

An informational guide for parents considering immersion education for their young children

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Introduction:

I've been interested in languages since 3rd grade when I started taking Spanish language classes. In 7th grade I switched my focus to the French language and after 3 years of French I decided to spend a year abroad in Belgium to completely immerse myself in the French language and culture. That experience made me curious about the way in which languages are learned and how children learn them with more ease and success than adults. To combine my love of languages and education, I chose to do a 4 month project on immersion schooling in the hopes of making a useful guide for others to learn about the idea.

Throughout the last semester I've been able to read various sources on immersion programs and observe at a local bilingual nursery school. My hope was to provide a guide for parents who are considering placing their children in immersion programs to help inform them of the background, context and current discussions that are taking place regarding the issue. I've found several common themes among all immersion programs I've read about and even related some of the issues to my observations at the bilingual nursery school. I've tried to answer some of the questions that parents may have about immersion programs in general as well as to teach them how to be effective observers when doing their own research. The second half of this document contains a journal of my observations at the French bilingual nursery school to give you an idea of what the immersion environment can feel like. I hope this serves as a useful tool in your exploration of immersion programs.

- Lindsay Gordon

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A brief history of immersion schooling

The first voluntary French language program began in the city of St. Lambert, Montreal in 1965 (de Courcy 5, Johnson and Swain 2-3). The creation of this program was a reaction to parental pressure in the community because it was becoming increasingly evident that their children needed the French language to survive in the dual language city (de Courcy 5). Students were currently learning French as a subject at school but they weren't acquiring the level of the language that was necessary for economic survival and to be able to work or socialize with native French speakers. The prior curriculum was overly focused on grammar and memorization while the students needed colloquial and everyday language instruction (Johnson and Swain 2-3). The first attempt at the program was a kindergarten program run entirely in French; English language literacy skills were postponed from the curriculum until 2nd grade (Johnson and Swain 2). This experience was the first immersion program because the families voluntarily enrolled their children in the program as opposed to submersion programs where children are forced into learning a language by joining a class of native speaking students (Johnson and Swain 6-7).

Since then, over 278 immersion programs in 29 states have started in the United States with at least 46,000 foreign language immersion students reported in 1998 (Locke 2004). The first American adaptation of the program took place in Culver City, California in 1971 and was similar in purpose to the Canadian program because of the large Spanish cultural influence in the area (Genesee 1985). However since many areas do not have such an influence of another culture, bilingual programs are often used for different purposes (Genesee 1985, Walker and Tedick 2000). These may be teaching students a language of power, offering support for heritage language, gaining cultural knowledge or reviving nearly extinct languages (Walker and Tedick 2000, Genesee 1985).

Although many studies have been performed analyzing immersion programs, researchers typically focus on the outcomes of such programs and their perceived success rather than the actual process (Walker and Tedick 2000, Bernhardt 1992, de Courcy 7). Studies from an administrative perspective are also severely lacking in number even though maintaining a successful immersion program is a hugely important issue (Locke 2004). As research continues to identify and explore these issues, the immersion experience around the world will continue to improve.

Some educators have connected the value of immersion schooling to the fact that it isn't just a different way to teach children a foreign language, but it teaches a new way of learning and relates languages to every other part of their life. Genesee thought of immersion as a pedagogical approach that actually promotes learning of the language. In his mind immersion was successful because it inspires the children to learn so that they may obtain the specific goal of meaningful communication with other cultures (Genesee 2004).

Immersion gives students a genuine and practical interest in learning the language rather than simply fulfilling a language requirement in a normal school curriculum. The sections that follow will hopefully uncover the ways in which immersion

schooling is truly different and explore the general aspects of the mission and the success of these programs.

What are the core features of an immersion program?

Immersion students gain proficiency in a foreign language through using it to study all their other school subjects rather than simply studying the language itself (Fortune and Tedick 2003). To understand immersion programs it is helpful to be familiar with the eight core features, as described in Swain and Johnson's book, that are characteristic of any foreign language immersion program. The list below comes directly from the book and the brief explanations that follow are personal interpretations. "L2" refers to the language that the children are learning, or the target language, and "L1" refers to their native language (Johnson and Swain 6-7).

From Swain and Johnson...

- a. The L2 is a medium of instruction*
- b. The immersion curriculum parallels the local L1 curriculum*
- c. Overt support exists for the L1*
- d. The program aims for additive bilingualism*
- e. Exposure to the L2 is largely confined to the classroom*
- f. Students enter with similar (and limited) levels of L2 proficiency*
- g. The teachers are bilingual*
- h. The classroom culture is that of the local L1 community*

(Swain and Johnson 6-7)

- a. The target language is not formally taught as a separate subject but used as a medium to teach the rest of the curriculum.
- b. Subjects such as math, science, geography, and history are taught in the curriculum just as they are found in the native language curriculum.
- c. A positive attitude and strong support for the native language are crucial before an immersion program can take place. This attitude is necessary from the community as well as the educators and staff of the school.
- d. The students need to have the same level of L1 proficiency as would be expected for non-immersion students instead of learning the target language at the expense of their native language.

- e. The L2 language is primarily used in the classroom but not when students return home or are not at school.
- f. The students enter with a similar and limited level of the language as opposed to a situation, for example, where a Spanish speaking student with limited English proficiency is placed in an English dominated classroom with all other English speaking students.
- g. Teachers must be bilingual to teach and support the use of L2 by the students, but also to communicate in L1 when necessary to do so.
- h. For example, this means that native French teachers would need to adapt to the American classroom culture even if they were teaching in an immersion program. The aim is not to create a French or Chinese school in the United States.

In my experience one of the most important components of that list would include the fact that teachers are bilingual. Through my observations I was able to see instances in which it was necessary to explain something to the children in English which relate to the fact that the teacher needs to be bilingual. In one case the teacher needed to use English because the children were either in danger of hurting themselves on the playground. Another situation was when the children needed to understand some logistics, such as where they needed to go to see the animals that came from the zoo one day, and it was perfectly appropriate and more effective for the teacher to tell them in English. As the children advance to elementary school and beyond it would become more important for teachers be bilingual in order to explain a math or history concept that the children may not have understood in the target language.

What are the different levels of immersion programs?

There are three common levels of immersion programs: full immersion, partial immersion and two-way immersion. Full immersion refers to programs where the target language is spoken at all times in the early grades. English subjects are gradually introduced into the curriculum and by 5th or 6th grade there is an even distribution of L1 and L2 classes. In partial immersion programs the native language and the target language are each used to teach the regular school curriculum for half of the day (Walker and Tedick 2003). Two-way immersion is a situation when native speakers of the target language are in classes amongst students learning the target language (Tarone and Swain 1995). This guide only includes information regarding full or partial immersion programs at a relatively young age.

How can my child benefit from these programs?

Children in immersion programs learn a foreign language by genuinely *using* it, rather than *knowing* about it (Bernhardt 9). Studies done in the US have shown that immersion programs are the most effective way to learn a foreign language program in American schools and students may obtain a wide variety of benefits (Fortune and Tedick 2003). Bilingualism has economic and social advantages because the student gains the resource of cultural knowledge and is now able to communicate with a much wider base of people around the world. Immersion students have also been shown to have improved cognitive abilities such as flexible thinking and non-verbal problem-solving abilities however it's unclear whether these results are causative or correlative. In select studies over the past thirty years, a few studies

have shown that immersion students have scored as well as or better than their non-immersion counterparts in verbal and mathematics skills (Fortune and Tedick 2003). Immersion programs aim to excel in these areas and are very proud of the outcomes such as those seen in these studies however it's hard to assess the benefits of immersion programs in general and make overarching judgments.

Although the most obvious benefit of immersion programs may be the acquisition of a foreign language to some degree of fluency, there are other benefits that may be less intuitive. Students often acquire a greater sense of self-esteem, confidence, respect and appreciation for other cultures through these programs (Walker and Tedick 2000). One article specifically looks at the perspective of immersion teachers who offer these thoughts on these less well known aspects of immersion programs (Walker and Tedick 2000):

“To me, if these kids go on and say to themselves in college, “you know, I could study Chinese, I could learn Chinese.” That, to me, is meeting the objective of immersion education. Just that confidence and interest in other languages is important to me, I am interested in these issues of blending cultures, and learning to respect each other” – 4th grade teacher (Walker and Tedick 7)

“I love having a second language; it does wonders for my self-esteem [...] we're teaching the kids a new way to learn [...] You don't have to do it perfect the first time, you don't have to know it all. You take a chance, you attempt, and see what happens, and sometimes you're successful and sometimes you're not. But it's an atmosphere that will allow a child to do that.” – Kindergarten teacher (Walker and Tedick 12)

“It's the cognitive development that gets involved with learning another language, and then cultures, too, seeing it from another way. That your world is not the only world” – 3rd grade teacher (Walker and Tedick 13)

From the teacher's perspective, the immersion programs are giving the children helpful life skills as well as the knowledge of the specific language they're learning (Walker and Tedick 2000). The confidence, tolerance, respect, understanding, and appreciation for cultures that the program emphasizes seem to be almost more important in the long run than the immediate language skills according to these teachers.

What potential problems or concerns have been highlighted?

The literature regarding immersion programs shows an overwhelmingly positive perspective on the experience of immersion schooling as a whole. However there are potential problems and concerns that the programs are continually facing.

One of the largest problems throughout the organizations is the lack of appropriate teacher training and certification for immersion programs (Walker and Tedick 2000, Bernhardt 114, Johnson and Swain 245, Locke 2004). As Walker and Tedick stated, “continual professional development in both language and elementary teaching are critical requirements for

successful immersion teachers”, however there is currently no structure to support this need (Walker and Tedick 2000). This concern was highlighted as early as 1976 with some research intended to create empirically based guidelines for teachers. However social changes in the past have required massive time and effort and retraining teachers would be an enormous task to take on (Bernhardt 114). Today no undergraduates finish school specifically trained for immersion teaching and there are still no professional preparation programs in the United States (Johnson and Swain 245-246). States don't require any sort of certification for teachers and there are no standards defining effective immersion teaching (Walker and Tedick 2000, Locke 2004). This also makes it difficult to hire teachers because the school must assume that someone with near-native proficiency and a background in elementary education will succeed as an immersion teacher (Johnson and Swain 245-246).

The lack of appropriate training available also relates to programmatic issues of finding administration for the programs in the United States. It is relatively accepted that in order to run an effective program the administration must understand and wholeheartedly support immersion education and have strong sense of commitment to its success (Johnson and Swain 244). Numerous immersion programs attribute their success to the skill and commitment of their administration (Locke 2004). However, an interesting question arises with respect to whether the administration should be required to know the target language of the school. Locke quotes a source who believes that it's important for the principal to at least have a working knowledge of the language but who also notes that finding someone with appropriate administrative skills as well as familiarity of the language is very difficult (Locke 2004). Interestingly, most principals are not fluent in the target language which makes them more dedicated because they see the children learning the language with such confidence and ease which they can't do (Johnson and Swain 244).

Immersion teachers have also noted a potential false confidence of language ability in their students (Walker and Tedick 2000). Students can be fluent and highly effective communicators but have less than adequate grammar skills that may manifest themselves in written language assessment. This was noticeable when students went on to normal foreign language classes and had to take heavily grammar focused tests as well as standardized tests in English (Walker and Tedick 2000). In a few particular studies, the most common charge against the immersion program was grammatical errors and there was much support for the claim. In these cases, the most common errors were using English words in French sentences, incorrect verb usage, direct translation and overuse of masculinity for nouns (Bernhardt 99-100). Some of the students' errors persisted through elementary school and in certain cases until 12th grade. One researcher concluded that an immersion student's target language speaking ability is their weakest skill (Bernhardt 98). This may be related to that fact that the immersion philosophy is “not to correct errors but rather to model the correct response” (Bernhardt 100). Studies like these have led some to believe that an element of intensive language teaching could eliminate the grammar insufficiency (Bernhardt 102).

It is also a risk that students may lose touch with the native way of speaking the target language or begin “speaking immersion” as one source called the trend (Tarone and Swain 1995, Johnson and Swain 58). Students may acquire their own slang or use language that is quite outdated because their only real connection to the language comes from a native-

speaking teacher. However, this may be remedied by exchange programs hosted in the L2 countries, living with host families and going to school with peers who speak L2 (Johnson and Swain 58).

According to Tarone and Swain, kids learn an academic form of the target language rather than the colloquialism and slang that children might learn if they were native speakers of the language. Educators have debated whether the only way to be exposed to that side of the culture and language is to visit the country where the language is spoken. Even if the teachers could teach slang, would an immersion classroom be the appropriate place to learn it (Tarone and Swain 1995)? One teacher comments on the use of slang and the immersion experience:

“When my students complain that they don’t know the teen talk, slang, etc., I tell them that immersion can only do so much and can give them a really good start, but if they really want to become ‘bilingual’, they will have to spend sometime in Quebec, go on an exchange, seek out francophones of their age, etc” (Tarone and Swain 1995)

It seems reasonable for immersion programs to be a great start to bilingualism and not to cover every topic in detail.

A few smaller issues include a feeling of isolation and detachment from the rest of the school if the immersion program happens to be one partition of a larger non-immersion school, the perception that immersion programs are elitist and that they drain school resources as well as dedicated parents and the lack of appropriate instructional materials, especially for less taught languages such as Russian or Japanese (de Courcy 62, Walker and Tedick 2000, Johnson and Swain 261). Although these concerns are not as crucial or as well understood as teacher training or grammatical errors, they do have their own impact on the situation and merit further exploration.

Questions that research has raised

There have always been questions in this field regarding best practices, ways to evaluate the success of a program, behaviors of the children noted across all immersion classrooms and other finer details. These questions are not easy to address and have no concrete and straightforward answer. Here is an overview of some of the perpetual questions being asked:

Native vs. Non-native speaking teachers:

Just how important is it that teachers be native speakers? The element of cultural experience that they bring is valuable for the children to learn about other cultures even if the culture of the classroom is not meant to be the native language’s culture. It is also very valuable to have their pronunciation and complete understanding of the language as evidenced by the observations even at the nursery school level. The children’s pronunciation was highly impressive and was most likely due to the exposure to the native speaking teachers. However near native speakers may be especially valuable because of their expertise in the child’s native L1 language which may be helpful for the children to be able to relate to them (Walker and Tedick 2000).

Effect on the native language of the child:

Although it may seem inevitable that the child's native language will be at a disadvantage in an immersion program, research consistently concludes that the child's native language development is actually enhanced. There may be a delay in the child's native language reading and writing skills if they enter a full immersion program at a young age during the first year or two; however due to native language exposure at home and in the community this delay will be only temporary (Fortune and Tedick 2003). To ensure that the native language development is never at a disadvantage this idea still continues to be researched.

Older children not using the target language in social interactions:

Studies have found that as students get older, they tend to use the target language less frequently especially in their conversations with each other (Tarone and Swain 1995). Around the 3rd or 4th grade children start using it less in their peer to peer interactions and by 5th and 6th grade they definitely prefer using their native language. One student tried to explain it by reasoning that the students don't learn slang in immersion classrooms and once children get older they develop their own type of language (Tarone and Swain 1995). There is no conclusion as to whether this creates a problem however it is an interesting situation that has been cited.

Measuring the success of an immersion program:

Since immersion programs are non-traditional programs that are trying to evaluate language acquisition as well as normal curricular courses there is no easy way to determine what counts as success in an immersion program (Johnson and Swain 2004). It may be as simple as the fact that the program has been established at all because it shows the support of the community and the dedication of the administration. Immersion L2 proficiency compares favorably to students who have only learned the L2 as one subject in an L1 school (Johnson and Swain 2004). Even comparing native speaking students and immersion students would be one way to measure the success of the program because research shows that after only two or three years in an immersion program, students have reading and listening skills comparable to native speakers of the same age (Fortune and Tedick 2003). However, evaluation of speaking and writing skills between native speakers and immersion students provides a less favorable comparison because grammatical accuracy and the use of colloquialisms would likely be highly deficient in immersion students based on recent studies (Johnson and Swain, Fortune and Tedick 2003).

Immersion programs tend to raise many unanswered questions as the program continues (Johnson and Swain 13-14). Some examples of these types of questions to provide more context and to evoke consideration of these topics include:

1. Is selection of students for an immersion program justifiable? Should any student be allowed to participate in an immersion program or should there be an application process?
2. What are the effects of having native-speaking students studying with immersion students?

3. What short- and long-term effects do immersion programs have on students' attitudes to and interaction with L2 speech communities?
4. What post-immersion study and career paths do immersion students in different contexts follow? What happens to their L2s?
(Johnson and Swain 13-14)

Effective observation topics to be considered:

As parents begin researching and evaluating immersion programs on their own, one of the most useful skills to have will be ways to effectively observe each program. Although this may sound trivial, it can be helpful to have a set of guidelines and questions to be contemplating while visiting a school to guide the focus of the observations. From my experience the following issues are helpful to be aware of:

1. Level of language used in different age groups: The percentage of target language used in the classroom should change as the children acquire more native language skills. Also look at how the teachers interact with each other. If they constantly interact using the target language this will serve as a model for the children as well as constantly expose them to the language. In my observations at the bilingual nursery school the teachers spoke only French to each other which seemed to give a positive model for the children to do the same.
2. Context: (city, economic status, multicultural aspect of the area, etc) Each program in each school will have its own context, whether it is the area of the country, reason for establishing the program, multicultural aspect of the city, the background and motivations of the parents who are taking part in the program, the economic status of the community, etc. This context may not have a significant impact on the parent's choice of schools; however it is crucial to understanding the program itself and its background.
3. Cooperative versus competitive atmosphere: According to Johnson and Swain the previously seen competitive atmosphere of immersion classrooms has recently been replaced by cooperative language learning (59). Cooperation between students encourages the understanding and respect for others that is an important goal in immersion education.
4. Error correction: As stated earlier, the immersion philosophy does not include error correction, but rather modeling the correct response. This may include dismissing incorrect usage of a verb tense in the target language but may also extend to dismissing incorrect usage of an English word as seen in my observations. This may not be true for all immersion programs so evaluate the effectiveness of the method used in a particular program. There has not been much research done in this area as to which particular method is more effective that I have found. Does this philosophy apply only to errors in the target language or does it expand to errors in the native language? How has this affected the language development of the students in the class? Different parents may agree with different philosophies regarding error correction of the target and native languages.
5. Spontaneous use of the L2: Spontaneous use refers to the target language being used in social peer to peer interactions which may take place at times such as recess or lunch.

- Spontaneous use might show that the student is genuinely enjoying learning the language by using it when not strictly necessary or that the L2 is becoming more second nature.
6. Comprehension despite no verbal answer: This can be especially true for younger children. The teacher may ask a question in the target language and in response the child will nod or raise their hand to volunteer without actually giving a verbal answer. Look for the subtle confirmations of the child's comprehension. I was able to see that although children did not respond to questions directly, their actions and their facial expressions showed a comprehension of the questions that they were being asked.
 7. How teachers encourage use of the language: Children can be very responsive to encouragement from the teacher. If the child gives a two word answer it can be helpful for the teacher to ask them to make a complete sentence. Teachers may also encourage simple things such as saying 'good morning' and 'goodbye' in the target language every day. When students from the bilingual school would leave each day they would tell the teacher "good-bye" unless the teacher said good-bye in French before them in which case the child would also respond in French.
 8. Diversity: Immersion programs emphasize respect, tolerance and appreciate for other cultures and this can be enhanced by diversity in the classroom as well as learning about another culture through the target language.

Reading recommendations:

There is an extensive list of resources available on the topic of immersion education but to get a decent overview and some interesting perspective on the topic check out the ones listed below:

Immersion Education for the Millennium: What We Have Learned from 30 Years of Research on Second Language Immersion: By Jim Cummins at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto
<http://www.iteachilearn.com/cummins/immersion2000.html>

What Parents Want to Know About Foreign Language Immersion Programs: By Tara W. Fortune, Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, University of Minnesota and Diane J. Tedick, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Minnesota
<http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/0304fortune.html>

Immersion Education: International Perspectives. Johnson, Robert Keith (Ed.) and Merrill Swain (Ed.). Cambridge University Press, July 1997.

Sources:

Bernhardt, E. B. (Ed.) (1992). Life in language immersion classrooms. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters, Ltd.

Cazden, Courtney B. Classroom Discourse: The Language of Teaching and Learning. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001

De Courcy, Michèle . Learners Experiences of Immersion Education : Case Studies of French and Chinese. Clevedon, GBR: Multilingual Matters Limited, 2002.

Fortune, Tara W and Diane J. Tedick. What Parents Want to Know About Foreign Language Immersion Programs. Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition. 2003

Genesee, Fred. "Second Language Learning through Immersion: A Review of U.S. Programs". Review of Educational Research, Volume 55, Number 4, 1985, p541-561

Johnson, Robert Keith (Ed.) and Merrill Swain (Ed.). Immersion Education: International Perspectives. Cambridge University Press, July 1997.

Locke, Brandon, T. "Standards for School Leaders: Implications for Leadership in Foreign Language Immersion Programs". ACIE Newsletter 2004

Tarone, Elaine and Merrill Swain. "A Sociolinguistic Perspective on Second Language Use in Immersion Classrooms" The Modern Language Journal, Volume 79, 1995, p166-178

Walker, Constance L. and Diane J. Tedick. "The Complexity of Immersion Education: Teachers Address the Issues" The Modern Language Journal, Vol. 84, No. 1 (Spring, 2000), 5-27.

AHS Capstone Journal: Observation at a bilingual nursery school

To understand how I came up with my “effective observation topics to be considered” from the previous section, it will be very helpful to read this journal of my observations at the school. Each of the seven ideas comes from something that I noticed once or several times over the course of the semester. The specific examples may also help to clear up my motivations for flagging each issue and how they took place in a real immersion setting. Thanks to the school I was able to observe in several different classroom levels and see how the curriculum was tailored to each age group.

2/6/06: Observation of 2 year olds

This morning was the first time that I was able to observe at the Bilingual Nursery School and I sat in on the class of 2 year olds. The children trickled in as 9am came and passed and for the first ten minutes or so they were all playing separately. The first thing that I noticed was that there were two teachers in the class room, one that was obviously a native-speaker and one that obviously wasn't. Her accent wasn't native but she seemed quite fluent and didn't have any problems conversing with the children. The teachers always spoke to each other in French which was also interesting. Teachers would come in and say hi or to ask questions about a student and none of them spoke a single word of English to each other. I think that little things like that would be very helpful for the exposure of the children to the French language.

I had read that the school really tried to focus on confidence and self-esteem in the children and although I didn't see that explicitly I did see a big focus on responsibility and taking care of one's own things. Each child has a cubby and a coat hook and slippers that they put on when they enter the building. They are also responsible for cleaning up the toys that they have been playing with before the group activity starts and the room is kept very orderly.

I think that there was a lot more French language in the classroom that I had expected from the school because it is only a partial immersion program. Especially since the kids were at such a young age and it seemed as if most of them hardly spoke any English. The teachers would speak most of the time in French or they would say a phrase in English, then say a word in the same phrase in French and ask the child to repeat it. There was also combining of French and English which seemed strangely natural to me. The teacher said “Did you bring me my chapeau today” (chapeau is hat) and one of the children said “that's her tapis” (tapis is rug). The children seemed to understand a lot of what the teachers were saying in French even if they didn't speak much. For example they were able to pick which activity they wanted to do when they were asked and they picked up their toys when the teachers asked them to.

When 'circle time' started I was able to see more of the structured curriculum of the school. The started off by cleaning up the toys and singing a song "on range tout les jouets" (let's clean up the toys) and each child then got their own rug and sat in a circle around the teacher. For the first activity the teacher had a series of laminated cards with pictures of animals on them and asked in French "what's this?". Each child had their own animal that they took and they would say that animal's name in order to get the card. After all the children had a card the teacher would then ask "can I please have the owl?" in French and the child with the owl would know that the teacher was talking about the animal on their card. Then they sang the "bonjour" (hello or good morning) song and the teacher would go around the circle, say bonjour to each child, shake their hand, and make sure that they responded "bonjour madame _____" and say the teacher's name. Next they moved on to numbers and one child would count the number of children in the circle in English in a "duck, duck, goose" fashion and then another student would count in French. Then came talking and singing about the weather, having each child say that it was "Monday" and "Lundi" and then more songs about the days of the week and clapping and doing hand movements along. It was interesting to see the inclusion of singing as a big part of their curriculum as well as movement and coordination associated with the language. It was clear that the children didn't have a strong grasp of English or French but going around and tapping children on the head while counting was helping them acquire those skills. I was also quite surprised with the amount of participation from the children, seeing that I hadn't heard them say much of anything in either language until then. They also had quite impressive accents that almost caught me off guard in a way. I would say that their pronunciation of all the names of the animals was better than the students in any class I had taken in middle school or high school. This made me think of the discussion of whether all immersion teachers should be native speakers because I think that hearing a native speaker talk has a lot to do with the children's pronunciation.

As far as observing differences in language acquisition between the two sexes, there wasn't a huge difference although I was able to see a few examples of differences. There are two boys in the class and five girls and the girls were much more eager to volunteer for the counting in the circle and they responded more often with the names of the animals. One interesting instance was when a little girl was showing her kangaroo stuffed animal for show and tell and the teacher said that kangaroo started with the letter K. One of the little boys then responded "like cat!" and I could tell that the teachers thought this was an interesting response and that it was a good observation and then said that in fact cat started with a C but that it sounded exactly alike. I wasn't able to see any spontaneous use of French between students but next week I'm going to sit in on the class of the next age group up and I might be able to see more spontaneous interactions.

2/27/06: Observation of 2 and 9 months to 4 year olds

Today I was able to observe the next class up from the “petit jardin” that I observed last time. The teacher was a native speaker and it was interesting to me that even when she spoke French it sounded like she was speaking English because of her thick accent. As before, the classroom was perfectly arranged, classical music was playing and the children sat in a circle on their “tapis”. As children were arriving the teacher was asking everyone what their news was for the day and each child told a small story. Interestingly enough, sharing time was a huge part of the book that I just finished reading, *Classroom Discourse*, written by Elizabeth Cazden. Basically it’s an effective way of encouraging the students to tell a story and have them effectively communicate their thoughts. It also emphasizes the act of listening to others and respecting them when they have the floor. However their sharing time was brief and ended as soon as it was nine o’clock. They began with the bonjour song and each child was asked the question “how are you doing” in French and responded with “ca va bien”. One boy thought hard and answered “non ca va bien!” (no, things are well) and the teacher corrected him to say that in French we say “ca va mal” (things aren’t well). Class then proceeded with the job chart (weather, counting the students, the calendar, etc.) and each student knew which job was theirs. When the teacher asked “qui fait le calendrier” (who does the calendar?) one little girls hand shot up right away. A common theme was that the teacher would say a phrase in French, then repeat the same phrase in English, then once again in French and then ask the child to repeat.

I was surprised to find that there was actually more English used in this classroom when compared with the younger children. This may be because the children’s English language skills were much more advanced in this age group and it’s important to use those as well? However their French pronunciation was still quite impressive. The next interesting thing was their math lesson that was incorporated in the exercise where they count the days of school that have gone by this year. They have a ones jar, a tens jar and a hundreds jar that have popsicle sticks in them. Yesterday they were at 89 (so 8 bundles of ten in the tens jar and 9 singles in the ones jar) and today the kids knew that they now had ten single popsicle sticks and they could make a new bundle of ten. The teacher also took this opportunity to have the kids count by tens. Then the child was supposed to update the count on the wall as well, with Velcro numbers, and the teacher was going to find a 9 for the student. She gave the girl a five and she said “noooo, that’s a 5” and then the teacher said “I don’t know what’s wrong, this never works for me. Ok, here’s a 9” and gave the girl a 3. “Nooooo, that’s a 3” she said and then the child was given the chance to find the 9 in the basket. This whole episode took place in English.

Another thing I read about in *Classroom Discourse* was the idea of language correction and how often it happens with regard to students with cultural differences. This particular case didn’t have to do with students of different cultures but I was interested to see when the teacher did or did not correct a

student. As I mentioned before the teacher corrected the child when his French phrase wasn't correct but there were two other instances where the teacher did not correct the student and these happened to be in English. One time was when a child said "one more children is left" when they were waiting for students to arrive and another was the question "why there's a truck?" when they were asking questions about a book about trucks. The teacher chose to praise the good question in the second case (because she asked the class for questions about the story) so maybe she was focusing on that. One other thing that came up in the book I just finished was how the teacher decides to delegate speaking responsibilities to the children. I noticed that this particular teacher had a magic wand that was used not so much as a talking stick as it was the stick that was held when a particular child was performing their task for the day.

Other little things: The kids didn't talk to each other much but when they did it was always in English. The girls did seem to have a better grasp on the English language (the boys stuttered and had a hard time forming coherent sentences) but that may have been due to different ages of the children. Both sexes seemed to volunteer answers to the teacher's questions and were eager to join in. They discussed that one of the teacher's stomach was getting bigger and they all knew that that meant a baby was coming. The question was also asked "why it's the truck a color?" and the answer that the little boy gave was "because it's a truck that carries red paint" which seemed like a pretty darn good answer. My favorite phrase that the teacher used was "on y va, rock and roll". ☺

3/6/06: Observation of the Grand Jardin (up to 4 years)

Today's classroom had a native French speaker whose accent was so thick that it was actually difficult to distinguish whether she was speaking English or French. It made me wonder whether the kids had any problem understanding her or at least noticed that she sounded different from native English speakers. First of all, the teacher asked for some volunteers to help with the morning activities (all in French) and every child raised their hand. The girl that was chosen got to repeat the entire date and then another volunteer was needed for the weather! Three girls raised their hand to help with the weather and had to find the signs with "le soleil" (sun) and "la neige" (snow) written on them. The teacher would then say a phrase about the weather and the child would repeat it or finish the teacher's sentences. Next was counting, and one girl was able to count up to 13 without a problem. The teacher reminded her to use complete sentences so she started over and said "today there are 13 students" in French. There seems to be a lot of focus on making complete sentences whenever possible rather than two word answers which is nice. One thing that really stood out to me today was the imperfection in some of the English skills of a few of the teachers. Not that it was a huge problem or that I'm trying to criticize them for dropping a few 's' here and there, but it was interesting to think about another issue that may be associated with native vs. non-native speakers. I had never thought about the flip side of having native speakers which is that they

could have significant trouble with English. When the class was listening to a story read by one of the teachers, I noticed a few instances where she was having a bit of trouble. A few examples include saying “to forgot her troubles” and having trouble reading the word “frantically”. It was most apparent when she was reading about mice and said the phrase “cats love to eat mouse”. One child had apparently missed what she said and asked “what do cats love to eat?” and all of the other children replied “mouse”. So it was interesting to see that they had picked that up from her but maybe if they had been asked in a different setting they all would have replied “mice”.

3/13/06: Observation of the Moyen Jardin

They got started a little bit late today so I wasn't able to see a huge amount of class. It started off as usual with the kids finding their names on the tapis and sitting in the circle to begin singing the circle song. Today was the 99th day of class so they were all very excited and discussed how they were finally going to get to use the centaines! (hundreds). I also looked for mistakes that the kids were making just out of curiosity and the only thing that I could really find, although I'm not sure I would call it a mistake, is not using articles for words. Their answers were always “meteo” (weather) or “gouter” (snack) and they never used “le” or “la”. This is quite understandable because the idea of masculine and feminine probably doesn't make any sense to them, but it was just an interesting thing that I noticed. Just general little stuff: kids were only speaking to each other in English; there were two non-native speakers as teachers, and there was one girl and one boy that were pretty advanced so there were no gender related differences.

3/31/06: Observation on the playground

I observed while the children were at recess today to see if I could witness any spontaneous use of French in peer to peer interactions. The teachers were still talking to each other mostly all in French (except when safety was an issue) but the children didn't seem to use any French. I asked one girl whether she ever spoke to her friends in French but she said she didn't when they were learning a lesson or reading a book. It's quite understandable that the children didn't use French on the playground and it could be a factor of their age or even that it's their time take a break and not worry about languages. When the teachers called the children back into the classroom they called them by their class name, “grand jardin” or “petit jardin”. The little girl that was talking to me said “did you hear “grand jardin we are leaving”?” so it seemed as if the kids would respond in French if the teachers said something in French. One other interesting thing that I heard was one of the native speaking teachers saying something to a student in French and then a non-native speaking teacher asked her about one of the words that she had used. It showed an example of how teachers can learn from each other and the importance of having native speaking teachers. I also got to see a variation of the game “duck, duck, goose” while the teacher

would sing a song about the days of the week and the mailman coming. The child walking around the circle would drop off an envelope (aka the mail) behind one child who would effectively be the goose. The last thing that I noticed was that when kids were saying goodbye they would say it in English unless the teacher said goodbye to them in French in which case they would also reply in French. To me it showed that teachers can have a great influence on the children and that it's their job to really encourage the use of the foreign language and model using it as much as possible.