, children with emotional problems, and immigrant children whose native language was not English. The results of the early identification project indicated that progress in the immersion French program might be predictable with a high degree of accuracy. However, it was suggested that the assessment instruments be cross-validated with other groups. It was not known, for example, whether the test scores in this battery would be equally accurate in predicting success in the partial bilingual program or with groups of children of lower general abilities levels, or of lower socio-economic levels than those included in the study.

In addition to reported research and case studies there is anecdotal evidence that learning difficulties are more severe for some students remaining in immersion French. In the opinion of some of the teachers in the immersion program of this study some children who experience moderate to severe learning difficulty in the immersion French program experience increased success once transferred to an English setting. Whether or not this is so, the question of learning difficulties is likely to play a role in parents' decisions to transfer their children from immersion. Do they believe that their children will experience less stress and frustration after transfer to the regular program? Would they be willing to be guided in their decision by adequate
2.3 English Language Development

In a typical immersion French program, French is the only language of instruction until students reach Grades 3 or 4, at which point English language instruction is introduced for a portion of the school day. The amount of English language instruction increases with grade level. At the Grade 7 level, many programs provide 50% English language instruction and 50% French language instruction. At the primary level, a developmental lag in English language skills development occurs in many immersion students due to French being the primary language of instruction. This lag may be found in such areas as spelling (St. Pierre, Laing, & Morton, 1995). A concern for English language development in the immersion French program may be another factor influencing parents to transfer their children to the English program.

Research has repeatedly shown that only some aspects of first language development are affected by immersion, and only temporarily. Barik and Swain (1974) compared the academic development of immersion French students from the partial and full programs with students from a regular English school. Regarding the effect of prolonged exposure to a second language on native language skills, the results lent support to the possibility that native language literacy skills may have been temporarily affected negatively. After one year of partial immersion, there was no evidence of deficiencies in English language skills. However, students from the full immersion group experienced a lag in English language development. By the end of Grade 3, children in the partial immersion group were found to lag behind the students in the regular program, but the children from the full immersion group appeared to catch up with the children from the regular group in their first language
skills following the introduction of English language arts at the Grade 2 level. After several years in both immersion programs, the results indicated that there was no difference in English language development between the immersion and English students.

In a later study, Barik and Swain (1976) conducted an evaluation of the immersion French program at a public elementary school in Toronto over a period of three years. Their findings indicated that although participation in the immersion program had no detrimental effect on the cognitive ability of children, students in the immersion program in Grade 3 lagged behind their peers in the regular English program in one or more aspects of English language skills.

Genesee (1978) evaluated an early immersion program in Montreal in a longitudinal study. English language tests and English mathematics tests were administered to the immersion and English control groups at each level. The findings were largely consistent with those reported by other researchers: there was a lag in English language skills development for the immersion group prior to the formal introduction of English language instruction. However, there was no indication that academic achievement was impaired as a result of participation in the immersion French program.

Harley, Hart, and Lapkin (1986a) also conducted a longitudinal study into the effects of early bilingual schooling on first language skills. Grades 1 and 2 students were examined over the period of two years. The findings suggested that first language skills of the immersion students were enhanced, but not in Grades 1 and 2. At some point after an initial lag, early bilingual schooling may have led to enhancement of first language skills. It was difficult to predict at what point first language skills were enhanced in an immersion French program. However, students with high competency in French appeared to show signs of first language
enhancement before students with low competency in French.

In a cross-sectional study, Harley, Hart, & Lapkin (1986b) compared Grade 6 immersion French students to peers in the English and gifted programs. The students were administered components of the Canadian Test of Basic Skills and were tested in vocabulary, grammar usage, and discourse skills. It was thought that the immersion group would outperform the regular program students in all components of the testing. In the area of vocabulary, no evidence was found that immersion students were benefitting from their knowledge of French. With respect to grammatical usage, advantages for immersion students were found as predicted. There did not appear to be a general advantage in discourse skills for immersion students.

Most of the studies have focused on reading. Carey (1987) examined the results from several studies on reading comprehension in French and English of students attending immersion French schools. The consensus of the previous research examined had been that little or no academic mastery of first language skills was lost through instruction in a second language. This study too found that reading comprehension of academic material by anglophone immersion French students at all grade levels remained considerably higher in English than French.

Malicky, Fagan, and Norman (1988) investigated similarities and differences in the ways immersion French Grades 1 and 2 students read in English and French. Informal reading inventories in French and English were administered to all subjects. The results supported the view that there was an initial lag in English reading skills in immersion students. Most students in the sample were not able to read independently in English but were able to do so in French by the end of Grade 1. However, by the end of Grade 2 the situation was reversed. A suggested reason for this was that some children having academic difficulties were counselled out at the end of Grade 1.

In their 1993 assessment of immersion French in Canada, Tardif and Tardif
suggested that immersion French students experienced an initial lag in first language development due to the concentration in the early grades on French language instruction. It was also suggested that immersion French students lagged behind their English peers in reaching proficiency in reading because they were reading in a second language. It was noted, however, that this lag was not permanent and further research was necessary to establish precisely at what point immersion students caught up with students from the English program.

Geva and Clifton (1994) examined the development of a variety of specific reading skills in early immersion French students. It was found that the development of fluent reading lagged somewhat in primary immersion students when compared with students of the regular English program. No differences were noted between the immersion and English group once children had reached a particular developmental reading level.

In one of the few studies on writing, Laing (1988) found that education in a second language did not impair native language abilities. Writing samples of Grade 8 students educated in the immersion French program were compared with writing samples of Grade 8 students educated in the regular English program. In overall quality, syntactic resources, and control over surface conventions, there were no significant differences in the writing of students from both programs. It was noted that only one grade level had been studied therefore it was possible that the cohort of students from the sample was exceptional and others may have performed differently on the same measures.

One finding that was supported again and again in studies conducted on English language development in immersion French is the developmental lag experienced by immersion students during their early primary years in the program. This lag is due to a concentration on French language instruction. It is not until
students have been taught in English for some time that they overcome this lag and catch up to their peers in the English program.

If the lag in English skills development is a concern of parents to the extent of influencing them to withdraw their children, two solutions are possible. Should we try to reduce the lag by concentrating on English language skills earlier in the immersion French program? What effect would that have on second language development? Perhaps this early lag in English language skills would be more acceptable to parents if they knew that it is only temporary.

The research to date conducted on English language development in immersion French consistently lends support to a predictable developmental lag in English language skills early in the program. This lag is not permanent. Students who have been in the immersion program for a number of years do catch up to their peers in the regular English program.

2.4 French Language Development

The level of French proficiency attained by immersion French students is another factor that may influence attrition in the immersion program. Do parents feel that their children are attaining an acceptable level of French proficiency in immersion?

Barik and Swain (1974) compared the French language proficiency of partial and full immersion French students with students from a regular English school. At the end of Grade 1, the French language skills of the children in the full immersion program were found to be no more advanced than the children in the partial immersion program. However, full immersion children tested at the end of Grade 2 scored significantly higher in French language skills than the Grade 2 children in the
partial immersion program. French skills attained by students in the full immersion program tend to be higher in the later primary years than those of students from the partial immersion and English program.

Other studies have compared the French of immersion students with French first language speakers. Pawley (1985) examined the level of bilingualism of immersion French students attending schools within the Ottawa and Carleton Boards of Education. The research indicated that in general, the graduates of the immersion program were proficient in French. The students did not perform as well as Quebec francophone students on reading and grammar based tests. However, their performance was superior to that of non-immersion students. The immersion students scored the highest on tests of listening comprehension. It was noted that there were students who had gone through the immersion French program and attained a high level of proficiency in French but also those whose abilities in French remained quite basic.

Does this superior French proficiency come from classroom exposure alone? In their evaluation of an immersion French program in Toronto, Barik and Swain (1976) examined the effects of an immersion program on French proficiency, first language skills, and mathematics skills. In relation to the levels of French proficiency attained in this particular school, students through Grades 1, 2, and 3 were compared with pupils in a similar program in Ottawa. It was noted that students in the immersion French program in Toronto performed as well as pupils in a similar program in Ottawa, who had the advantage of a bilingual environment.

However there seems little doubt that contacts with francophones can add to the French exposure of the classroom. MacFarlane and Wesche (1995) studied the French proficiency of immersion students in relation to their attitudes and interaction with the francophone community. Their study examined the self-assessed proficiency.
language-related attitudes, and French use patterns of 21 former immersion students. Although students expected high levels of future use of French, few students were using French in their careers or post-secondary education. It was found, however, that early French use and contact with francophones outside the classroom was related to the development of higher French proficiency and to greater use of French in daily life.

Van der Keilen (1995) also supports the view that contact with the francophone community enhances French language proficiency in Grade 5 to 8 immersion French students. It was suggested that immersion students did watch French television. However, after seven to ten years of immersion instruction, there was little French use outside of the classroom. Van der Keilen emphasized the importance of learning French in an environment where real contact with francophones is possible. One suggestion was introducing a twin school system fostering repeated informal contact with peers of the francophone community.

The majority of the research conducted on French language development in immersion French suggests then that immersion students benefit from exposure to use of the language outside of the classroom. Although Barik and Swain (1976) found that Toronto immersion students performed as well as immersion students from Ottawa in French language proficiency and did not have the advantage of a bilingual environment, MacFarlane and Wesche (1995) and Van der Keilen (1995) found that interaction with real francophones outside of the class enhanced French literacy skills in immersion students.

Much of the research pertaining to French language proficiency of immersion French students indicates that immersion students who have contact with francophone communities do have an advantage in their second language enhancement. It is also noted that immersion does not necessarily guarantee bilingualism for all students however their second language proficiency is likely to be higher than that of students
in the regular program. Some students in immersion French develop proficiency in second language skills, however, others do not. It has been observed in the immersion program of the study that children who are delayed in their first language skills development experience more difficulty with second language proficiency.

In light of the research, it might be asked whether parents who may have felt that their children were not adequately developing French language skills were expecting too much from their child too soon. Learning a second language takes time. Constant exposure to a second language enhances second language growth. This growth occurs at an even faster rate through contacts with the French community, but when exposure to the language is limited to the classroom, immersion students ultimately outperform their regular program peers in French language development.

2.5 Parental Expectations

Immersion French programs differ in many regards from the regular English program. It is important that parents of immersion students have a firm understanding of these differences in order to ensure realistic expectations of their child’s progress in the immersion program.

McGillivray (1983) discussed parental expectations of immersion French and addressed specific questions that many parents of immersion students may ask. Is it realistic to expect that most school boards in Canada offer effective second language programs? The researcher believed that this was a reasonable expectation. Another parental concern addressed was the issue of a student becoming bilingual through immersion. This was seen as a reasonable parental expectation, depending upon how long a student attends the program and what out-of-school experiences in the second language are provided. It was also seen as realistic for parents to expect that
the programs, the teaching, and the services in immersion French be equal to those in English programs. Special support services such as speech language pathology, social workers, and psychologists are offered in English only in many immersion schools. There is a need for these services far greater than they can support in both of the immersion schools of the study.

Gibson (1985) discussed some common reasons why parents had made the decision to place their child in the immersion French program. Some do so as an alternative for gifted education, however the study indicated this may not have been an appropriate choice. An immersion French environment was seen as initially challenging for the gifted, but gifted children were found to learn French more easily than non-gifted children and eventually needed additional stimulation and enrichment. Gibson also suggested that parents who are not convinced of the value of bilingualism should choose the English program for their students.

Parental views were also discussed in Bonyum, Morrison, and Unitt's examination (1986) of attrition in primary immersion French programs. This report was based on studies of transfers out of immersion. Through questionnaires and interviews, information was obtained about the factors which led to the decision to transfer children from immersion French. Five factors were found to influence the parental decision to transfer their child. These include understanding French, speaking French, relations with the immersion French teacher, emotional or behavioral problems, and lack of remedial help in immersion French. The researchers recommended that workshops be available for parents prior to their child’s entry into the immersion program. They also concluded that strong community relations and better understanding of the immersion program increased parental support of the program. A lack of understanding of the differences between immersion French and the regular English program may make parents likely to remove their children from the
immersion program when learning problems arise (Downer, 1993). Downer also suggested that strong community relations increase parental support of immersion programs and assist parents of immersion students to understand that there are unique differences in the patterns of academic and linguistic development in immersion French children. Among the suggestions for enhancing such understanding were: allowing and encouraging parents to borrow resources from the school library, permitting parent volunteers in the classrooms regardless of their level of French proficiency, providing evening courses in French at the school, and regular inservice for parents on the philosophy of instruction in the immersion French classroom.

One of the questions addressed in this study is whether parents felt that they were inadequately prepared to assist their child with homework and would be better able to monitor their child's progress in an English program. No research has been conducted, to date, on this question.

2.6 Concerns of Students Who Have Left the Immersion Program

Some researchers have examined the concerns of students who have left the immersion French program, in order to explain possible reasons for attrition. These studies relate to transfers at the secondary level.

Adiv (1979) conducted a study in Montreal to determine the number of students transferring out of secondary immersion programs and the reasons for their transfers. They were asked to rate the courses in their immersion program. The average rating was "averagely interesting." Art and music received the highest ratings. Science was also rated highly. History and math were rated as being more difficult. All subjects other than art and music were rated as being demanding. It was found that the higher
academic demands of the immersion courses and the fact that they were insufficiently interesting were important factors in students' decision to leave the program.

Morrison, Pawley, and Bonyun (1979) conducted a study of the reasons for student transfers from secondary school immersion programs in Ottawa and the Carleton Board of Education in the Ottawa area. Questionnaires were sent to 176 Grade 9 transfers and 65 Grade 12 transfers. It was found that late immersion students transferred from immersion between Grades 8 and 9 because the courses they wanted were not offered in French. Students felt that they would perform better and learn more in courses taken in English. The reason most often given by students who transferred during their secondary school career was that they would receive higher marks in English. The researchers also found that students wanted more oral French than was provided in their program.

Lewis (1986) studied the opinions and attitudes of students in four British Columbia school boards and found that regular program students were more satisfied with the content of their courses than immersion students who had left the program. Many immersion students felt that it was easier to obtain better grades in an English program. It was also revealed that many immersion students felt dissatisfied with the quality of instruction and high expectations placed on them.

Lewis and Shapson (1989) discussed the opinions of secondary immersion French students who had left the program. Some of these students expressed concerns about difficulty of the courses. Another concern was the quality of instruction. It was noted that students wished to increase their skills in French but felt that the content of their courses was not up to par and that they were working harder for poorer grades. It was recommended that objectives for the program be reviewed at the district, school, and classroom level, and that a clear set of objectives be communicated to the student and/or negotiated with them.
Halsall (1994) reported the results of surveys sent to 353 school boards across Canada by Canadian Parents for French, attempting to find reasons for attrition in secondary immersion. The respondents' comments indicated that there was a perception that students preparing for post-secondary education had to emphasize English language skills in order to obtain high marks. Student concerns included difficulty understanding, speaking, and reading French, difficulty reading English, and relations with immersion French teachers.

In summary, factors identified as reasons for transfers out of immersion schools at the secondary level include a lack of variety of courses, heavy work load, difficulty obtaining high grades, and the lack of opportunity to practice their French skills. However, there is no research to date on students' opinions of immersion French at the elementary level.

2.7 Opinions of Immersion French Students Who Have Remained in the Program

The views of graduates of immersion who have remained in the program are also of interest. Husum and Bryce (1991), concerned with the future of the immersion French program in Saskatchewan, performed a study to examine whether it was or was not a passing fad. Questionnaires were mailed to 80 Grade 12 immersion French graduates from one Saskatchewan high school to obtain their opinions concerning their experiences in the immersion program and also what they had to say about putting their own children in a similar program. Student responses were highly positive with respect to the immersion French program. Of the 78 respondents, 67 said that they were glad to have been in the immersion program. Similarly, when asked whether they would place their child in an immersion program, 63 out of the 78 responded “definitely”. Evidently those that “stay the course” are the most likely to
view their experiences of immersion in a positive way.

2.8 Summary of Literature Review

In summary, some of the factors that may lead parents and students to become dissatisfied with immersion French and transfer elsewhere have been identified and researched.

Various views have been advanced in regards to learning difficulties in immersion programs. Some studies, such as those of Bruck (1981) and Wiss (1989), supported the view that students who experience learning difficulties are able to successfully develop second language skills in an immersion setting. Trites (1976, 1986a, 1986b) on the other hand suggested that students who experience language difficulties in first language skills will experience more difficulty in a second language setting. Ultimately the needs of the individual child need closer attention. This lends support to the need for an early identification tool before students enter the immersion program.

Many students in immersion programs experience a predictable initial English language lag in the early elementary years, however they do ‘catch up’ to their non-immersion peers during the intermediate grades. Some research indicates that students who are exposed to a francophone community outside of the immersion French classroom possess an advantage with French language development. Other research indicates that many immersion students develop adequate proficiency in the French language, however, not to the extent of a francophone particularly in regards to French grammar. Some research suggests that not all students will become proficient in French simply by attending an immersion school. This has also been recognized in the immersion schools of this study. However there is general concensus that
immersion students will acquire higher French proficiency than those in the regular program.

Students who have transferred out of immersion generally felt that courses were more difficult and it was more of a challenge to maintain high grades in immersion programs. However this motive for transfer is more relevant to the high school situation. Students with language difficulties in the immersion program of this study often experience difficulty with comprehension. Using higher levels of thinking skills becomes a great challenge. Despite the absence of research data it is therefore likely that elementary level students also find comprehension a problem in the immersion class.

The fact that research has shown that first and second language skills development are generally not hindered and are often reinforced in immersion may not prevent parents from having concerns in these areas. It may therefore be necessary to introduce measures to educate parents in this respect. Some parental concerns can possibly be eliminated by maintaining an open door policy and developing positive relations with parental groups. Increasing public relations with the community and parent councils has been seen as a means of increasing parental support of immersion programs.

2.9 Conclusion

Both the research literature and the researcher's experience in the immersion classroom indicate that perceptions of parents who withdraw their children from immersion French are worth examining in the following areas:

1) difficulties encountered by the child in the immersion French program
2) the progress of English language skills development

3) progress in French language skills development

4) parents' own proficiency and ability to assist with children's homework
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

3.1 The Parent Questionnaire

The questionnaire used to collect data from the parents (Appendix A) was developed specifically for this study. Questionnaires used previously by the Ministry of Education of Ontario to elicit parents' and students' perceptions of immersion French were examined and found to be not suitable for the specific needs of this study.

The questionnaire was developed in consultation with the Thesis Committee, the Research Review Committee of the board of education of the study, and colleagues. Following a limited pilot with four colleagues and four parents of children in the immersion French program, modifications were made to improve comprehensibility.

The questionnaire consists of two sections. Section A relates to student experiences during their enrolment in the immersion French program. Section B elicits information on the process of withdrawal from the program and other demographic information.

Section A: In question 1, parents rate the reasons why they initially enrolled their children in immersion French. Question 2 asks for their opinions regarding their children's progress in the immersion French program. In this section, each question is rated on a three point Likert-type scale. Items evaluated are: English language instruction, quality of English skills, quality of French skills, learning difficulties in immersion French, experiences with homework, student progress, program delivery, and accommodations and transportation.
Section B: Parents indicate when they began considering removing their children from immersion French, at what point they actually transferred, their reasons for transfer, and the education setting of relocation. They are also asked to indicate the languages spoken in the home and their occupations. Space was provided at the end of the questionnaire for open-ended responses or any additional comments.

3.2 The Teacher Questionnaire

The second source of data was teachers' perceptions of reasons why parents may remove their children from immersion French. A short questionnaire (Appendix D) was given to nine teachers of immersion French. The teachers who participated represented the two immersion French schools involved in the study and a variety of teaching levels. The questionnaire asks for teachers' views on parental opinions of student progress in the area of English and French language skills. A space is provided for comments following each section of the questionnaire. The teachers who participated were asked to give their opinion why parents may remove their children from immersion French.

3.3 The Research Process

A research proposal was submitted to the board of education of the study and subsequently presented to a meeting of the Research Review Committee, which approved the study subject to necessary changes. A similar proposal was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Windsor.

The Research Review Committee contacted the principals of both schools
involved in the research. As anonymity was stipulated by the Research Review Committee, the researcher did not know the names and addresses of the subjects of the study. The secretaries of both schools were asked by the principals to forward the questionnaires to the parents who were selected according to the criteria described below (3.4 The Sample). Parents whose children remained in the same board of education were sent questionnaires through the school courier. Children who had transferred to a different board of education but remained in the city received questionnaires by courier. The questionnaires were addressed to parents but were taken home from the school by the children. Parents who had moved out of the city received their questionnaires through the mail.

The parent questionnaires where accompanied by a cover letter (Appendix C) which identified the researcher and the intent of the study. The importance of participation was stressed but it was stated that completing the questionnaire was optional. It was also stated that participants would have access to a summary of the study upon completion. This summary would be available at one of the immersion schools once the study is completed.

Participants were asked in the cover letter to complete the questionnaire and return it in the envelope provided postage pre-paid addressed to the researcher. The cover letter stated that subjects need not sign the questionnaire. The researcher therefore had no knowledge of who returned completed questionnaires.

Questionnaires were sent out in June of 1994. By September of 1994, 48 questionnaires had been returned, yielding a respondency rate of 41%.

Due to the anonymity stipulated by the Research Review Committee of the board of education of the study, the researcher was not able to send follow-up questionnaires to nonrespondents because there was no way of knowing which parents had failed to participate. For the same reason the researcher was limited
to using only the questionnaires and was unable to interview any of the participants.

The teacher questionnaire was given informally to nine immersion French teachers who represented both immersion schools of the study. The results were compared with the data accumulated from the teacher questionnaire.

3.4 The Sample

The secretaries of both immersion French schools of the study were asked to search their records for the previous three years, 1993 - 94, 1992 -93, and 1991 - 92. Between the years 1991 and 1994, 116 pupils transferred from immersion school A. There were 103 transfers from immersion school B during the same period. Of the 116 transfers from immersion school A, 47 resumed schooling in another immersion French school in either Ontario or elsewhere in Canada. There were 54 transfers from immersion school B to other immersion French schools in Ontario or elsewhere in Canada. Parents of these students did not receive a questionnaire. Parents who had moved out of the country did not participate in the study.

The parents who had transferred their children from the two immersion French schools for reasons other than relocating therefore constituted a total of 118

3.5 Statistical Analysis

Statistical analyses of the data obtained from the returned questionnaires were conducted using the SYSTAT computer package.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The reference numbers given in parentheses in the following statistical analysis refer to corresponding items on the parents’ questionnaire (Appendix B).

4.1 Parents’ Perceptions of Learning Difficulties in Immersion French

Many of the students who transferred from immersion had experienced some kind of learning difficulty while enrolled in the immersion French program. Some of these students were identified with a specific learning disability or other special need.

Of the 47 parents who responded, 18 ($38\%$) felt certain that their children experienced learning difficulties in immersion (A2.D.i). Another 7 ($15\%$) felt somewhat that their children experienced learning difficulties in the program. Of the parents who were certain that their children were experiencing learning difficulties in immersion French, 15 ($83\%$) felt that their children experienced stress due to French being the primary language of instruction (A2.D.ii). Of the 18 students with learning difficulties, 11 ($61\%$) were identified with a specific learning disability (A2.D.iii), while 6 ($33\%$) were identified with another special need (A2.D.iv). Table 3 shows the distribution of the grades in which the identifications occurred.
Table 3
Children identified with special learning needs in immersion French

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<th>other special need</th>
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No identifications were reported for Grades 5 to 8.

It is interesting to note that identification of learning disabilities or special needs were not necessarily detected during early enrolment in the immersion program. Of the 17 students who were identified with a learning disability or special need, 4 (23%) were identified at the kindergarten level, 5 (29%) at the Grade 1 level, 2 (12%) at the Grade 2 level, 2 (12%) at the Grade 3 level, and 4 (24%) as late as Grade 4 (B2.). Many of these parents thought about removing their child before identification but actually removed their child shortly after the point of being identified with a specific learning problem (B1.).

Of the 17 students identified with a specific learning need, 15 (88%) resumed schooling in a regular English program. Another was placed in a special class and one resumed schooling at a local private school (B4.).

Other children, not specifically identified with a learning disability or special need, allegedly experienced learning difficulty in the immersion French program. Of the parents who claimed this, many indicated difficulty with specific English and/or French language skills. Of the 47 parents who responded, 20 (43%) indicated some
form of problem reading in English (A2.B.i) and 23 out of 46 respondents (50%) in French (A2.C.i). 17 students (37%) apparently experienced reading difficulties in both English and French. Similarly, 23 respondents (49%) mentioned difficulty with English writing skills (A2.B.ii) and 28 (61%) did so for French (A2.C.ii). 19 respondents (42%) indicated difficulty writing in both English and French. 25 (54%) had problems spelling in English while 27 experienced problems spelling in French (59%), and 21 (46%) claimed to have had difficulty spelling in both English and French. While only 11 students (23%) had difficulty understanding English 20 (43%) had difficulty understanding French, hardly surprising since English is the first language for the majority of the students from the group. Only 8 students (17%) experienced difficulty comprehending both English and French. Perceptions regarding language difficulties in both English and French are summarized in Tables 4, 5, 6, and 7.

Table 4
Difficulty reading in English

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Table 6
Difficulty spelling in English

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</tbody>
</table>

To answer the question: Is there a correlation between English and French language skills development in specific areas, Spearman correlation coefficients were calculated, each of which was significant at the 1% level. Students’ difficulties reading in English were related to their difficulties reading in French (R=0.690, P=0.000). Students’ difficulties writing in English were related to their difficulties writing in French (R=0.640, P=0.000). Moreover, students’ difficulties spelling in English and in French (R=0.624, P=0.000) and students’ difficulties comprehending English and French were related (R=0.497, P=0.000). It would be interesting to conduct a follow-up assessment of those students who had difficulties to verify if their English language skills development has improved since their transfer from the immersion French program. Wiss (1989) found that learning difficulties do lessen once a child experiencing difficulty in immersion is placed in an English program.

Many of the parents whose children were identified as having learning difficulties in the immersion program were not satisfied with the special education services in the immersion French program. Of this group of parents, 11 (64%) were
not satisfied with services available assisting children with special needs in immersion (A2.D.v). The same percentage felt that improvements were necessary with the process of identification and testing in the immersion French program (A2.D.vi).

4.2 Parents’ Perceptions of English Language Instruction

As mentioned in the previous section, a number of parents indicated that their children experienced difficulty with their English language skills development in immersion French. 20 (43%) reported their children had experienced some kind of difficulty reading in English. 23 (49%) of the sample had children who experienced some kind of difficulty writing in English. 25 (54%) had children who had problems spelling in English. The percentage of students who had difficulty understanding English was much lower at 23%.

At present, English language instruction is introduced in the immersion schools of the study at the Grade 3 level. 25 of the parents (54%) were satisfied that English was introduced at this point (A2.A.i). Furthermore, parents of children who experienced difficulty with English language skills development generally were not dissatisfied with the level of introduction of English language instruction. Of the group of parents who indicated their children had difficulty in English skills development only 8 (38%) felt that English should be introduced at an earlier level. The remainder of these parents were satisfied with English being introduced at the Grade 3 level. 4 parents (8%) in this group felt that English should be introduced at a later point.

24 (51%) parents were satisfied with the amount of English language instruction offered at each grade level, namely 25% between Grades 3 and 6 and 50% in Grade 7 and 8 (A2.A.ii). 1 parent would have preferred English to be introduced at the Kindergarten level, 2 at the Grade 1 level, 5 at the Grade 2 level, 3 at the Grade 4
level. 1 at the Grade 5 level, and 1 at the Grade 8 level.

Of the 21 parents (48\%o) whose children experienced difficulties in English skills development, 12 (57\%o) felt that their children should have received more English language instruction (A2.A.ii). 2 of these parents felt that math should have been taught in English. Another 2 felt that the program should have been taught 50\%o English and 50\%o French. 1 parent felt that “English should be the main language initially. So much French should not be pushed all at once”. It is interesting to note the grade level at which those students who experienced difficulty in English skills left the program as shown in Table 8. 20 students (95\%o) out of 21 who experienced difficulty with English skills development left the program at the Grade 4 level or below. One other student experiencing difficulty with English skills left the program in Grade 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Removal of students who experienced difficulty in English skills development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The open ended comments at the end of the questionnaire suggested that many parents felt their children were not reading or writing in English to a satisfactory level. Some parents made comparisons of their children with children attending regular English schools whose skills were much higher. “I was afraid that my child was not reading as well as she should be. Her cousin who is a year younger was reading better than her. I decided at that time to remove her from the program.” Teachers in both immersion schools of the study have encountered these types of parental concerns through parent/teacher interviews and discussions. A repeated comment on the teacher questionnaire indicated that teachers perceived parents to
feel a necessity to concentrate more on English language skills development in preparation for secondary school and eventually university.

Perhaps these parents are unaware of the initial developmental lag in English language skills development among immersion children and that these children do 'catch up' to their peers educated in regular English schools, though usually not before the junior or intermediate grades. The majority of the students (95\%) who experienced difficulty with English language skills development in immersion left the program between kindergarten and Grade 4 when this developmental lag can be particularly critical.

4.3 Parents' Perceptions of French Language Skills Development

The majority of students in immersion French come from English speaking homes. French is spoken in the homes of only a very small percentage of students attending immersion schools. Of the 46 parents who responded, 23 (50\%) felt that their child experienced some kind of difficulty reading in French. Writing was the area where parents felt their child experienced the most difficulty. 28 parents (61\%) felt that their children possessed weak writing skills in French, while 27 (59\%) felt that their children had experienced difficulty spelling in French. Parents were more satisfied with the level at which their children were speaking and understanding French. 27 (57\%) felt their children had understood French to a satisfactory level and 29 (62\%) were satisfied with their childrens' French speaking skills.

The community in which this study took place is ethnically diverse, however, the language primarily heard and used is English. Immersion students do have the opportunity to become involved in French summer camps and participate in activities in a local French community center, however the use of French outside of school is
limited. Both MacFarlane and Wesche (1995) and Van der Keilen (1995) maintain that early French use and contact with francophones outside of the classroom are related to the development of higher French proficiency and to a greater use of French in daily life. It would therefore be interesting to compare parents’ views of French language skills development in immersion schools located in a French speaking community with the opinions of parents who participated in this study.

4.4 Parents’ Perceptions Relating to Homework

A particular concern that emerged was parents’ perceived lack of ability in assisting their children with French homework. Only 15 (35%) parents were not concerned that they were unable to understand books that their children brought home to read (A2.E.i). 16 parents (33%) felt that it was necessary to be able to read to their children in French (A2.E.ii). 24 (50%) felt they were unable to assist their children with homework because they could not speak French (A2.E.iii). 25 parents (52%) agreed that it was necessary to understand all homework and assignments that their children completed in the immersion French program (A2.E.iv). Of the group of parents who had concerns about assisting their children with French homework, all came from English homes where no French was spoken (B5). The open-ended comments revealed that concerns ranged from day to day reading to children to larger projects such as science fair and speeches. One parent felt that “my son was unsure of what to do for a science fair project and I couldn’t help him because it was a French assignment.” Another parent stated that “my child brought home French books to read that were above her level and I couldn’t help her.” Of the parents who experienced anxieties over assisting their children with French homework, 21 (88%) felt that they were unable to assess the level of their children’s progress in the immersion French
program (A2.F.i). 22 parents (48%) felt that communication between teachers and parents was lacking. Comments on the parent questionnaire revealed that some parents felt that specific expectations of assignments and homework were not clearly defined. "I didn’t know my child had a speech to do until the week before! No outline came home in advance.” Some of these parents evidently lacked a clear understanding of program expectations and units of study that their children would be working through. Perhaps a brief outline of long range plans sent to parents early in the year would have eliminated concerns regarding upcoming assignments.

4.5 Other Findings

Other issues not related to teaching and learning may have affected parents’ decisions to remove their children from the immersion French program. The first deals with transportation. Of the sample, 19 (58%) felt that their children were spending too much time on a school bus (A2.H.i). As stated earlier (1.1 Rationale) the amount of time each child spends on a school bus has increased the past two years since the amount of busses has been cut from twelve to five larger busses. Some children remain on the school bus for a period of just under one hour.

Another issue was the location of the immersion French secondary school to which the students would move if they continued in the program. 1994-95 was the first school year in which immersion French was offered at the secondary level. Of the parents who responded, 16 (38%) were dissatisfied with the location of the secondary immersion French school (A2.H.iii). Only 4 parents of the sample (9%) were dissatisfied with the location of the elementary immersion French schools (A2.H.ii). Of the group of parents who were dissatisfied with the location of the secondary immersion school, 5 removed their children at the Grade 8 level and resumed
schooling at a public English secondary school. Fewer parents dissatisfied with the location of the secondary school removed their children in the early elementary grades (see Table 9).

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>K</th>
<th>Gr 1</th>
<th>Gr 2</th>
<th>Gr 3</th>
<th>Gr 4</th>
<th>Gr 5</th>
<th>Gr 6</th>
<th>Gr 7</th>
<th>Gr 8</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another issue that may have contributed to the decision to transfer from immersion French is the size of classes. Of the 48 subjects, 23 (48%) felt that class sizes were too large for an immersion setting (A2.G.i). Class sizes have remained reasonably small at the Grade 1 and 2 level but large classes of over 30 children have been common at both immersion French schools over the past few years. Holistic teaching practices do facilitate second language acquisition, but large class sizes make child-centered teaching difficult. Large class sizes will be a reality in the future at all grade levels due to provincial cut backs in education.

While 17 parents (37%) were satisfied with the actual teaching strategies used in immersion classrooms, an equal number of parents were dissatisfied, and 16 (35%) were undecided (A2.G.ii). Dissatisfaction could be with teaching strategies or approaches which parents may not have experienced or understood such as holistic teaching.
4.6 Results of the Teacher Questionnaire

The Teachers’ questionnaire, which it should be remembered, was administered to a small sample, may enable us to gauge the extent to which teachers are aware of concerns of the parents.

8 out of the 9 teachers who participated felt that parents were generally content with English being introduced at the Grade 3 level. All 9 felt parents were satisfied with the amount of English language instruction at each level. This was indeed reflected in the parent questionnaire. The majority of parents were satisfied with each of these variables. However, there was less agreement in some other areas. Of the 9 teachers, 8 believed that parents who had transferred their child out of immersion were concerned with the child’s reading skills in English whereas 43° of the parents felt that their child experienced difficulty reading in English. Of these 8 teachers, all believed that parents felt their children also experienced difficulty reading in French. Of the sample, 50° of the parents felt a concern for French reading development. 8 teachers felt that parents were concerned with their children’s writing skills in English. whereas 49° of the parents felt that their children had experienced difficulty writing in English. All 9 teachers felt that parents were somewhat concerned with their children’s writing skills in French. and indeed 61° of the parents expressed this concern. 8 teachers felt that parents were concerned with their children’s spelling skills in English. and all of them felt that parents were concerned with their children’s spelling skills in French. This is confirmed to a large extent by the parents’ questionnaire. 54° of the parents were concerned about their children’s spelling in English and 59° felt their children had experienced difficulty spelling in French. Only 2 of the teachers felt that parents were concerned with their children’s comprehension skills in English. however, 6 felt that parents were concerned with their children’s
comprehension skills in French. This was an accurate perception of parent concerns regarding these skills. 78% of the parents were satisfied with their children's comprehension skills in English, but 43% felt that their children were experiencing difficulty understanding French. 6 teachers felt that parents were concerned with their children's speaking skills in French. Of the group of parents 40% felt a concern for French speaking skills.

Generally, teachers were aware of parental concerns regarding their children’s progress in the immersion program. All of the items that teachers were asked to evaluate on the Teacher Questionnaire were perceived by the teachers to be a concern of the parents. However, they seemed to overestimate the anxiety regarding English reading.

4.7 Reasons Given for Transfer

Section A of the parent questionnaire asked parents to rank, in order of importance, the applicable reasons why they enrolled their child in the immersion French program (A1.). The relative importance of each reason was determined by the following procedure. In order to calculate the relative importance of parental expectations, the following numerical values were assigned: 1st choice = 5, 2nd choice = 4, 3rd choice = 3, 4th choice = 2. The relative importance (maximum 5) for each choice is shown in Table 10.
Table 10

Relative importance of reasons for entering the immersion program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for entering</th>
<th>Relative importance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The immersion French program was a means of improving future job opportunities</td>
<td>4.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersion would provide child with the opportunity to become bilingual</td>
<td>4.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersion would be academically enriching for child</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersion program would lessen the tension between English and French Canada</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Providing their child with the opportunity to improve future job opportunities was ranked the highest reason among parents for enrolling their child in immersion French. The relative importance of this reason for enrolment was 4.30. Providing the child with the opportunity to become bilingual was rated second highest. The relative importance of this reason was 4.09. The last 2 reasons were rated equally by parents and both received a relative importance of 4.0. These reasons were: immersion French would be academically enriching for the child and immersion French would lessen the tension between English and French Canada. Space was provided in this section of the questionnaire for parents to add any additional reasons for enrolment. Additional reasons given were: providing the child with greater challenges, desire of the child to enter the program, restoring part of Canada’s natural heritage, bussing conveniences, and that the organization of the program seemed impressive.

Some relationship was found between transfers from immersion due to learning difficulties and transfers due to original expectations not being fulfilled. The correlations are shown in Table 11.
Table 11
Transfers due to learning difficulties and original expectations

Coding: (1) = yes, (2) = somewhat, (3) = no

Frequencies: Transfer because original expectations not fulfilled (rows). Transfer because child was experiencing learning difficulties in immersion program (columns).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Spearman Rank correlation coefficient was identified and a significant result at the 1% level was found (R=0.507 P=0.001). Many parents whose children experienced learning difficulties in the program apparently did not have their original expectations of the program fulfilled.

The open ended comments from the parent's questionnaire revealed various reasons for transfer other than that their original expectations had not been fulfilled (B3.C.). 5 parents were concerned about the quality of instruction at the secondary level. "I need to be convinced that [name of secondary school] offers an enriched educational experience for my child." Other parents felt that their children were unhappy in immersion. "My child did not enjoy the French. He was frustrated." 1 parent indicated that "my child was unable to play with his friends from school because they lived so far away. He was happier in English."
4.8 Timing of Removal

Not all parents removed their children from the immersion French program at the point of initial concern. As shown in Table 12 many parents transferred their children within a year of considering removal or during the following year. However, some parents waited a number of years after initial contemplation of removal before transferring their children. One parent initially considered removal at the Grade 1 level but actually waited to transfer until the child was in Grade 5. Another considered removal at the Kindergarten level but transferred at the Grade 4 level. Of the entire sample, 18 (41%) transferred their children from immersion French the same year that they first considered transferring. 17 (39%) waited for the period of 1 year. 5 (12%) waited for 2 years. 2 (5%) waited 3 years and 2 (5%) waited 4 years before transferring (see Table 12).
### Table 12
Initial consideration and removal from immersion program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Removal</th>
<th>K</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Began**

| Grade 6 |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |

**Considering**

| Grade 5 |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 4  |

**Removal**

| Grade 4 |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 2  |
| Grade 3 | 1  | 4  | 1  |    |    |    |    |    | 6  |
| Grade 2 | 2  | 1  | 2  | 3  | 1  |    |    |    | 7  |
| Grade 1 | 1  | 2  | 7  | 1  | 1  |    |    |    | 11 |
| K       | 3  | 4  | 1  |    |    |    |    |    | 8  |

| 3  | 6  | 8  | 4  | 10 | 6  | 1  | 5  | 44 |

Of the sample, 52% removed their children from the immersion program at some point between Grade 4 and Grade 8. These children had spent the majority of their school career for the past 5 to 8 years receiving instruction in the French language. It is likely that their acquired second language skills will be subject to attrition over a period of time following the transfer to the English program. If such attrition occurs one may question whether or not time was "wasted" in the immersion setting which may have been better spent in developing first language skills. This question of "wasting" years in immersion becomes even more apparent when considering students who had experienced learning difficulties. These students would have had more concentration on first language skills had the transfer taken place at a much earlier point. It has been observed in the immersion schools of the study that
first language skills are sometimes further behind those of peers in a regular English program containing late transfers.
CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

5.1 Summary and Conclusions Regarding Learning Difficulties in Immersion French

A significant number of the parents who had removed their children from immersion French reported concerns with learning difficulties in the immersion French program. The difficulty here lies in knowing whether or not these learning difficulties were sufficient to hinder the child’s progress. Immersion French is not a school solely for the gifted or those with high IQs. Many children with learning problems do succeed through the immersion program. There are, however, some children who enter the program with moderate to severe language disabilities. Some language deficiencies make learning difficult in a second language.

Of the sample, 35% had children who were identified with a specific learning disability or other form of special learning need. This identification did not always take place on initial enrolment in the program. Four children were identified with specific learning disabilities as late as Grade 4. Another two were identified at the Grade 3 level. These children had remained in the immersion French program for four and five years before being identified. Had they been immediately identified, perhaps they could have transferred to the regular English program at an earlier point where concentration on first language skills would have taken place much sooner. One reason why children are not always identified early in the immersion French program is that this process of identification is often lengthy. The two immersion French schools of this study had at the time when the study was conducted, one speech language pathologist and school psychologist that were shared between nine other schools.
The services of the educational consultant were similarly limited. Some children requiring testing may have waited to see these support people for an entire year. Parents have the option to have their children tested outside the school system but this process is very costly and not all parents have health plan coverage.

It is important that learning disabilities, especially of the kind that may hinder language development, be detected early in an immersion French program. It may be difficult for these children to transfer to an English school at a stage where they have solely or primarily been taught in a second language. They may be very far behind in their English language skills and have a great deal of catching up to do to succeed in an English classroom. This is not only difficult for the student but also for the teacher. It would be ideal to screen out such learning difficulties early in the immersion French program so that students affected would be able to concentrate on developing their first language skills. It has been observed in the program of the study that students can lose in French proficiency long after transfer to the English program. This raises the question that perhaps these students could have better spent the time devoted to developing second language skills that were later lost in concentrating on much needed English language skills development.

Other questions are raised by testing in immersion French at the earlier grade levels. In the schools studied, testing was done in English because there was no French assessment tool appropriate for immersion children and no bilingual consultant, speech language pathologist, or psychologist. Children tested at the Kindergarten, Grade 1, or Grade 2 level had received no instruction in the English language, yet were tested in English. One may question the validity of testing early immersion children in this way, yet the concern of leaving the child too long in a less suitable program remains.

One recommendation may be to utilise a pre-screening instrument when
children enter the immersion French program at the kindergarten level. This process would identify immediately those children who may have special learning needs that would make learning difficult in the immersion French program. At the present, the board of education of the study does not implement any kind of screening tool upon entry of the immersion program. In adapting the use of such a tool, many children that would probably transfer at a later date would be spared a difficult start to their school career.

One identification tool that may be of interest to the board of education of the study is the four-year old Kindergarten Early Identification Assessment Battery (Trites, 1986b). The early identification of children who are at high risk of failure in immersion French was the goal of a seven year study beginning in 1976 (Trites 1986b). The kindergarten Early Identification Assessment Battery was found to accurately predict those who experienced great difficulty in immersion French and subsequently dropped out as well as the subsequent achievement levels of students who remained in the program. The scores from this battery were found to be more accurate than other variables such as socio-economic status, home background, or teacher ratings. Such an assessment tool would prove useful to any immersion French program.

5.2 Summary and Conclusions Regarding English Language Instruction

The study also indicated real concerns among parents who removed their children from immersion French regarding their children’s English language skills development, due to French being the primary language of instruction. The research shows that many immersion French students experience an initial lag in first language development in the early grades but that most overcome this lag as English instruction increases in the later grades.
Roughly half of the sample had children who had experienced some kind of difficulty with English language skills development in the immersion French program. Of these, 95% had removed their children at the Grade levels in which the initial developmental lag is most noticeable in immersion French students. How aware are parents that this developmental lag has been extensively researched and found to be predictable but temporary? Upon entering the immersion French program under study parents receive a parent handbook but this does not mention the question of English language development in an immersion French program. Many parents are very excited about enrolling their children in the immersion French program and opening up opportunities to a future of bilingualism. Yet as their children advance in the primary grade levels it may become more apparent that they are behind their peers in the regular program in regards to English language skills development, particularly when children participate in reading experiences at Brownies, Cubs, Scouts, etc. and parents can actually make comparisons. Some parents may come to feel that a bilingual education is not worth the perceived threat to the first language skills.

Educators, administers, and boards of education must educate the public and particularly those parents who have children in immersion French that an initial lag in English language skills is normal and predictable. Parents cannot generally be expected to be informed on the processes of second language acquisition. One suggestion is to provide documented research to parents of immersion students. Immersion schools should consider subscribing to publications such as *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, where a great deal of research on immersion French programs is reported. Perhaps a section of the school library can be dedicated to parents where they can obtain information on the immersion French program. Canadian Parents for French is an organization that every immersion parent should be aware of, which reports on research developments in immersion and core FSL and is
accessible through the Internet. Another suggestion is to conduct short presentations on the topic at local parents' club meetings or invite parents to come to a short inservice session on a separate evening.

5.3 Summary and Conclusions Regarding French Language Skills Development

The third area of parents’ concern was their expectations regarding French language proficiency. Two important factors contribute to the development of bilingualism in a child. First, the child must be given the opportunity to speak French. Immersion programs that are offered in a French speaking environment have an obvious advantage over other programs offered in primarily English speaking areas. However, much can be done to foster French language use outside of the classroom even though English is the language of the community. In most communities strong French organizations exist that offer various youth programs throughout the year. Immersion schools may need to become more involved and aware of what enrichment is available for immersion students through French clubs. School boards and immersion schools could promote and support local French clubs. Many parents of immersion students are unaware of the availability of French enrichment outside of the classroom. At the elementary level, student exchanges with Quebec could be implemented. In the program studied, Grade 8 students participate in a four day excursion to Quebec, however there is little or no other contact made with French speaking Canada at the elementary level. Teachers and administrators should perhaps consider additional measures to promote French involvement outside of school.

However, despite maximum and equal exposure to the target language, it must be recognized that every child that enters an immersion French program does not
necessarily become bilingual. This has been particularly evident in the case of those students who are delayed or troubled with first language skills. Teachers and administrators should perhaps be realistic in discussing with parents the prospects of becoming bilingual for those children having difficulty in their first language skills development. Chapter 2 revealed two philosophies on the issue of students entering immersion programs possessing first language skills difficulties. One philosophy supports the belief that immersion students can be successful in immersion French regardless of learning difficulty provided that the necessary support for the child is available. The other is the belief that learning difficulties lessen once a child is educated in the first language. The second belief is held by many educators in the immersion schools of the study. However, children with language difficulties who have remained in the program over an extended period of time have been observed to lack proficiency in either French or their first language. perhaps because the second language setting does not allow for enough concentration on first language skills development. Both these concerns were noted in the survey. It is primarily the decision of the parent to keep the child in immersion or transfer to an alternative setting and it must be recognized that not all parents will follow recommendations of the board professionals. Nevertheless, accurate and timely assessment could help identify children with language difficulties, just as with other learning difficulties (5.1).

5.4 Summary and Conclusions Relating to Homework

Another concern of parents removing their children from immersion French was the question of their own ability to assist their children with French homework. 50% of the parents felt that they were unable to assist their children with their homework because they didn’t speak French. More than 50% felt that it was necessary to
understand all homework and assignments that their children completed while enrolled in the immersion French program. Of those parents who felt incapable of helping their children with French homework, 80% felt dissatisfied with the level of communication between teachers and parents.

It is well known upon entering an immersion program that French is the primary language of instruction. A parent upon entering the program may also anticipate that French materials and assignments will be brought home. Nevertheless, teachers and administrators may underestimate the anxiety parents may feel when their children do not understand their homework and need help to complete larger projects at home in French. Once again, public relations regarding these matters seems imperative. Early in the immersion French program, parents must be made aware that the program is geared to children coming from English speaking homes, so that bilingualism on the part of the parents is not required. However, for those parents wishing to become more involved in their children's work, immersion French schools could set up parent support groups. A board of education or immersion school could certainly put parents in contact with courses that are offered in French or perhaps even offer beginner courses for parents at the school one night per week. Another suggestion is to implement a lending system from the school library for parents to assist them in developing their French language skills. Teachers could also briefly review their long range plans for the school year with parents at a Parent Welcome session early in the year. Parents would then know in advance the dates of major projects such as speeches or science fair. At the same time, teachers could assure parents that they should listen to their children read in French, even if they do not understand what is being read. Parents should always be encouraged to read to their children in English, even during the early primary years in which English is not taught.

Somewhat similar to the concern about homework, of the sample, 48% felt that
they were unable to assess the level of their children's progress in the immersion French program. Many of these parents felt that the reason for this was their lack of the necessary language proficiency. While it is not imperative that parents be bilingual for their children to succeed in the immersion French program, it is imperative that they feel secure with their initial decision of placing their children in immersion French. Public relations with the community is the vital way to ensure that parents feel comfortable with their choice of bilingual schooling for their children. Opening the door to communication with the parents and instituting an open door policy with the school is one way to assure this. This public relations must take place at the board, administrative, and teacher level. Immersion school administrators may even consider allowing parents of immersion students to come into the classroom to volunteer. When parents are welcome, they may develop an understanding and support of the program.

5.5 Summary and Conclusions Regarding Other Findings

Other factors of a non-pedagogical nature may have contributed to parents' decisions to remove their children from the immersion French program. One of these was the issue of transportation. Of the respondents, 48% felt that their children were spending too much time on the school bus. In the program studied some children may be on the school bus for as long as one hour. Others are no longer picked up at their doors but must walk to a general pick up location. Some parents made comments that they were unhappy with the level of discipline on the bus. There were cases of reoccurring behaviour problems on the bus with some students.

Parents need to feel secure about sending their children on a school bus. The problem of long bus rides is difficult to change because of budget cuts. Parents will have to accept this inconvenience. However the problem of discipline on school
busses can be helped. Children who are not capable of following rules on school busses could lose their bussing privileges. Perhaps numerous warnings should not be granted before bussing privileges are lost. The only supervision on a school bus is the bus driver him/herself. The driver of the bus is not able to stop and regulate unruly behaviour while concentrating on driving. This becomes even more of a challenge in inclement weather. The safety of the children is a first priority and in order to assure each child’s safety, those not following bus rules could be removed and their parents asked to provide alternate transportation.

Even though the location of the elementary school was not a problem there was some concern regarding the location of the secondary school to which the students would later transfer. 38% of the parents were dissatisfied with the location of the secondary immersion French school. This location will likely not be changed despite some parental opposition. The board of education of the stucy could better promote this school as an appropriate feeder school of the two immersion elementary schools. Presently, students from the secondary school work with teachers and students from one of the elementary immersion schools which is located in close proximity. Perhaps more of an effort could be made to permit secondary students to work with the other immersion elementary school as well. Effective orientation for Grade 8 students could take place early in the school year. Grade 7 students could be introduced to the secondary school as well, so they may form positive opinions and see what is going to be available for them once they commence their secondary studies.

Another concern revealed in the study that may have contributed to parents removing their children from immersion French is the issue of class size. Of the sample, 46% felt that class sizes were too large for an immersion setting. The ministry of education provides boards of education with grants when they maintain class sizes at the Grade 1 and 2 level under twenty children. This policy does not exist for other
grade levels. Classes in both immersion schools at the the junior and intermediate level have contained well over 30 children.

When comparing class sizes with other English class sizes of the same grade level this does not appear to be unusual. However immersion French cannot be compared to the regular English program in regards to class size. For children learning a second language, the only role model during the day is the classroom teacher. Unlike living in a milieu where they can experience the language upon leaving school, most immersion students go home to an English setting. The more students there are in a classroom, the less opportunity each child has to speak and respond to the classroom teacher who is the sole role model. Moreover, it is important that children in immersion classrooms have adequate opportunities to speak and communicate during the day in order to practice their second language skills. This becomes much more difficult when class sizes are large. Noise level becomes an issue and often the amount of English spoken by students becomes difficult to control. Boards of education should perhaps carefully assess the importance of smaller class sizes at all grade levels in immersion French school.

It was noted that 17 parents were not satisfied with some of the teaching strategies used in the immersion schools of the study. In the past year, the board of education of the study implemented training for teachers and administrators on the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training curriculum guideline, The Common Curriculum. Teachers involved in this training conducted an evening workshop for parents explaining the teaching approach used by immersion teachers to arrive at student outcomes. Perhaps more of this inservice in the future will assist parents to develop an understanding of why certain teaching strategies are used in immersion.
5.6 Summary and Conclusions Regarding Reasons Given for Transfer

The most important reason given by parents for their initial enrolment of their children in immersion appeared to be the long range goal of enhancing their future job opportunities, in other words, instrumental motivation, the learning of a second language to attain goals such as getting a job, reading foreign material, or passing an exam. This differs from integrative motivation, which refers to learning a language in order to communicate with people and understand or appreciate a different culture (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). 63 parents from the sample were employed, 3 were unemployed, and 3 were students (66%). 64% of the sample was either self-employed or employed in a public sector profession. 36% was employed in the private sector, a student, or unemployed. The majority of the parents thus appeared to belong to the socio-economic group which would place high value on such instrumental goals as bilingualism. However, the initial instrumental motivation of these parents seemed to have been quickly forgotten or reduced in importance when their children encountered learning difficulties in immersion. Perhaps value should be placed on learning a second language for more intrinsic or integrative reasons, which were rated less highly by the parents. The learning of French culture is currently enforced in the immersion schools of the study. Quebec Carnaval celebrations and cultural unit studies on French culture around the world are examples of this. Perhaps parents can become more involved in such activities as a way of developing their intrinsic motivation towards their children’s immersion schooling. One suggestion is to invite parents for a tourtiere lunch during the week before Christmas since tourtiere is a traditional French meal during the festive season. Parents could also assist with activities during Quebec Carnaval celebrations.
5.7 Summary and Conclusions Regarding Timing of Removal

Although most parents transferred their children from the immersion program after the period of 1 year, some waited as long as 4 years. If late transfers from immersion are attributed to learning difficulties, such delays could perhaps be reduced by the use of early assessment and pre-screening as previously suggested (5.1 Summary and Conclusions Regarding Learning Difficulties in Immersion French.). Other problems that may not be detected through pre-screening should be identified soon after entry into immersion rather than at a point when a child has spent a number of years in the program.

5.8 Summary of Recommendations

The discussion of the parents' perceptions on the topics contained in the questionnaire led to the following recommendations which could be explored by boards of education wishing to reduce attrition in immersion French.

1. Adapt a pre-screening instrument such as the Kindergarten Early Identification Assessment (Trites, 1986b).
2. Test students experiencing language learning difficulties early in the program.
3. Include a section in the parent handbook on the process of second language acquisition.
4. Provide documented summaries of relevant research for parents in second language acquisition.
5. Conduct short workshops for parents on language growth in immersion.
6. Promote and support local French clubs. Provide parents with information on
French activities that their children can participate in outside of the classroom.

7. Communicate regularly with parents about their children’s language progress in immersion.

8. Provide information for parents about French courses offered in the community or offer French language courses for parents at the school.

9. Review long range plans with parents early in the year.

10. Have an open door policy at school with parents. Invite parents into the classroom as volunteers.

11. Remove bussing privileges immediately from students who do not follow bus rules.

12. Assess the importance of smaller class sizes at all grade levels in immersion schools.

13. Promote the location of the secondary immersion school by conducting effective orientations for Grade 7 and 8 students and co-op experiences between secondary and elementary students.

14. Provide opportunities for parents to become involved in French cultural activities at school which will develop their intrinsic motivation for their children’s immersion schooling.

5.7 Limitations of the Study

Certain limitations must be recognized relating to the collection and interpretation of data in this study. One limitation is the tool used to collect data. Since questionnaires used in previous research did not meet the specific needs of this study, it was necessary to compile a new instrument. The questionnaire was piloted on a small group of colleagues and parents but not used in an entire study previous to this
study.

Another limitation is the sample size received upon return of the questionnaires. Due to the anonymity stipulated by the research review committee of the board of education of the study, the names and addresses of parents who returned the questionnaires was not available to the researcher. As a result, it was not possible to send out a second request to those who did not respond. The sample size, as a result, was quite small. A similar study in a larger metropolitan area may lead to a larger sample size.

Anonymity also excluded the option to conduct interviews with the subjects of the study, to obtain additional opinions or permit respondents to elaborate on their answers. Perhaps in future such research projects, permission could be obtained to contact the subjects in person or at least by telephone.

A final limitation of this study is that of timing. The sample covered a time span of three years, the most recent school year studied being 1993-94. According to the secretaries of the schools studied, transfers have increased for the year of 1994-95 and 1995-96. Incorporating this school year into the study may have resulted in a much larger population and increased the number of respondents.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

Questionnaire

REMOVAL OF CHILDREN FROM IMMERSION FRENCH

SECTION A

1. Some parental expectations of immersion French are as follows. Please number in order of importance, the applicable reasons why you enrolled your child in the immersion French program. Please add any additional reasons not covered.

   ___ I wanted to provide my child with the opportunity to become bilingual
   ___ I felt that the immersion French program would be academically enriching for my child
   ___ I felt that the immersion French program was a means of improving future job opportunities
   ___ I felt that the immersion French program would lessen the tension between English and French Canada
   Other: ____________________________

2. During the time that your child was enrolled in immersion French, you may have formed opinions regarding your child’s progress. Circle the appropriate response for each of the following items in regards to progress made during the time that your child was enrolled in the immersion French program. Please add any additional comments in relation to any of these items at the end of the survey.

   yes/no/not applicable

   A. English Language Instruction

      i) I was satisfied with English being introduced at the Grade 3 level ________
         If you answered no, indicate the grade level you would have liked
         English to be introduced ________ Grade ________

      ii) I was satisfied with the amount of English language instruction
         for each grade level ________________________________ ________
         If you answered no, indicate amount of preferred English language
         instruction ________________________________ ________

         not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

   B. Quality of English Skills

      i) My child was experiencing difficulty reading ________
         in English ________________________________ ________
         not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable
ii) My child's writing skills in English were weak
   not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

iii) My child was unable to accurately spell in English
   not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

iv) My child was experiencing difficulty comprehending English.
   not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

C. Quality of French Skills

i) My child was experiencing difficulty reading in French
   not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

ii) My child's writing skills in French were weak
   not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

iii) My child was unable to accurately spell in French
   not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

iv) My child was experiencing difficulty comprehending French
   not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

v) My child was not speaking French to a satisfactory level
   not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

D. Learning Difficulties and Special Needs in Immersion French

i) My child was experiencing learning difficulties in the immersion French program
   not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

ii) My child was experiencing stress in the immersion French program due to French being the primary language of instruction
   not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

   yes/no

iii) My child was identified with a specific learning disability during enrolment in Immersion French at the Grade __ level
   yes/no

iv) My child was identified with another specific need during enrolment in Immersion French at the Grade __ level
   yes/no

   yes/no/not applicable

v) I feel that the immersion French program provides adequate services that assist children with special learning needs
   yes/no/not applicable

vi) I was satisfied with the process of testing and identification of my child during enrolment in immersion French
   yes/no/not applicable
agree/undecided/disagree

E. Experiences with Homework

i) I was concerned because I couldn’t understand books that my child brought home to read ............ agree/undecided/disagree

ii) I felt that it was necessary to be able to read to my child in French .................. agree/undecided/disagree

iii) I was unable to assist my child with homework because I don’t speak French ............... agree/undecided/disagree

iv) I felt that as a parent needed to understand all homework and assignments that my child completed in the immersion program agree/undecided/disagree

F. Student Progress

i) I was unable to assess the level of my child’s progress in the immersion French program agree/undecided/disagree

ii) I was not satisfied with the level of communication between teachers and parents regarding student progress agree/undecided/disagree

G. Program Delivery

i) I felt that class sizes were too large for an immersion setting agree/undecided/disagree

ii) I was satisfied with the teaching strategies used in the immersion French program agree/undecided/disagree

H. Accommodations and Transportation

i) I felt that my child was spending too much time on a bus agree/undecided/disagree

ii) I was satisfied with the location of the elementary immersion French school agree/undecided/disagree

iii) I was satisfied with the location of the immersion French secondary school agree/undecided/disagree

SECTION B

1. At what point did you begin to consider removing your child from the immersion French program? Check the appropriate grade level.

kindergarten ___
Grade 1 ___
Grade 2 ___
Grade 3 ___
Grade 4 ___
Grade 5 ___
Grade 6 ___
Grade 7 ___
Grade 8 ___

2. At what point did you actually remove your child from the immersion French program? Check the appropriate grade level:
- kindergarten ___
- Grade 1 ___
- Grade 2 ___
- Grade 3 ___
- Grade 4 ___
- Grade 5 ___
- Grade 6 ___
- Grade 7 ___
- Grade 8 ___

3. You’ve indicated reasons why you decided to enroll your child in the immersion French program in Section A. Please indicate below why you decided to transfer your child to another school or program:
- Yes/No/Somewhat
  A. My original expectations of immersion French were not fulfilled ___
  B. My child began to experience learning difficulties in the immersion French program ___
  C. Other: ____________________________

4. Where did your child resume schooling? Check the appropriate school system or program:
- Private school ___
- Public system regular English program ___
- Public system special class placement ___
- Separate system immersion French program ___
- Separate system regular English program ___
- Public system Immersion French program/different school ___
- Other: ____________________________
5. Primary language spoken in the home: ________________
   Please number, in order of importance, other languages spoken in the home:
   ___ English
   ___ French
   ___ Arabic
   ___ Chinese
   ___ Polish
   ___ Italian
   ____________ Other(s)

6. Please indicate occupations(s) of guardian(s) by checking the appropriate responses:

   A. Public Sector
      ___ government services
      ___ nurse
      ___ doctor
      ___ teacher
      ___ other

   B. Private Sector
      ___ self employed
      ___ service industry (food services, retail, etc.)
      ___ industry worker (please indicate)
      ___ other

   C. ___ Student

   D. ___ Presently Unemployed

   E. ___ Other

Comments: _____________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
Appendix B

Parents' questionnaire showing references used in statistical reporting (Chapter 4).

SECTION A

1. Some parental expectations of immersion French are as follows. Please number in order of importance, the applicable reasons why you enrolled your child in the immersion French program. Please add any additional reasons not covered.

   ___ I wanted to provide my child with the opportunity to become bilingual

   (A1) ___ I felt that the immersion French program would be academically enriching for my child

   ___ I felt that the immersion French program was a means of improving future job opportunities

   ___ I felt that the immersion French program would lessen the tension between

   ___ English and French Canada

   Other ___________________________ ___________________________ ___________________________

2. During the time that your child was enrolled in immersion French you may have formed opinions regarding your child's progress. Circle the appropriate response for each of the following items in regards to progress made during the time that your child was enrolled in the immersion French program. Please add any additional comments in relation to any of these items at the end of the survey.

   yes/no/not applicable

   A. English Language Instruction

   i) I was satisfied with English being introduced at the Grade 3 level

   (A2 A i) If you answered no, indicate the grade level you would have liked

   English to be introduced

   ___ Grade ___

   ii) I was satisfied with the amount of English language instruction

   (A2 A ii) If you answered no, indicate amount of preferred English language

   instruction ___________________________ ___________________________ ___________________________

   ___________________________ ___________________________ ___________________________

   not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

   B. Quality of English Skills

   i) My child was experiencing difficulty reading

   (A2 B i) in English ___________________________ not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable
(A2.B.ii) ii) My child’s writing skills in English were weak

iii) My child was unable to accurately spell

(A2.B.iii) in English

not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

iv) My child was experiencing difficulty

(A2.B.iv) comprehending English

not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

C. Quality of French Skills

i) My child was experiencing difficulty reading

(A2.C.i) in French

not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

ii) My child’s writing skills in French were weak

(A2.C.ii) in French

not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

iii) My child was unable to accurately spell

(A2.C.iii) in French

not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

iv) My child was experiencing difficulty

(A2.C.iv) comprehending French

not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

v) My child was not speaking French to a satisfactory level

(A2.C.v)

not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

D. Learning Difficulties and Special Needs in Immersion French

i) My child was experiencing learning difficulties

(A2.D.i) in the immersion French program

not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

ii) My child was experiencing stress in the immersion French program due to French being the primary language of instruction

(A2.D.ii)

not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

yes/no

iii) My child was identified with a specific learning disability during enrolment in immersion French at the Grade __ level

(A2.D.iii)

yes/no

iv) My child was identified with another special need during enrolment in immersion French at the Grade __ level

(A2.D.iv) yes/no

yes/no/not applicable

v) I feel that the immersion French program provides adequate services that assist children with special learning needs

(A2.D.v)

yes/no/not applicable

vi) I was satisfied with the process of testing and identification of my child during enrolment in immersion French

(A2.D.vi)

yes/no/not applicable
agree/undecided/disagree

E Experiences with Homework

i) I was concerned because I couldn't understand books that my child brought home to read. agree/undecided/disagree

(A2 E i)

ii) I felt that it was necessary to be able to read to my child in French. agree/undecided/disagree

(A2 E ii)

iii) I was unable to assist my child with homework because I don't speak French. agree/undecided/disagree

(A2 E iii)

iv) I felt that as a parent needed to understand all homework and assignments that my child completed in the immersion program. agree/undecided/disagree

(A2 E iv)

F Student Progress

i) I was unable to assess the level of my child's progress in the immersion French program. agree/undecided/disagree

(A2 F i)

ii) I was not satisfied with the level of communication between teachers and parents regarding student progress. agree/undecided/disagree

(A2 F ii)

G Program Delivery

(A2 G i) I felt that class sizes were too large for an immersion setting. agree/undecided/disagree

(A2 G i)

ii) I was satisfied with the teaching strategies used in the immersion French program. agree/undecided/disagree

(A2 G ii)

H Accommodations and Transportation

(A2 H i) I felt that my child was spending too much time on a bus. agree/undecided/disagree

(A2 H i)

ii) I was satisfied with the location of the elementary immersion French school. agree/undecided/disagree

(A2 H ii)

iii) I was satisfied with the location of the immersion French secondary school. agree/undecided/disagree

(A2 H iii)

SECTION B

1. At what point did you begin to consider removing your child from the immersion French program? Check the appropriate grade level.

(B1) kindergarten __
Grade 1 __
Grade 2 __
Grade 3 __
Grade 4 ___
Grade 5 ___
Grade 6 ___
Grade 7 ___
Grade 8 ___

2. At what point did you actually remove your child from the immersion French program? Check the appropriate grade level:

kindergarten ___
Grade 1 ___
Grade 2 ___
Grade 3 ___
Grade 4 ___
Grade 5 ___
Grade 6 ___
Grade 7 ___
Grade 8 ___

3. You've indicated reasons why you decided to enrol your child in the immersion French program in Section A. Please indicate below why you decided to transfer your child to another school or program:

yes/no/somewhat

(B3 A) A. My original expectations of immersion French were not fulfilled ___

(B3 B) B. My child began to experience learning difficulties in the immersion French program ___

(B3 C) Other ______________________________________________________________________

4. Where did your child resume schooling? Check the appropriate school system or program:

(B4) ___Private school ___

___Public system regular English program ___

___Public system special class placement ___

___Separate system immersion French program ___

___Separate system regular English program ___

___Public system immersion French program at different school ___

Other ____________________________________________________________
5 Primary language spoken in the home

(B5) Please number in order of importance other languages spoken in the home

___English
___French
___Arabic
___Chinese
___Polish
___Italian

__________________________Other(s)

6 Please indicate occupations(s) of guardian(s) by checking the appropriate responses

(B6) A. Public Sector

___government services
___nurse
___doctor
___teacher
other ______________________

B. Private Sector

___self employed
___service industry (food services, retail, etc)
industry worker (please indicate) ______________
other ______________________

C. ___Student

D. ___Presently Unemployed

E. ___Other

Comments

__________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________
Appendix C

Cover Letter Accompanying Questionnaire

#308 - 101 Langlois Street, Windsor, ON N9A 6Y2

June 5, 1994

Dear Parent or Guardian:

My name is Trish Eagle and I am doing a Master of Education thesis at the University of Windsor. I am very interested in finding out about reasons why some parents decide to remove their children from immersion French.

Your position as a parent is an important one when it comes to educational decision making. I understand that, for whatever reason, you made the decision to remove your child from the immersion French program. I would very much appreciate if you would take the time to share the reasons why you made that decision.

Your participation in this study is important because it may help the immersion French program more successfully meet the needs of the parents and children that it serves. Your participation will also enable me to complete my degree.

This is a study conducted with the approval of the board of education of the study. Permission has been secured from the Research Review Committee of the board of education and the Ethics committee of the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor. Your participation is voluntary, of course. By returning the questionnaire you will indicate your consent to participate. You should not sign the questionnaire upon completion. I assure you that your response will remain anonymous and confidential.

The questionnaire contains two parts. Section A deals with reasons why you enrolled your child in immersion French and your feelings about different aspects of the program. Section B contains questions about your child's transfer from the program.

Please return the completed questionnaire to me in the envelope provided by June 27. You are most welcome to contact me at any stage of this study with any questions or concerns (256-3385). You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Norman Diffey at the University of Windsor, Faculty of Education at 253-4232 ext. 3832, or the chair of the Ethics Committee at 253-4232 ext. 3800.

A summary of the study will be available at the office of the immersion schools upon completion.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Trish Eagle
Immersion French Teacher
FACTOR INFLUENCING PARENTS TO REMOVE THEIR CHILDREN FROM IMMERSION FRENCH

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR IMMERSION FRENCH TEACHERS

To what extent do you think the following are commonly held concerns of immersion French parents who have removed their children from immersion French.

**English Language Instruction**

Do you feel that this group of parents were satisfied with:

1. The introduction of English at the Grade 3 level  
   yes/no/not applicable  
   If you answered no. indicate the grade level you feel parents would have liked English to be introduced

2. The amount of English language instruction for each grade level  
   yes/no/not applicable  
   If you answered no. indicate the amount of preferred English instruction you feel parents would have liked

**Quality of English Skills**

To what extent do you feel these parents felt a concern that:

1. Their children were experiencing difficulty reading in English  
   not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

2. Their children's writing skills in English were weak  
   not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

3. Their children were unable to accurately spell in English  
   not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

4. Their children were experiencing difficulty comprehending English  
   not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

**Comments:**
Quality of French Skills

To what extent do you feel these parents felt a concern that:

1. Their children were experiencing difficulty reading in French ........................................... not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable
2. Their children's writing skills in French were weak ......................................................... not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable
3. Their children were unable to accurately spell in French ............................................... not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable
4. Their children were experiencing difficulty comprehending French ................................ not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable
5. Their children were not speaking French to a satisfactory level ..................................... not applicable/somewhat applicable/applicable

Comments:

In your opinion, why are parents removing their children from immersion French?
NAME: Tricia Eagle

PLACE OF BIRTH: Prince Albert, Saskatchewan

YEAR OF BIRTH: 1965

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND DEGREES
The University of Windsor
Windsor, Ontario
1989 - 1996
French as a Second Language Part 1.2.
& Specialist
M. Ed.

University of Montreal
Montreal, Quebec
1989
Summer Immersion French Program

L'Université Laval
Quebec, PQ
1987 - 1988
French for Non-Francophones Program

University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
1983 - 1987
B. Ed.

RELATED EXPERIENCES
Windsor Board of Education
Windsor, Ontario
1989 - present Immersion French Teacher

Prince Albert Board of Education
Prince Albert, Saskatchewan
1988 - 1989 - Teacher