A Qualitative Study of Five FSL Teachers

Using Constructivism to Support Second Language Learning

By

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study concerns how five participants who teach French use constructivism as a theory of learning in their classrooms and how this effects their students' learning. In a constructivist classroom, learning experiences are based on the construction of knowledge, prior knowledge, and social context. Students make sense of what they are learning in relation to what they already know and new knowledge is gained by sharing of ideas with others. A snowball sampling technique was used to generate a list of five participants. The interview process involved a semi-structured question format, allowing for probes to explore the responses further. The participants' own words and experiences are used to illustrate how their students acquire a second language. The findings reveal how active learning helps students make sense of what they are learning, assume ownership of their education and have fun in the classroom.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In Chapter One, an introduction to the purpose of the study is presented, revealing why second language teachers use constructivism as a framework for learning in their classrooms to help their students develop language skills, to become independent learners and to gain important social skills. The purpose of the study is followed by a reflection of my positioning in the research. An overview of constructivism as a theory of learning and the French as a Second Language program in Ontario is discussed with reference to current curricular documents and recent trends in education. The rationale for this study is presented in the following section. Lastly, a review of the definition of terms is provided to help clarify and to create an understanding of second language teaching and learning in Ontario.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore how constructivism as a theory of learning is used to enhance student learning in second language acquisition. By providing students with a learning environment that encompasses constructivist concepts, it is possible to generate "growth in knowledge, a higher degree of critical thinking, greater reading and writing skills, as well as improved skills in argumentation" (Terwel, 1999, p. 196). The main focus of the study is on how teachers use constructivism to support second language learning in their classrooms, illustrating the positive aspects of using this theory of learning to teach French. One key advantage of using constructivism in

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the classroom is that students become actively involved in the learning process. They gain important social skills as well as linguistic abilities, develop as independent learners, and have fun while they are learning. For teachers, constructivism affords an opportunity to help students take responsibility for their own learning and to create a classroom environment in which students explore and discover language. Through the use of constructivism, teachers forge important partnerships with their students, developing new teacher-student roles in the language classroom. Students are both learners as well as teachers in a classroom that promotes constructivism while teachers act as guides and language learners.

The following research questions guide the study:

1. What are French language teachers' (core and immersion) perceptions of constructivism?
2. How do French language teachers (core and immersion) define constructivism?
3. How do they use a constructivist theory of learning in their classrooms?
4. Does a community of learners play a role in second language learning?
5. Do French language teachers feel establishing a community of learners in their classroom is important?

Personal Ground

I have been a student of the French language for many years. I was first introduced to French in elementary school and continued studying the language in high school as well as university. A few years following graduation, I completed a year long course at a post-secondary institute in France for foreign language students. More recently, I have been a teacher of a second language. I was certified by the Ontario College of Teachers in 2000 and specialize in teaching French as a Second Language (FSL). I have also taught English as a Second (ESL) language to adults and

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elementary students in Japan. Throughout my own years of study, including my Honours degree at the university level, there was a strong emphasis placed on the use of text books, individual reading, isolated grammar exercises, and paper and pencil evaluations.

As a preservice teacher, I was introduced to a variety of teaching strategies to use during a language lesson such as Gardner's theory of multi-intelligences and collaborative learning. Throughout the year, active learning formed the basis of many lessons that I observed and participated in during my placements in an elementary French Immersion school. I saw how students responded to this method of learning, how teachers organized the classroom and the positive classroom environment that resulted from the use of constructivism. At other times, more traditional teaching methods were used to advantage to help students develop skills in reading and writing a second language.

As a native speaker teaching ESL in Japan, I found that there was a focus on repetition and drill during the English lessons in the Japanese elementary school where I taught. Generally, lessons were structured around a list of words for that day. I would say the words and the class would repeat them, emphasizing pronunciation and intonation. The list of words was reinforced with pictures, games and/or songs near the end of the lesson. At the local community centre, I taught adult students in the evenings. In the beginning, students were uncomfortable with communication activities and cooperative learning situations, preferring to complete worksheets alone or work quietly with a partner.

Due to my own experiences as both a language student and teacher, I am

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interested in exploring how teaching methods have evolved as new information about how students learn is discovered and new strategies are formulated to help them reach their full potential. In particular, understanding how constructivist theories of learning are being used in second language classrooms and to what extent they can assist in the learning process can add to the discourse in language learning and provide an interesting and interactive alternative for both students and teachers.

Introduction to Constructivism and French as a Second Language in Ontario

Overview of Constructivism :

One of the most visible themes in educational research today is constructivism. Recent discourse on constructivism has brought about change in education (Simpson, 2002, p. 347). Constructivism refers to meaning making or how students make sense of what they are learning. Dating from the early 19th and 20th centuries (Harris & Graham, 1994; Terwel, 1999), the roots of constructivism can be found in the works of Dewey, James, Piaget, and Vygotsky among others and has recently become the focus of research in education. Building on the original work of Jean Piaget (1954) and his notion of cognitive development in the field of child psychology, Jerome Bruner (1960) advanced the theory of active learning in his book The Process of Education, proposing the idea that "learning is an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based on current/past knowledge" (Kearsley, n.d., para. 1).

Constructivism is a theory of learning that teachers can use to guide them in preparing curriculum and in structuring classroom learning experiences. It engages students in the schooling process, asking them to construct meaning actively rather

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than to accept the transmission of knowledge passively from the teacher. Learning experiences involve students' active participation in the search of knowledge. For instance, students discover for themselves how to conjugate simple verb tenses in French by investigating and exploring the meaning behind the patterns they notice while reading. Thus, students develop tools to question and challenge traditional sources of information, to internalize and reinvent knowledge based on what they already know, in order to make their own learning meaningful and genuine.

Learning becomes self-directed as students gain important inquiry skills as new topics are explored and students and teachers work together. Initially, students are "'taught' how to be self-directed ...before they can work in a self-directed manner "(Puk, 1993, p. 9). Martinello (1998) also suggests that as teachers model questioning strategies, students learn how to ask better questions.

The components of constructivism can be applied in a language classroom. These components are construction of knowledge, prior learning and social context. In Ontario, French as a Second language is an integral part of the curriculum. How second language learning is supported in Ontario elementary schools, which is of particular concern to this study, is examined in the following overview.

Overview of French as a Second Language:

The Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (1973) suggests that second language learning:

strengthens first-language skills, and that the ability to speak two or more

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languages generally enhances problem-solving and reasoning skills, the capacity for creative thinking, and the ability to respect and understand other cultures. Second-language learning strengthens students' ability to communicate and participate effectively in the workplace and the global community. It also increases their ability to understand themselves and other people, and helps them to appreciate the power of words and the many different uses of language." (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1999, p. 2)

This is accomplished through the introduction of a logical sequence of knowledge and skill development. More specifically, the Ontario program is to "develop basic communication skills in French and an understanding of the nature of the language, as well as an appreciation of French culture in Canada and in other parts of the world" (p.2).

Under the "role of teachers" section in this curriculum document, the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (1999) suggests that it is up to individual teachers to determine how second language skills will be developed in their classrooms. Further, the document encourages teachers to "base their decisions on the needs of students, the resources available, and the recognition that good teaching should build strong personal values and positive attitudes towards French and towards learning in general" (p. 3). These statements together make up the foundation of French as a Second Language programs in Ontario.

Rationale

This study has the potential to inform the development of second language learning by describing how French language teachers use constructivism in their classrooms to support their students' language growth as well as how this theory of learning can help students develop greater autonomy by allowing them to direct their own learning. Using constructivism as a theory of active learning in the classroom offers educators an alternative student-led teaching strategy based on authentic learning opportunities. Students are empowered to become "an active collaborator, leader, apprentice, teacher, and planner" (Crawford, 2000, p. 932) in the classroom. Bromley (1998) suggests that encouraging students to "discuss, retell, ask and answer questions, respond to statements, summarize, draw, dramatize, write, perform, and to make or do something " to demonstrate understanding in a nurturing community and to allow students to take risks, can develop critical thinking, reflection, and enhancement of student ownership (p. 177).

Constructivism invites teachers to think differently about second language learning, to engage students in the learning process and to encourage students to take responsibility for what they are learning and how they are learning. Language studies, using a constructivist framework are interactive, based on the use of language in real-life situations, and are meaningful to students. This study examines how five participants use constructivism on a daily basis to teach grammar, reading and writing comprehension, social studies, science and mathematics among other subject areas.

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Definition of Terms

Constructivism is a term which was first used by Jean Piaget in the 1930's during his work in the field of child psychology and cognitive development (Papert, 1999). It was reintroduced by Jerome Bruner, the American psychologist in the 1960's, to describe how children learn when they are actively engaged in the educational process. Knowledge is the culmination of past and present experiences as students make sense of what they learn. Today, there are many different definitions of constructivism although the central components are based on construction of knowledge, active engagement in the learning process, and prior knowledge (Harris & Graham, 1994).

Community of learners refers to knowledge construction in a social setting, among peers. Social constructivists believe that learning is not an isolated event but occurs when people interact and communicate with each other. New knowledge is constructed as individuals work together, sharing and reflecting on what they have learnt.

French as a Second Language is a subject offered by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training to students in elementary and secondary schools. In Ontario, students and their parents or guardians can choose from three different formats: core French, Extended French and French Immersion programs. Although they are unique programs, they share a common objective - "to develop students' oral communication (listening and speaking), reading, and writing skills in the French language" (Ontario

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Ministry of Education and Training, 1999, p. 4). Students are also encouraged to gain an appreciation of the French culture through literature and language studies.

Core French is a program run by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training in provincial schools. Students will have had 600 hours of French language instruction by the time they reach grade 8 (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1999, p. 4). The goal of the core French program is to "provide students with fundamental communication skills and an understanding of the language and its culture" (p.2).

Extended French is the second option offered in Ontario to students studying a second language. Students are invited to develop language skills and to study the francophone culture in Canada in order to increase their appreciation and knowledge of French. Students must complete four courses in Extended French as well as at least three other courses in which the language of instruction is French. The focus of this program is on building literacy skills and to "function in a French-speaking community" (p. 3).

French Immersion is another option for studying the French language and culture in elementary and high schools. In this program, students have a minimum of 3800 hours of instruction in the second language by the end of elementary school. The aim of the program is to "develop and refine...abilities to communicate in French as well as to expand their knowledge of the language through the study of francophone literature"

(p.3).

Conclusion

This chapter briefly introduced an overview of both constructivism as a theory of learning and the French as a Second Language program in Ontario. A short discussion of the purpose, highlighting the main research questions, as well as a personal reflection on how I am situated in the research followed. The rationale for the study and a brief definition of terms concluded the chapter. The preceding chapter will outline the related literature on constructivism and second language learning.

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CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore the literature on constructivism and examine various viewpoints regarding its use to enhance student learning in second language learning in the classroom. In the literature review I explore research pertaining to constructivism including radical and social constructivism, multi-intelligence theory, and authentic pedagogy. As well, the different concepts and subconcepts of constructivism are highlighted. Next, various learning styles are considered, including collaborative learning, cooperative learning, situated learning, and inquiry. Notions of second language learning and language pedagogy are presented and followed by a discussion about the relationship between constructivism and second language learning, including Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development and views on whole language learning in literacy.

Research Trends Pertaining to Constructivism:

Radical and Social Constructivism, Multi-intelligence Theory, and Authentic Pedagogy

According to MacDonough (2001), constructivism is based on four key elements:

1. Learning is not the result of development; learning is development.

2. Disequilibrium facilitates learning.

3. Reflective abstraction is the driving force of learning.

4. Dialogue within a community engenders further learning. (p.77).

Constructivism refers to a non-linear, holistic and integrated educational experience for students (Hwangbo & Yawkey, 1994). Constructivist "learners need to interact, to have

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dialogues, to solve problems and to make sense of new ideas" (Fox, 2001,p. 33).

Constructivism is grounded in multiple ways of knowing, prior knowledge, and learning

in a social context. Hausfather (2001) notes that "when students interact with

information, using it in solving problems, answering questions or discussing

interpretations, the information becomes their knowledge, tied to their unique

understandings' (p.16).

The seeds of constructivism were planted many years ago by John Dewey. In

My Pedagogical Creed (1929), he refers to a child's "own instincts and powers [which]

furnish the material and give the starting point for all education". Dewey also supports

the notion of "continual reconstruction", focusing on the process of learning rather than

the end product (as cited in Terwel, 1999, p. 195). Actively engaging students in

learning experiences that are of interest to them is central to his philosophy of

education. Dewey identified a key component to successful student learning:

motivation, and providing students with work that is of interest to them (Glassman,

2001). James [1842-1910], the American psychologist and contemporary of Dewey,

confirms that "truth is in the making", clearly linking the pursuit of knowledge with

constructivism (as cited in Roelofs & Terwel, 1999, p. 204).

However, the connection between knowledge and meaning making may not be

achieved solely through "active learning". Fox (2001) claims that all active learning is

not necessarily inherently interesting to students and is a more complex process than

simply presenting students with unexplored topics. For Fox, the definition of activity

must include reading and listening, commonly perceived as passive learning

experiences which he believes are very satisfying and motivating activities for students.

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Gardner and Lambert (1972) have examined student motivation at length in their book, Attitudes and Motivation in Second-Language Learning.

James and Dewey's notions of knowledge construction were advanced by research in the field of psychology under the direction of Jean Piaget. Piaget is known for his ground breaking work on child psychology and for developing the stages of cognitive development (Piaget, 1954). Warren and Yoder (1994) suggest that Piaget's work in the field of psychology has influenced the shift of focus from the previously accepted behavourist strategies of Skinner (1974) to a more child-centred philosophy. Piaget's work has been reexamined in the 1980's under constructivism. He has been called the "progenitor of constructivism" (von Glasersfeld, 1997, para. 3).

Blythe (1997) describes how Piaget and Vygotsky examined constructivist ways of knowing. According to Nyikos and Hashimoto (1997), Piaget and Vygotsky viewed language as a "mediational tool for thought" but differed on how cognitive development occurs and the setting under which optimum conditions for learning exist (p. 509). Blythe (1997) claims Piaget believed that "to understand is to discover, or reconstruct by discovery" (p.207). Blythe continues, noting that Piaget, as a proponent of radical constructivism, proposed that students need to process their experiences individually in order to make sense of them. Nyikos and Hashimoto (1997) describe Piaget's notion of individual development, constrained by structures or fixed stages of cognitive growth. At each stage, meaning is derived by individual reflection. The teacher in Piaget's classroom acts as a mentor in the learning process.

Nyikos and Hashimoto (1997) assert that on the other hand, Vygotsky, a social constructivist, referred to the learning process as taking place in a dynamic social

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setting, among peers.   Differing on the issue of individual versus community, Nyikos and Hashimoto suggest that Vygotsky's view was that it was more authentic and meaningful to find understanding in collaboration with others and in a social context. Vygotsky believed that "signs and words serve children [or learners] first and foremost as a means of social contact with other people" (as cited in Nyikos & Hashimoto, 1997, p. 509), maintaining that the social element in learning is critical to meaning making (p. 507).   For social constructivists, an important part of the learning process is sharing new information with others. Only when knowledge has been internalized, transformed and then shared with others, has the student participated fully in the construction of knowledge that is meaningful to him or her. Establishing communities of learners within the classroom promotes peer learning and co-construction of knowledge. This is what is meant by social context.

Nyikos and Hashimoto hold that in Vygotsky's view social interaction, involving a community of learners, is a pre-requisite for cognitive development. Contrary to Piaget's notion of fixed stages of cognitive growth, Vygotskian theory states that there are no developmental phases to bind learning, describing a learning process that is fluid. The teacher in Vygotsky's constructivist classroom serves as a facilitator and guide in the meaning making process.

Current opponents of radical and social constructivism believe that they present a contradictory view of learning for educators. The notion that knowledge is personal seems to be contrary to the idea that knowledge is constructed in a group setting and vice versa. Fox (2001) suggests that the extremes proposed by both factions are unrealistic:

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...although individuals have their own personal history of learning, nevertheless they can share in common knowledge and ...although education is a social process, powerfully influenced by cultural factors, nevertheless cultures are made up of subcultures, even to the point of being composed of a subculture of one. (p.30).

He adds that "cultures and their knowledge-base are constantly in the process of change and the knowledge stored by individuals is not a rigid copy of some socially constructed template. In learning a culture, each child changes that culture" (p. 30). Fox (2001) asserts that "each learner has a distinctive point of view based on existing knowledge and values" (p. 29).

For social constructivists, the "shared construction of knowledge" seems to deny the existence of individual influence on learning. Fox (2001) holds that "'shared construction of knowledge' becomes the central image for teaching ...[creating] an implausible extreme..." (p. 29). For radical constructivists, learning is experienced by the individual and is not dependent on others. Notions of individuality versus community learning seem to be inherently opposed to one another. Fox (2001) asserts that if "knowledge can in fact be communicated, and shared, and compared, and evaluated, then the distinctive point about [knowledge is idiosyncratic and personal] largely disappears" (p. 29).

Echoing criticisms of constructivism espoused by Fox (2001), others' support the view that direct teaching or teacher-led learning is not opposed to the construction of knowledge. Citing Harris and Presley (1991), Warren and Yoder (1994) explore the "false dichotomies" of "...constructed versus instructed knowledge, understanding

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versus rule following, and discovery versus drill and practice..." (p. 253). They point to a number of advantages of employing more traditional methods of language teaching in the classroom. Specific skills, difficult language structures, and abstract concepts may be more easily explained to students using direct teaching methods. According to Warren and Yoder, children are routinely instructed by parents, teachers, members of the community among others. In language development, Fox (2001) argues for practice performance or rote learning to help eliminate mistakes made by students. Although memorization or rote learning is associated with more traditional teaching and learning methods, he feels that drill and repetition is not opposed to students making sense of what they are learning. Fox affirms that students can move beyond rote learning to engage in higher order thinking activities, "[b]ut to understand without ever remembering is also equally useless, for it condemns us to repeat each episode of learning over and over again...(p. 32).

Warren and Yoder (1994) also assert that for students with special needs, direct teaching may be more beneficial than constructivism to the student early on in the primary grades. This view is supported by scholars who warn that constructivism can have serious implications for students with special needs or who are disadvantaged. The role of the teacher as facilitator in a constructivist classroom can fail to meet the needs of special learners by asking students to make meaning without having the necessary prior knowledge required to succeed in the activity. Supporting this view, Harris and Graham (1994) suggest that "...many of those at risk and those with disabilities, may require more extensive, structured, and explicit instruction to develop skills, processes, and understandings that other students learn more easily" (p. 238).

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They add that explicit instruction or direct teaching does not imply that the learning is meaningless or less genuine than experiences based on constructivism. Harris and Graham (1996) call for " explicit, focused and at times, isolated instruction to the extent needed and integrate it ..." (p. 26). Teachers still need to help students develop skills, processes, strategies and understanding which they may need to do in a more explicit manner.

Puk (1990) argues that during instruction the level of prior knowledge required for the task can be adjusted to meet the needs of exceptional students. In addition, Warren and Yoder (1994) confirm that with young students whole language learning does help to develop early language skills in students who do not possess the "attentional resources or abstract knowledge" that may be required (p. 254). They conclude that "each instructional approach has its place" and that the challenge that language teachers face is to:

- to match interventions with the characteristics of individual learner styles and levels;

- to combine approaches to create truly rich, stimulating, responsive, and varied environments for children to learn... (p.254)

According to Papert (1999), Piaget's ideas of cognitive development and knowledge construction have informed education in that "he championed a way of thinking about children that provided the foundation for today's education-reform movements" (para. 2). More recently, much of the work in education and psychology has dealt with cognitive psychology. Curtain and Pesola (1993) refer to the work of Glover and Bruning who developed several key principles in cognitive psychology which

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bring further understanding of a new emphasis on metacognition, meaning making, student motivation and the importance of process:

- students are active processors of information.

- learning is more likely to occur when information is made meaningful to students.

- how students learn may be more important than what they learn.

- cognitive processes become automatic with repeated use.

- metacognitive skills can be developed through instruction.

- the most enduring motivation for learning is internal motivation.

- there are vast differences in students' information processing abilities. (p. 58).

Constructivism also fits well with the current idea of multi-intelligences and teaching/learning strategies that reflect the varied ways in which students learn. Hwangbo and Yawkey (1994) describe how Gardner "feels that our various intelligences become activated as we experience the same concept with different materials or objects, in different locations and in different groups - individual, small and large groups" (p. 207).

Constructivism supports current views of authentic pedagogy, a theory of teaching "in which everyday experiences, and students' interests in those experiences play a central role" (Roelofs & Terwel, 1999, p. 202). The notion of authentic pedagogy has been influenced by research on how students learn and construct knowledge. "Authentic classroom tasks, therefore, prepare students for life, not just a test" (Burke,

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1994, p. xv). Constructivists believe that "instead of learning being 'decontextualized' and taught, for example, by memorizing the parts of speech, it must be situated in a rich context of writing or speaking. Real-world contexts are needed if learning is to be constructed and transferred beyond the classroom" (Burke, 1994, p. xiv). Conversely, Fox (2001) claims that learning depends on independent practice, formation and revision of skills and problem solving. This has important implications for language learning as much of the history of language instruction has been based on practice, memorization and drill. His view is supported by Harris and Graham (1994) who contend that direct teaching is not inherently meaningless, passive or removed from students' experiences outside of school. Fox (2001) advocates that students correct mistakes they make when they are given a chance to polish their skills and repeat activities until they become automatic.

Different Concepts and Subconcepts of Constructivism:

Collaborative Learning, Cooperative Learning, Situated Learning, and Inquiry

Collaborative learning, cooperative learning, situated learning, and inquiry- based learning are some examples of constructivist learning strategies that encourage student engagement and meaning making. These concepts and subconcepts, however, may vary in degree and approach to constructivism. A cooperative classroom may look very different from an environment in which situated learning is taking place. An inquiry-based science lesson may be constructed quite differently from a collaborative science workshop even though there are elements of constructivism in each. It would be useful to examine and compare these different learning strategies in order to

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examine their underlying constructivist principles.

Collaborative learning.

Collaborative learning often is used interchangeably with cooperative learning. However, for the purpose of this literature review it will be helpful to consider these terms separately. Collaborative work in the classroom affords students an opportunity to work together in "knowledge communities" (Oxford, 1997, p. 444). Learners are engaged with other learners who have more experience and knowledge about the subject area and can act as guides and assistants. Collaborative learning makes use of Vygotsky's (1978) concept of scaffolding to help students with less knowledge develop the skills they need. In this instance, scaffolding refers to any assistance or help that a student may require when constructing meaning or understanding a new concept. There may or may not be an inherent value beyond school and connection to the students' personal world in collaborative learning. Collaborative learning can be authentic, based on real world situations. It may also be used to explore a school related topic. The teacher, particularly in second language learning, is a representative of the target culture and an expert member of that community.

Cooperative learning.

Cooperative learning also involves group work in "communities of practice" (Anderson, Reder & Simon, 1996, p. 9). However, group work as such does not necessarily imply cooperative learning. Simply having students work together in pairs or groups of three or four does not guarantee a level of cooperation among group

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members (Woolfolk, Winne, & Perry, 2000). Students need to learn how to work effectively in a cooperative group situation. A notable difference between collaborative and cooperative learning is that group members are equal partners in a cooperative learning environment and accountable to the group as a whole.

Acknowledging that not all students have the same level of prior knowledge nor learn in the same way, cooperative learning can still be used in the classroom to enhance learning. Different learning styles and knowledge levels can be used to advantage in a cooperative learning situation. Schniedewind and Davidson (2000) contend that:

> when teachers implement cooperative learning thoughtfully and differentiate tasks within it, they can personalize student learning, help students collaborate while challenging each individual in the context of a group effort, and encourage students to appreciate their peers' diverse competencies and experiences (p. 24).

They suggest that teachers miss a valuable opportunity if they only create groups of students with similar skill levels and experiences. By having heterogeneous groups in a cooperative learning activity and rejecting the stereotypes that cooperative learning means strong students helping students who need assistance or of every student learning the same thing, students can benefit from the rich perspectives and experiences that all group members bring to a project. Schniedewind and Davidson (2000) hold that "students in a cooperative learning group can engage in tasks at different levels of complexity and learn different amounts of material. Every student

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learns something he or she doesn't already know; all students contribute to a common goal"(p. 24). Further, individual work can be supported by the sharing of ideas in a group setting. They point to individualizing activities based on multi-intelligences theory as well as creating different levels of success to show how heterogeneous cooperative learning can work in a classroom to the benefit of everyone.

Knowledge is created and exchanged within a cooperative group environment. Similar to collaborative learning, cooperative learning has the potential to enhance students' social and communicative skills by encouraging students to work together (Schniedewind & Davidson, 2000). Curtain and Pesola (1993) hold that "when children work together cooperatively in small groups or in pairs, their opportunities for language use are multiplied many times over, as are their opportunities for active participation in concrete and meaningful experiences" (p. 317). They also suggest that McGroarty's work on cooperative learning situations in second language classrooms illustrates several advantages of using this type of learning strategy:

- frequent opportunities for natural second language practice,
- additional ways to integrate language and content instruction,
- variety of activities and materials,
- redefining the role of the teacher, and
- encouraging students to take an active role in language acquisition. (as cited in Curtain & Pesola, 1993, p. 320).

The teacher in a cooperative classroom is at the same time a facilitator, an observer, an assistant and an advisor to the group. In terms of authentic learning, cooperative groups may choose to explore a real life situation or may be restricted to a

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more school-based problem depending on the parametres of the project negotiated by the teacher and students of the group.

Situated learning.

Situated learning is also known as situated cognition and/or situationalism (Terwel, 1999). It involves learning through contextual activities. Construction of knowledge is linked to a cultural environment and it is specific to a particular situation. It is often described as "enculturation or adopting the norms, behaviours, skills, beliefs, language and attitudes of a particular community" (Woolfolk, Winne, & Perry, 2000, p. 261). While some argue that skills and knowledge can also be transferred to other situations, others feel that the new skills that have been learnt are particular to the context in which they developed (Woolfolk, Winne, & Perry, 2000). Situated learning is constructed primarily through apprenticeship, collaboration, reflection, coaching, practice and sharing (McLellan, 1994). Situated learning, therefore, has strong cooperative and communicative components as well as authentic elements. Situated learning experiences are based on real-life authentic conditions in which students learn skills that will be needed outside of school.

There is a clear historical connection to the notion of value outside of school as situated learning evolved from a perception that learning in school did not relate to the skills and knowledge people needed in everyday life (Anderson, Reder, & Simon, 1996). The link to a student's personal experience or prior knowledge and a connection outside the classroom may or may not occur depending on who generates the idea and organizes the learning experience - the student or teacher. If it is the student who

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suggests the activity and arranges it then the learning method has more of a constructivist approach than if the teacher organizes the learning opportunity. Situated learning also tends to be more authentic, according to the definition used by Roelofs and Terwel (1999). Situated learning tends to happen with a real world problem. Two examples of real world problems are the following: a math problem at work involving the calculation of the amount of lumber needed to build a fence or a telephone conversation with a travel agent arranging a flight overseas in another language. Students are learning a particular skill or knowledge in a specific context in order to apply it outside of school in a similar situation. The teacher in a situated learning environment has many roles. The teacher is the mentor, co-constructor, and coach.

Inquiry.

Inquiry-based learning encompasses a number of different ways of knowing. It is characterized by three central components: research, interpretation, and presentation. At each key phase, the student is involved in planning, acting, and reviewing / reflecting (Wells, 1995). Inquiry may be defined in a number of ways, however, it is generally accepted that it pertains to "actively researching questions that involve the unknown (unknown at least to the individual) in order to further understand one's reality" (Puk & Haines, 1998, p. 190). Inquiry may also include extrarational learning processes or means of thinking that occur in the subconscious or preconscious state of mind (Puk, 1996). Puk proposes that students "loop" back and forth from stages or steps in the inquiry process as they work to develop meaning for themselves. The concept of "looping" further illustrates the non-linear characteristics of learning and meaning

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making. According to Puk, important steps in the inquiry process include meditation and relaxing which allows students to reconfigure their perceptions, discover new associations, and let their thoughts and feelings surface. In this regard, Puk (1996) notes that "...unconscious processing appears to be the foundation of higher level thinking involved in, for example, inquiry" (p.129).

Puk (1996) also argues for a more integrative thinking and learning model to enhance student development, supporting both the rational and extrarational functions or the conscious and unconscious learning processes. The term "rational" for the purpose of this discussion constitutes the analytical problem-solving skills of the conscious mind. Working from a process of inquiry, students choose an area to study, design a model to work with, and develop a "product" (Puk, 1990, p. 11). Students then present their ideas to others and reflect on what they have learnt. External frameworks (or organizers) which represent an internal scheme may include the following: identification, classification, comparison, decision-making, issues analysis, correlation, cause and effect, planning, and concepts (Puk, 1993). These rational organizers are supported by nonrational processes like mediation, imaging, incubation and relaxation, particularly when they are merged with other steps in the process.

The framework or design for inquiry-based learning can be used from primary grades to the senior level. As students develop their inquiry skills, the complexity of the inquiry process increases according to the needs of the student. For instance, at a primary level, Pataray-Ching & Kavanaugh-Anderson (1999) suggest that students engaged in the reflection component of an inquiry-based lesson may choose to respond to three questions: "(1) What did I accomplish today?, (2) What did I find most

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interesting?, (3) What will I do next time?" (p. 62). At the intermediate level, students analyze, adapt, deduce as well as discuss not only the results of their inquiry but the learning process itself (Puk, 1990). Students reflect on what they are learning and how they are learning. Crawford (2000) developed a similar organizer to describe inquiry-based learning in science. She has identified six key components in her design:

(1) situating instruction in authentic problems,

(2) grappling with data,

(3) collaboration of students and teacher,

(4) connection with society,

(4) teacher modeling behaviours of a scientist,

(5) development of student ownership. (p.922).

According to Pataray-Ching and Kavanaugh-Anderson (1999), "each inquiry was enhanced by conversation, collaboration, experimentation, reflection, and learning through multiple experiences. These fluid characteristics of inquiry illustrate the connectedness of inquiries and make it difficult to discern where one inquiry ends and another begins "(p. 65). Again, this fluidity echoes the "looping" notion referred to earlier by Puk (1996) and affirms the notion that there are no fixed stages or rigidly defined phases in the learning process as students make meaning for themselves. Students may begin with a conversation, reflect on what they already know, search for data, talk it over with their peers, meditate, let new links appear before following a different direction.

There is a strong emphasis on student ownership of knowledge, developed through the generation of a "real" or authentic question by the student. In this instance,

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the term "real" means of personal interest to the student, involving a connection to the

student's personal world (Roelofs & Terwel, 1999). He or she becomes committed to

the inquiry process and is energized by the pursuit of knowledge. In determining a

focus and answering a question, the student works towards becoming an expert,

sharing the newly constructed information with others. Puk and Haines (1999) claim

that "students derive meaning through their communications with others and their

environment" (p. 543). New knowledge is built upon prior learning. The new knowledge

becomes internalized and reconstructed through interaction with others - between

teacher and student as well as between student and student. Collaborative work,

cooperative learning and situated learning can all be a part of an inquiry-based learning

experience.   Meaning making, supported by dialogue with others, is not based

on textbook or teacher information. Focusing on the student effectively changes the

teacher-student relationship. Puk & Haines (1999) explain that "learning would be

dependent upon the socially constructed meaning that students acquire and not on the

theoretical dictates of the teacher or textbook" (p. 543). Wells (1995) also refers to this

change in focus which emphasizes the importance of communication between the

teacher and student as knowledge is constructed rather than on the transmission of

knowledge by the teacher to the student. Crawford (2000) paints a similar picture of

teacher-student relationships in which they work together "to develop conceptual

understandings through shared learning experiences" (p. 933). Puk (1993) describes

an " 'interactive' sharing of the teaching and learning" (p. 9). Crawford (2000) suggests

that it is the role of the teacher to facilitate the learning process and encourage students

as they journey ahead. The teacher is a motivator, diagnostician, guide, innovator,

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experimenter, researcher, modeler, collaborator, and learner (Crawford, 2000).

To summarize using Pataray-Ching & Kavanaugh-Anderson's (1999) definition, "inquiry encourages us to become a part of the ever-changing, ongoing cycle of knowledge, valuing, and living as knowledge constructors and lifelong learners" (p. 58).

Second Language Learning and Language Pedagogy

Second language learning has changed over the past one hundred years as new methods of teaching foreign languages have evolved. The development of language teaching and theories of learning have been influenced by a number of factors: the languages studied, the purpose behind second language learning and the learners themselves. Changes in foreign language teaching methods have generally evolved as instruction methods used previously are modified and adapted to new situations and circumstances. The following is a brief historical chronology of some of the major shifts in language learning that have occurred over the past two centuries.

With the *Grammar Translation Method* of the 1800's, students studying Latin focused on grammar points and translation methods, two key components of the language study program at that time (Mitchell & Vidal, 2001). Students developed skills in logic and interpretation, employing their knowledge of other Romance languages to build vocabulary. However, as the study of living languages was introduced at the beginning of the twentieth century, communication and dialogue were emphasized over grammar and translation, offering language students an alternative to the previous method. Lessons focused on the simplified contextual use of the target language to help students grasp meaning in particular situations. This method was later replaced in

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the early 1900's by the *Direct or Natural Method* which focused on vocabulary and word frequency lists, discovery, adaptation and testing. Reading and writing tasks were withheld until students could prove proficiency in the target language. Communication skills and interaction in a natural setting were key elements of these two approaches emphasizing oral communication rather than grammar for its own sake (Curtain & Pesola, 1993).

The discussion on language instruction methods continued as the Coleman Report was released in 1929 in the United States. The report suggested that more emphasis should be placed on oral expertise in the classroom (Mitchell & Vidal, 2001). It also advocated for the use of a variety of methods to attain oral and reading competency in a foreign language. The *Coleman Report* was a book based on a multi-year study of foreign language instruction and curriculum in the United States. Its release resulted in the formation of the *Reading Method* of the 1930's (Mitchell & Vidal, 2001).

With the advent of World War II, there came about a new shift in the study of foreign languages. The United States government paid post-secondary institutes to train military personnel to help in the war effort by teaching them linguistic skills to help identify, decode and interpret wartime messages. Native speakers were used to transfer these language skills in the *Army or Intensive Method* of instruction (Mitchell & Vidal, 2001). Small groups of students worked with a "native target language informant" to practice language drills (p. 29). Post World War II, language instruction split into two streams: (1) structural linguistics which focused on word classes, rules, sentence structure methods and (2) behaviourism which emphasized habit formation,

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memorization, practice and drill (Mitchell & Vidal, 2001). The *Audiolingual* approach

emphasizes linguistic proficiency during which learners practice form and structure.

This approach dominated language learning in the 1960's and 1970's (Blythe, 1997). It

typified language learning centered on language proficiency using habit formation as a

teaching strategy. Communication became the key focus. Curtain and Pesola (1993)

wrote that "inductive grammar and oral drill replaced grammatical analysis in English;

listening and speaking practice in the classroom and in the language laboratory

replaced reading and translation exercises" (p. 17). Teachers used dialogue, patterned

drill exercises, and memorization techniques in the language classroom.

The *Counseling-Learning Method* of the 1970's, borrowed from group therapy

methods in psychology, constructed communities of learners in which the learner took

control of the educational process (Mitchell & Vidal, 2001). This represented a shift in

focus to the learner and his or her communicative competence. Another method also

surfaced around this time, the *Total Physical Response Method* (TPR) which involved

using physical activity to explore language development (Curtain & Pesola, 1993).

TPR was first studied by Asher in the late 1960's. This method was used particularly

with students learning Japanese and Russian. In this approach to language learning,

students were not required to speak until ready. They showed understanding through

body language and physical response.

In the 1980's, oral proficiency testing reached its pinnacle and the *Proficiency*

Movement emerged (Mitchell & Vidal, 2001). Supporters of this method explored how

students learnt vocabulary as well as, methods of teaching to support oral proficiency

development (Mitchell & Vidal, 2001). Language instructors de-emphasized grammar

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and "discrete-item testing" on grammatical points and concentrated on students' global understanding and comprehension of the spoken language (Curtain & Pesola, 1993, p. 23). Under the direction of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) proficiency guidelines were established to describe teaching expectations and objectives in language learning and to "provide a new way to look at student language performance across programs and school levels" (p. 24).

In the last twenty years, language teachers have continued to focus on the learner, scaffolding, and "creating contexts...that allow students to see how to take the next steps to learning" (Mitchell & Vidal, 2001, p. 35). Mitchell and Vidal (2001) hold that the future emphasis in language instruction will highlight the concepts of identity and community. They state that "one metaphor that scholars have consistently applied to the history of language teaching methodologies is that of a pendulum swinging back and forth between strictly managed and more laissez-faire amounts and content of instruction" (p.27).

Language is alive and dynamic, not a series of unrelated and independent facts. Blythe (1997) asserts that social context, input, and "cognitive processes that learners employ to comprehend meaning", are key components of today's effective linguistic programs, allowing students to see and hear what is in the message being communicated (p. 52-53). According to Blythe, this represents a shift from "form to meaning" and from explicit instruction to comprehension-based pedagogy (p. 52-53) . Blythe (1997) suggests that historically, second language teaching of grammar in particular, has been dominated by drills and practice, supporting structuralist and behaviourist teaching strategies which stressed "observation, avoidance of errors and

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habit formation" (p. 51). Crawford (2000) paints a picture of a "traditional, information-driven classroom" in which students act as "learner, listener, and receiver of information" (p. 932).

To date, language instruction methods have responded to the changing needs of students, shifting emphasis from grammar study to oral and reading competency. With the study of living languages and an interest in conversation and dialogue, methods of teaching and learning have taken on a new focus.

Constructivism and Second Language Learning

Constructivism is particularly relevant to second language learning because of the current focus on communication and the social aspect of learning a language. Authentic learning experiences based on communication and dialogue provide students with an opportunity to interact with native speakers, speak in the target language and "situate language learning in the daily life of the student" (Roelofs & Terwel, 1999, p. 204). McGroarty (1998) states that social learning is meaningful in language pedagogy as both the social context of language acquisition and effective learning / teaching styles are essential to the study of linguistics.

Referring to first language learning, Bromley (1998) states that constructivism places the student in the centre of the learning experience as he/she constructs meaning and knowledge of language and literacy directly or indirectly under natural circumstances. This can carry over to second language learning as well. Curtain and Pesola (1993) assert that "we know that languages are acquired in real-life, natural settings through interaction with others" (p. 125). More specifically, they argue that "in

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the elementary or middle school foreign language classroom that is oriented toward communication, the traditional large group, teacher-led structure has severe limitations" (p. 317). Referring to language learning in the United States, Padilla, Fairchild and Valadez (1990) claim that foreign language instructional methods of the past which used to teach vocabulary and grammar structures, have failed to produce second language proficiency. According to Padilla, Fairchild and Valadex, this would suggest that language students today do not have a certain level of oral or written competency. However, a recent study of French Immersion high school students conducted for a Master's project in Northwestern Ontario found that a majority of students (75.6%) felt that mechanical drills were a useful part of the French language program in which they were enrolled (Kunnas, 2001, p. 56). There may be several reasons to explain this including inexperience with alternative methods of language instruction. Today's focus on natural conversation and dialogue as well as real-life contextual learning may be problematic for students who have only experienced rote learning, habit formation and performance practice in the past.

Today, greater emphasis in second language learning has been placed in four areas: wide exposure, regular interaction, communication for real purposes and reduced emphasis on grammar and drill (Crowhurst, 1994, p.77). Firstly, to promote second language acquisition, teachers of second languages need to provide students with wide exposure to a foreign language, creating more opportunities for students to practice their written, listening and verbal skills. Crowhurst (1994) contends that with second language learning "specific instruction may support but cannot substitute for wide exposure" (p. 77). Students of a second language need to speak, hear, see and

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write words time and time again in genuine situations in order to make sense of them. Secondly, peer interaction is also an important tool second language teachers can use to facilitate language learning. It has been found that students working with other students in a cooperative or collaborative environment aids language acquisition (Crowhurst, 1994).

Crowhurst (1994) suggests that "as they interact in small groups on tasks associated with content area topics, they hear and use new vocabulary repeatedly and so make it their own"(p. 77). This advances Curtain and Pesola's (1993) assertion that group work is especially effective in language learning, particularly with additional languages. Further, by developing classroom "communities of learners", students are afforded more opportunities to build on the language skills while interacting in a safe and comfortable environment. Thirdly, authentic learning plays a central role in supporting second language learning. Crowhurst (1994) holds that "second language learners need to be actively engaged in real communication if their language development is to be facilitated" (p. 78). Learning experiences that provide students with meaningful, interesting and challenging activities help to develop writing and speaking skills in the target language. Lastly, as has been previously discussed, the emphasis on grammar and drill is being replaced by authentic learning situations in which students work together cooperatively for real purposes using dialogue and communication to foster meaning. However, it is noted that, similar to first language learning, some instruction may be necessary to resolve problem areas but generally, grammatical errors will decrease as language proficiency and familiarity increase (Crowhurst, 1994). Fox (2001) suggests that familiarity can be developed through

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practice to help eliminate language mistakes. Once students have practiced a particular skill such as conjugation or a list of words, errors decrease. The more students repeat the correct conjugation or vocabulary, for example, the easier it will be for the students to make the correct tense choice or word substitution. It becomes automatic or instinctual. He states, "practice is vital in two ways: firstly because it is the chief way in which we eliminate errors from habitual routines and secondly because it somehow...allows us to transfer our limited powers of conscious away from routine competencies" (p. 32).

Zone of Proximal Development

Little information is available about the relationship between group interaction and language learning (Nyikos & Hashimoto, 1997). Vygotsky developed a "notion of assistance" to describe the distance between what an individual student knows and what he/she can potentially learn with teacher assistance, support or scaffolding (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). He referred to this as the *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD). In language learning, for instance, assistance varies according to student or community needs and may include encouragement, information, learning strategies, and grammar or lexical rules. In a constructivist learning environment, the assistance may be provided by either the teacher or members of the community of learners (Nyikos & Hashimoto, 1997; Oxford, 1997; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). The more the student is able to engage and process information in the target language, the fewer the scaffolds needed. As language development persists, supports are removed. In a community of learners, a key component of constructivism, social and affective

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supports are used to help less experienced members develop needed language skills (Nyikos & Hashimoto, 1997).

Whole Language Perspective

Since the 1990's, the whole language perspective in developing literacy skills has been prevalent in first language learning, when new theories of emergent literacy evolved from research in primary classrooms. This approach has particular relevancy to second language learning. Although a second language is usually acquired after a student has developed language skills in his or her native tongue, students experience similar processes in learning to read and write in the second language. These foreign language skills are essential in order to develop proficiency and native-like abilities in the target language. Supporters of whole language learning advocate that literacy like many other skills is a "natural process" that students go through as they develop (Woolfolk, Winne, & Perry, 2000). Woolfolk, Winne and Perry (2000) hold that "children actively create understandings of what it really means to read and to write by engaging in authentic reading and writing activities" (p. 335). However, for some students the process may be more difficult and interventions required to help them develop necessary language skills.

As with constructivism, there are many definitions of whole language learning (Harris and Graham, 1994). According to Harris and Graham, it is defined more as a philosophy than a specific teaching method. They suggest that whole language learning can include a number of components used in teacher-led learning or explicit teaching. Phonics, oral competency, storytelling, and writing all find a place in a whole

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language classroom as long as the learning is authentic and relevant to the student.

Whole language philosophy shares many common aspects with constructivism. Similar to constructivism, authentic reading and writing situations chosen by the student are central to this philosophy. As well, the social aspect embedded in learning to read and write is shared by constructivism and whole language perspectives. The use of modeling in the classroom is a frequent occurrence in an environment that supports this type of literacy development. As in constructivism, prior knowledge plays an important role in whole language learning. Students' understanding of what the teacher, for example, is saying or communicating is dependent on what they already know.

With whole language instruction, reading and writing are developed simultaneously in an environment that is rich in literacy experiences. Curtain and Pesola (1993) contend that "meaningful literacy experiences occur in second-language classrooms that provide appropriate settings for communication - communication that is expressed not just through oral language, but is expanded into reading and writing activities" (p. 125). According to Woolfolk, Winne and Perry (2000), Chapman suggests that reading and writing abilities, flowing naturally from listening skills, are developed at the same time as students' cognitive growth occurs.

On the other hand, Warren and Yoder (1994) suggest that constructivism and whole language learning which are generally considered student-led learning strategies, are not incongruous with direct teaching or teacher-directed learning. Proponents of direct teaching believe that language can be broken up into discrete, independent parts for easier digestion. As previously mentioned, Warren and Yoder (1994) point out that direct teaching of abstract skills and concepts may be of benefit to students. This claim

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is supported by Harris and Graham (1996) who found that in a constructivist classroom where spelling skills and handwriting were presented to children with special needs using a whole language perspective, an integrated teaching strategy was necessary to provide students with supports required for success.

Previous Studies on Constructivism and Second Language Learning

There have been a number of recent studies that have examined how social context and community as a part of a constructivist approach to learning has affected student achievement. Nyikos & Hashimoto (1997) undertook a study to determine how constructivist theory affects interaction, collaboration and cooperative learning and teaching strategies. As well, they explored how groups develop an individual and community *Zone of Proximal Development*. There were 16 teacher education graduate students who participated in the study. Students were required to work in "communities of learners". During their involvement in the project, students explored role taking and division of labour. The results of the study revealed that there is a need for social and affective scaffolding by peers and teachers for the cognitive development of second language proficiency.

In a 1997 study of kindergarten to grade six Hawaiian students whose first language was not mainstream English, Au & Carroll (1997) refer to the KEEP Demonstration Classroom Project in which constructivist practices were developed, introduced and assessed in a whole language literacy program for 281 students in the first year of the study and 608 students in the second year of the study. Although the first year of the study proved to be disappointing in terms of student achievement

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levels, the second year showed marked improvement. The lack of success in the first year was attributed to problems associated with implementation of the new teaching strategies and a dual focus on both readers' and writers' workshops. In general, however, the results of the two year study showed that the use of writers' and readers' workshops, grade level achievement benchmarks, whole language literacy curriculum, and portfolio assessment engaged students and teachers in a constructivist model that promoted language learning. Ownership of literacy was an important emergent theme; students felt proud of their achievement and enjoyed reading (Au & Carroll, 1997). Using constructivist methods helped to improve literacy in the Hawaiian schools.

One prevalent theme in language learning throughout its history is whether or not grammar learning is inductive or deductive. Grammar studies have been characterized by drill sequencing - structural, mechanical, and communicative drills. In a study involving second language teacher educators, Blythe (1997) employed constructivist techniques in teaching grammar. He highlighted the problems associated with teaching teachers to teach grammar using traditional behaviourist methods based on habit formation. Past verb tense is a difficult grammatical point for French language learners to grasp. Many of the teachers in the study did not understand the underlying grammatical points of past verb tense. They had been taught a linear model to explain verb tense to students but were unable to delve beneath the surface of the model. This implied that their students were also unable to do so and became easily confused by exceptions to the rule and native speaker usage of grammatical tense (Blythe, 1997). By having participants in the study question and challenge their previously held notions of verb tense, Blythe was able to support the theory that critical thinking evolves in a

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constructivist classroom.

Roelofs and Terwel (1999) developed criteria to evaluate three Dutch schools to investigate how educators had adapted their teaching practices in mathematics and English language learning to reflect the newly introduced curriculum based on constructivist principles of learning. In a multi-year, multi-site study, Roelofs and Terwel used the following criteria to better understand the degree to which the teachers used constructivist learning techniques in their classrooms:

1. Construction of knowledge

2. Connection to the students' personal world

3. Value beyond school

4. Cooperation and communication (p. 207-8).

The role of the teacher permeates each of these four components.

In reference to their study of English language classrooms in Holland, Roelofs and Terwel (1999) found that most teachers preferred to give basic grammar instructions to students before communication activities. As well, text book resources or lack thereof influenced the classroom environment. Time constraints also shaped learning experiences. The communicative abilities of students outside of the classroom were given particular attention by the English language instructors and became a focus in the classroom. Roelofs and Terwell found that cooperative and collaborative learning strategies had been employed successfully to facilitate language learning in the Dutch schools.

Interestingly, student perceptions of the four criteria and how often they were met were quite different than the teachers' perceptions. The students in the study felt that opportunities for learning using a constructivist approach occurred less frequently.

In summary, the authors recommended that educators should make use of a multitude of learning and teaching strategies ranging from whole class instruction to cooperative learning opportunities. Echoing criticisms of constructivism put forth by Fox (2001), Roelofs and Terwel (1999) suggested that a variety of methods "provide guidance to students who do not have sufficient prior knowledge or the required skills and meta- cognitive strategies" (p. 223).

Traditionally, the focus of school curriculum in Ontario has been fact and content based, however, as early as the 1970's, a shift in emphasis toward problem solving, inquiry, and an image of the learner as a more independent, intrinsically-motivated student emerged (Puk & Haines, 1998). Puk (1990) holds that "as the emphasis in education in Ontario has changed over the past twenty years from transmitting knowledge (usually facts and algorithms) to students, to an emphasis which attempts to empower students to be self-directed problem-solvers, the need for teaching self-directed skills has increased" (p. 3).

Focusing on inquiry, a constructivist learning strategy, Puk and Haines (1998) conducted a study of the perceptions and use of this learning method in classrooms in Ontario. They were interested in determining if teachers taught and practiced inquiry as a learning strategy as outlined in curriculum documents since the 1970's. Starting as early as the 1973 *New Dimensions* document, the Ontario Ministry of Education supported "inquiry as an important component in teaching and learning" (as cited in Puk

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& Haines, 1998, p. 191). The study revealed that:

> teachers do not teach it because they do not understand it due to the fact that
> they have: (1) not been trained to teach it, (2) because it has not been explained
> clearly enough to them or in enough depth...and (3) because they have little
> incentive to understand it or learn how to teach it in the absence of externally-
> applied, systematic accountability. (p. 200).

Confirming earlier research on classroom practices involving inquiry, it was found
that teachers organized activities for students to fill the school day assuming that the
skills required for higher order thinking like inquiry were naturally apart of the lesson or
chose not to teach these skills to their students (as cited in Puk & Haines, 1998).

In a Master's project, Kunnas (2001) explored factors relating to high school
French Immersion students' use of French as a second language. Among other issues,
he discovered in his quantitative study of 221 secondary school French Immersion
students in Northwestern Ontario that students wanted learning opportunities that were
real-life based and of interest to them. He concluded that "immersion courses should
be designed with the students' interest in mind, in order to promote self-expression of
the French language and to motivate students to intrinsically value their second
language" (p. 52-53). Kunnas further recommended that French language teachers
use non-traditional methods of instruction in their classrooms that emphasize real-life
contexts, hands-on activities and active construction of knowledge to help develop the
linguistic skills of their students. He asserts that "second language educators need to
focus on creating a more authentic learning environment in order to facilitate a more

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successful transfer of skills they learn into 'real world' circumstances" (p. 105).

To study how changing classroom practices and routines can help to create a new social order, Sheehy (2002) studied constructivism in an urban middle school classroom. Working with two middle school teachers in the Social Studies and English departments, Sheehy organized an eight week class project called *The Building Project*. Recently, administration had decided to close the school and renovate another structure for the students and teaching staff. Sheehy and her colleagues asked the students to consider whether or not a newly renovated building was needed and if so, what amenities the new school should have. The project was constructivist in nature, allowing students the chance to make meaning by connecting what they learned during the project to the school administration's decision to renovate another school in their community as well as to take responsibility of their learning experience.

The project was divided into five phases. At times, students worked in small groups while at other times they worked as a whole class. While engaged in *The Building Project,* students coconstructed meaning by reading census data and investigating school funding in the first phase. Next, students were responsible for developing a survey to be given to stakeholders to find out how people felt about the school closure and what they envisioned for the new building. In the third phase, stories were written to describe the students' lived experiences at the school. This activity was followed by the creation of floor plans and models of the new school using information gathered from the survey that had been completed in phase two. The culminating activity was a speech to be given to the school administration during a Board meeting thereby linking the classroom to the outside world. Sheehy (2002)

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explains, "the speech writing involved synthesizing all information from the project - census data, place stories, survey results, Sanders history, and communicating to the school board what the community of Sanders wanted in a new school" (p. 286).

Throughout the project, Sheehy found that the students and teachers had difficulty assuming new classroom roles and practices: "Students reported liking projects, yet Jade [name of the teacher] found that projects involved new classroom routines and changing routines difficult" (p. 285). However overall, Sheehy discovered that the students enjoyed the new experience and wished to continue this type of classroom work. This study is particularly interesting in terms of language learning and discourse in a community of learners setting. Sheehy determined that whole class constructivism as well as group constructivism took place in the following situations:

- when an idea was put forth by a student and discussed by the class or the teacher
- when a student commented on a point brought forth from a previous point made (p. 297).

Sheehy describes an Initiation, Response and Evaluation (IRE) pattern in her study in which the teacher initiates student response and then evaluates the student's comments. "I considered any instance when students expanded the IRE pattern constructivism, because these expansions demonstrated that students were taking responsibility for classroom talk" (p. 287). Students were in control of their learning when they assumed responsibility for classroom discussion or group discussion. As suggested previously, language learning is enhanced when students have an opportunity to talk among themselves in a group situation or in the case of The Building Project as a class, affording them the time and a place to practice language skills in a comfortable environment.

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After interviewing seven high school students from Northwestern Ontario to talk about their lived experiences in a French immersion program, Tassone (2001) asserted that all of the young adults had a positive bilingual experience in both elementary and secondary school. Key themes that emerged from the findings of this Master's thesis were the importance of community, personal commitment and determination to continue with bilingual education, interest in the French culture, and future opportunities in the marketplace, which all led to a positive experience in the French immersion program for her participants. In her study, Tassone (2001) touched on the importance of a sense of community based on trust and support for these students in the French immersion program. In turn this echoes the key element of constructivism, which is the establishment of a community of learners.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the many constructivist learning strategies that have been successfully employed in a variety of subject areas. The focus on students and their social, affective and physical needs can carry over to second language learning in classrooms in Ontario schools. New approaches to learning another language are needed to ensure that all students' needs and multiple ways of knowing are met by the education system. It is hoped that this literature review will add to the discourse in order to support students as they take ownership of their learning experiences, shaping their education in ways that are meaningful and relevant to them.

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CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter three, divided into four sections, contains the methodology of this study. Section one refers to the design of the study, illustrating its nature and purpose. Included in this section is a brief outline of the time frame, a description of the sample used in the study and the limitations. In section two, data collection is identified. This is followed by a discussion of data analysis. Ethical considerations are examined in section four of this chapter.

Design of the Study

This study is qualitative in design. In order to explore how constructivism can be used to support second language development, data was gathered from five core and immersion French as a Second Language teachers in Northern Ontario. A semi-structured interview format was employed, drawing upon probes to further understand the participants' own perceptions of constructivism and how they use it in their classrooms. The language teachers' experiences enhanced and brought meaning to this study which evolved as more was learnt about the "setting, subjects, and other sources of data through direct examination" (Bogdon & Biklen, 1998, p.49). Gathered from personal reflections on their teaching practices and the learning environment they promote in their classrooms, the five participants' own words and phrases added depth and richness to the picture they painted. "Grounded theory" was employed as themes emerged from the data collected during the five conversations I had with the participants. Data was collected, observations were made during our conversations

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and themes were induced from the data (Bogdon and Biklen, 1998).

Time Frame

In July and August 2002, I engaged in five conversations over a two month period in July and August 2002. The conversations ranged in time from thirty minutes to sixty minutes. The conversations took place at a number of locations, including the participants' homes, my home and classrooms. Data analysis was ongoing and a researcher's log was kept. Methodological and theoretical notes were also written after each conversation. As well, review of the current literature on constructivism continued during the study.

Sample

In total, seven teachers were contacted over an eight week period, however, only five teachers participated in the study. I began with a list of five teachers that I thought would have some interesting classroom experiences to share regarding the use of constructivism to support second language learning. These were teachers that I had met during my preservice year or in a university setting. I had experienced "active learning" first hand in their classrooms or spoken socially with them about their experiences teaching a second language. From this list I hoped the initial participants would recommend others using a snowball sampling technique (Bogdon and Biklen, 1998). After a few attempts to contact the participants by phone, I succeeded in reaching two teachers and met with them early on in the study. After meeting with these two FSL teachers, I was able to add a few more names to my list of possible

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participants, including those recommended by the FSL teachers with whom I had spoken to as well as two others whom I had met at a university. Unfortunately, I was unable to set a time and place to meet two of the teachers.

Of the five FSL teachers that I did speak with, four taught in the public school system while the fifth was employed with the separate school board. All the participants were women and had taught French as a Second Language for many years. They were able to draw upon their unique experiences as second language teachers and were willing to participate and interested in reflecting upon their classroom practices.

Their teaching experiences were varied. While a few of the participants had taught exclusively in the immersion program, some had taught in both core and immersion French programs and hence, could consider their experiences in both streams. Some of the participants had taught students in the primary division as well as the junior/intermediate division. In addition, one of the participants had taught a foreign language at the college level early in her career. The participants spoke both French and English and most of the teachers I talked to felt comfortable communicating in a third language and/or held a degree in a language other than French or English.

Limitations

Due to the time frame of the study, I had some difficulty reaching teachers. Time constraints for me as well as the teachers I was contacting was a factor. On my part, I needed to speak with FSL teachers during the summer months because I was leaving the city for a year beginning at the end of August. I had only eight weeks in which to collect data. As well, school had finished for the year and summer holidays

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were well underway by the time I tried to contact possible participants. Some of the teachers I spoke to had prior commitments or were out-of-town for the summer while others were unsure of how they could help or felt that they did not have the teaching experience needed to participate in a university research study and were hesitant to speak with me. As the end of summer approached, many were also busy preparing for their own classes. Under these circumstances, the snowball sampling technique was not an effective way to reach possible participants. Therefore, I relied on people I had met in the teaching profession, contacting other FSL teachers I knew who used constructivism in their classroom, and asking them to participate in the study. However, the last teacher that I spoke to was recommended by two of the other participants.

Two other limitations need to be considered. The sample size was small, consisting of five second language teachers in Northern Ontario. As well, I only spoke with female FSL teachers and did not have an opportunity to present the views of male language teachers in the study.

Data Collection

In order to better understand how constructivism is being used as a theory of learning in second language classrooms, it was critical to speak to the teachers who are implementing the curriculum and supporting their students' language learning. A semi-structured interview format, consisting of seven basic questions followed by probes was used during my conversations with the second language teachers. Based on Patton's (1990) model of a general interview guide, probes were used to "fill[ing] out the descriptive picture" (p.294). The participants were asked to reflect on the seven

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questions and share their own unique perceptions and experiences with me. These seven questions helped, in part, to determine how French as a Second Language teachers use constructivism in their classrooms to enhance second language learning and its effect on their students' learning.

The Interview Process

The conversations were structured around the following seven questions:

1. **Describe your own experiences as a second language student.** The first question was meant to help the participant begin reflecting on memories and recollections of being a second language student. I hoped the participants would share some of their feelings about language learning and the types of classroom activities that they had experienced in elementary, secondary and post-secondary school.

2. **How would you define constructivism?** The following question tapped into the participants' own perceptions and definitions of constructivism or active learning. I was interested in knowing what these terms meant to them as language teachers. I discovered that many of the participants had difficulty with the term *constructivism* and felt more comfortable using the phrase *active learning*. Constructivism was not a term they used to describe the type of learning in their classrooms. Others used cooperative learning and physical activity to describe certain elements of constructivism.

3. **Describe a lesson where you employed or observed constructivism.** This question asked participants to provide an example of a lesson or unit that they

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had used in their classroom which employed constructivism. The responses to this question provided me with a concrete picture of how theory can be turned into practice in the classroom. It also helped to clarify any misunderstanding that I may have had about the participants' definition of constructivism. Responding to this question, one participant explained, "When I say 'active', I think in terms of student-driven. It could be a student sitting on his own trying to figure something out but he is still figuring out some questions."

4. **Describe a lesson where you didn't employ or observe constructivism.** According to Simpson (2002) who cites Geelan, current literature suggests that "constructivism is one possible way of thinking; a model useful in particular contexts rather than universally true" (p.348). I was interested in finding out if FSL teachers use a mix of teaching/learning strategies, traditional and constructivist, in their classroom to support language learning or whether they use constructivism exclusively.

5. **How have your ideas about constructivism influenced your classroom planning?** This question speaks to classroom and lesson planning. My probes included whether or not establishing a community of learners in the classroom was important and the day-to-day mechanics of structuring student-led learning.

6. **How have your ideas about constructivism influenced your students' learning?** I wanted to reflect upon second language teachers' perceptions of students' learning experiences in a classroom where constructivism is practiced. How do they perceive their students' learning experience? They described some

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of the benefits and drawbacks of constructivism in response to this question.

7.   **How are your ideas about constructivism supported in your school?**

Teachers need support to try new things in the classroom. They need support in terms of time, resources, professional development and feedback. It was interesting to talk to participants about what type of support for active learning they received from their principals, colleagues, and parents.

The participants met with me at a time that was convenient for them and at a location in which they felt comfortable. During my initial conversation with each participant, I suggested several venues and asked her where she preferred to get together. I met three of the participants in their homes. One conversation was held at my home. The last conversation took place at the end of August as the participant was preparing for the upcoming school year so we met in her classroom. I spoke to each participant once. There were five conversations in total. With each conversation, I spent time getting acquainted, building trust and rapport.

The semi-structured interview format also allowed for comparable indicators or questions but at the same time afforded an opportunity for probing. Probes were used to elicit greater detail during our conversations and to facilitate the participants' reflections. Given that there are varied definitions of constructivism and many concepts and subconcepts, the probes helped to clarify meaning for both myself and the participant throughout our conversation. Woolfolk, Winne and Perry (2000) refer to Prawat who states that "while there are several interpretations of what [constructivism] theory means, "most agree that it involves a dramatic change in the focus of teaching,

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putting students' own efforts to understand at the centre of the educational enterprise" (p.325).

As the conversations progressed I was able to refine my questions and probes. For instance, by my second conversation, I discovered that the participants were not familiar with the term *constructivism* but were accustomed to using the phrase *active learning* when speaking with their colleagues or parents to describe students constructing knowledge or making meaning. One participant explained, "We never use it. To me, like you say, it is kids building meaning. Instead of just being passive-receptive, they are active...there is a lot of interaction, discussion between the students and figuring out, you know." Once I understood that constructivism wasn't a term that the participants, themselves, used to describe the learning environment in their classroom, I was able to change the question to reflect the participants' own experiences. In response to the term, *active learning,* another participant stated that, "Yes, active learning or student-driven is often what we use, too." A third participant referred to examples of cooperative learning that she used in her classroom to help promote language learning. Her examples mirrored elements of constructivism such as sharing ideas, working in a small group setting, and student ownership of work. She said, " I know that [cooperative learning] is a term that we are more accustomed to using. I think it would be more so cooperative learning. More than anything." Later in the discussion, she elaborated,

> I know even more so with the science, they work on their own...give them the
> instructions and let them go to it. It is amazing what they come up with. I have
> to kind of circulate to ensure that they are staying on task but it is amazing what

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they come away with...what they learn on their own.

I also found that by paraphrasing what the participant said or by asking for an example to illustrate the point gave me a clearer picture and a better understanding. One participant spoke about her experiences in both core and immersion programs. At one point, I needed to clarify whether the example she was using was one experienced in a core or an immersion classroom. As well, allowing time between questions afforded both myself and participant an opportunity to reflect or expand upon a point. For example, all of the participants that I spoke with were interested in discussing their own experiences as a second language student. During the last conversation, a participant commented, "you don't often go back to what you used to do in high school".

Each of the participants was given a letter of consent (Appendix A & B) to read and sign which explained the purpose of the research study and stated that there were no perceived risks involved in participating. The original cover letter and signed consent form are on file as well as any notes that I took during our conversations. Permission was also requested in order to tape record our talks.

Data Analysis

This inquiry was exploratory in nature and as such themes and patterns emanated from the findings using inductive coding methods to further understanding of core and immersion French language teachers' perceptions of constructivism. Using grounded theory, I focused on what the teachers' felt, thought and saw in their environment, situations or experiences (Sullivan, 2001) . Bogdon and Biklen (1998) suggest that inductive analysis allows researchers to construct "a picture that takes shape as you collect and examine parts" (p.7). This picture is composed of

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"manageable units...searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others" (1992, p. 153)

Four conversations were transcribed immediately. The last conversation was transcribed shortly afterwards. A researcher's log was kept and included at the beginning of each typed transcript. I attempted to recollect how contact with the participant was made, the setting in which the conversation took place, the atmosphere before, during or after the meeting and any observations and comments made by myself or the participant during our time together. Methodological notes made at the end of the transcript helped to guide my questions and probes for the next conversation. I made note of what worked well and what areas needed to be improved upon. I also made theoretical notes to highlight emerging codes and categories as well as possible themes. Codes included but were not limited to "conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings or folk sayings or proverbs" (Taylor & Bogdon, 1984, p. 131). The original transcripts were kept on file and copies were made for analysis. After carefully reading each of the transcripts several times, I noted codes, selecting the participants' own words and phrases as often as possible. Many of the initial codes related to frequent activities such as the use of literature circles, events or roles that occurred in the participants' classroom or the way the participants or their students felt about learning a second language. After reviewing my initial list of codes, I found that many of the codes could be grouped together suggesting common categories. From these categories, the main themes of the study emerged.

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Ethical Considerations

There were no perceived risks involved in participating in the study and the participants' anonymity and confidentiality were protected. They were informed at the outset of the study that they could withdraw at any point. Informed consent was sought from all the participants prior to data collection. I explained verbally as well as in written form the nature of the study, my role and their role before beginning any of the conversations. Participants were also encouraged to ask for clarification throughout. Pseudonyms were assigned to each transcript and any information that could possibly identify the participant was also changed.

Data will be stored for seven years in compliance with the guidelines of the Research Ethics Board of Lakehead University. This was explained in the written letter of consent and cover letter which was given to all participants involved in the study. I reiterated this when I met with the participants. A copy of the research study will be available at the Lakehead University Faculty of Education Library in the Bora Laskin Building.

Conclusion

Chapter Three examined the design of the study including the time frame and the sample, the data collection, the data analysis and ethical considerations of this qualitative study of five FSL teachers' perception of constructivism and its use to support second language development in the classroom. The following chapter will explore in detail the codes, categories and themes that inform the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

Introduction

Five themes emerged from the data: *active learning, new roles in the classroom, teaching strategies, constraints and supports, and learning is fun.* The first section, "active learning", examines the participants' own perceptions of what constructivist learning is and what it means to them as language teachers. Participants shared their own classroom experiences, personal thoughts and definitions. The second section, "new roles in the classroom", presents a new focus in the classroom where the "kids are in the driver's seat" and examines student-teacher roles and relationships. The third section explores teaching strategies the participants use to support learning in their classrooms. Next, a discussion of how the new curriculum and school environment affect language learning on a daily basis ensues. The last section, "learning is fun", is a discussion of second language learning using a constructivist paradigm. Each participant was given a pseudonym to respect their confidentiality. The pseudonyms are Monica, Theresa, Jane, Julie, and Frances.

Active Learning

In speaking with the participants, five themes emerged from the data to help illustrate how constructivism as a theory of learning is used to enhance second language learning. The participants' own words and experiences create a picture of how active learning is employed to support the French Language program.

The general theme, Active Learning, refers to the term most often used by the

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participants to describe a learning environment which is student-driven and where students take part in creating their own learning experience. Even though the term "constructivism" was used by one teacher, all the participants suggested that active learning aptly describes what goes on in their classrooms. The theme, Active Learning was broken down into two main categories: interaction and knowledge. Many codes emerged from these two categories.

Interaction.

In discussing "interaction", the participants referred to physical movement, hands-on activities, conversations, and drama to illustrate their definitions of active learning. Teaching a senior kindergarten class gives Julie a unique point of view of active learning. To her, it involves a lot of physical movement since her young students are usually just beginning their second language education. She focuses on building vocabulary through songs, games, rhymes and movement and showing her students what she means by moving around the classroom and having them do the same. Julie defines active learning as understanding through body movement. As such, her classroom is very active, particularly in the morning.

Theresa echoes this view of active learning. "I think I keep things moving. A lot of physical stuff, hands-on stuff so that the boys aren't sitting in the back of the room twiddling their thumbs". She goes on to say that "more than once a day that there is some really active stuff and kids love to solve puzzles, and teach". She feels that students are a product of their environment.

Monica uses presentations, plays and dramas to help her students express

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themselves in their second language and develop their oral skills: "I really notice more so with the French language when they do plays." She goes on to explain that: "And I think, even with the plays and I do a lot of getting them to do plays because their creativity comes out and they really enjoy that. That is something I've learnt teaching in immersion." Students help define the roles they play, giving voice and personality to their characters. She finds that these types of activities support her students' oral skill development and they as a result are more confident.

Knowledge.

The second category, "knowledge", refers to the participants' beliefs in constructing knowledge, allowing opportunities for students to share what they have learnt, exploring the personal interests of the students and planning lessons that make a connection to the students' own world and experiences. Referring to group constructivism, Sheehy (2002) contends that the construction of knowledge flows from students discussing ideas, sharing thoughts and creating meaning together.

Speaking about her language program, in particular a literature circle she organized last year, Frances offers this example of active learning in her immersion classroom.

> Well, I think it is basically...it is done independently within their group so I am not sitting beside them telling them, 'this is what you should have...this is what the setting is. This is where the setting takes place'. I am not telling them that this word means that. They are finding it out for themselves and sharing that with the rest of the class or with the rest of their group, I should say. I am not the one...I

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am not in front of the class saying this word means this and the main character of this chapter is this person and this is his role. They do that for themselves. They discover that for themselves.

Frances touches on how her students construct knowledge in her language program, reveals how she uses constructivism to further her students' understanding not only of the novel they are studying but of the second language, and how they share what they have learnt with their peers. Roelofs and Terwel (1999) confirm these two important components of constructivism. According to Sheehy (2002), "constructivism is itself a social practice, a manner of learning that requires participation. In an activity, language develops and students learn to participate in a discourse community" (p.278). Sheehy quotes Guitierrez, Baquedano-López and Turner (1997) to argue that reading and writing skills develop as students construct meaning by working together.

Frances stated that she was the first French immersion teacher in her school to use literature circles as part of her language program. After attending a workshop and with support from her English partner, she felt ready to try it with her junior class. "To go back to the literature circle, I had never done it before and it was kind of scary at first."

Prior knowledge is also an important element in the participants' definition of active learning. When asked how she would define active learning, Jane suggests that:

Basically, taking into account that students come into the classroom with a lot of knowledge. And it doesn't mean that teachers don't know anything but we have to try to lead them in a certain direction... they have to have a chance to show us what they do know already.

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She reiterates later on in the conversation, "Young children come to school with a lot of knowledge."

In referring to the importance of making a connection to the students' personal world and interests, Theresa talks about creating a link with what students read, stating that, "If the kids can't make any connection about what they are reading, how much are they getting out of their reading?". She feels that making this connection is important to their whole learning experience. The participants spoke often about keeping their students' interested in what they were learning. Jane supports this aspect of active learning in her teaching. She described a unit that she taught to her Core French class about the Summer and Winter Olympics. Students were able to decide what they studied based on personal interest.

> The kids had to determine sometimes on an individual basis, sometimes on a
> group basis, whether to do summer, winter, a particular event, if they wanted to
> know about a particular country, if they wanted to know about a particular
> sport...I was amazed. I had never seen kids so interested because it was an
> Olympic year.

Julie also uses students' personal interests to focus and enrich lessons. For example, her senior kindergarten students participate in "montre et raconte" during which they bring in something special from home and share it with the class. This not only connects their school world with their home life but also allows them an opportunity to practice and expand their oral skills in a comfortable environment.

To conclude, Jane offers this explanation of active learning:

> They can do something fun and you try to work in different sorts of activities, all

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varied, all driven by them but they don't realize it is driven by them. So you give every kid a chance to succeed. That's the big thing - there is a lot more chance for education to be successful...When I say 'active' I think in terms of student-driven. It could be a student sitting on his own trying to figure something out but he is still figuring out some questions.

Theresa sums it up. "To me, like you say, it is kids building meaning. Instead of just being passive-receptive, they are active and like you say it is hands-on, or it's a lot of interaction, movement and stuff." The participants spoke about the changing roles of teachers and students in a classroom environment which affords students an opportunity to be more active and to take responsibility for their education. Hands-on activities and interaction help students assume new roles in the classroom such as teacher and independent learner.

New Roles in the Classroom

This general theme refers to a focus on the student in the classroom. Theresa describes this emphasis succinctly: "the kids are in the driver's seat". Student-teacher roles and relationships are changing to reflect a desire to give learners an opportunity to take an active part in their education and to make their learning experience relevant and meaningful. According to Puk & Haines (1998), this shift in education in Ontario began nearly thirty years ago and is still being realized today. Referring to this focus on the student in the classroom, Puk (1990) suggests that the education system is attempting to give students the tools to become "self-directed problem-solvers" (p. 3).

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Sheehy (2002) citing Alloway and Gilbert asserts that:

> Changes in classroom practices will also necessitate changes within the institutional structures and practices. If classrooms are to foster critical deconstruction of the 'self', and to support critical inquiry and interrogation, they need to establish teacher-student relationships and classroom environments that are supportive of student-focused learning (p. 303).

The categories for this theme involve the role of the student and the role of the teacher. Numerous codes emerged from each category.

Role of the student.

Codes resulting from the category, the role of the student, include students as teachers, students as independent learners, and student ownership of learning. Using her language program to illustrate an example of the role of student as teacher in the classroom, Frances describes what happens during a literature circle.

> Although everybody has read [their chapter], they kind of teach, 'did you remember this?'; 'this is what we were talking about when they were talking about setting'; 'you should have noticed it when you were reading this particular chapter'; ' did you come across this word?'; 'did you find it difficult?'; 'if you did but didn't look it up this is what this word means'. So they are teaching to their peers because they have had to focus but at the same time they aren't focusing on ten different things.

Frances' students have taken an active part in their learning experience, becoming an

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expert in their particular subject and sharing what they have learnt with their group members, "That they are able to teach, able to teach others, show others how to do things the right way." She views them as "tak[ing] on the role of the active participant".

Another example of the role of the student as teacher is illustrated in the use of group work in Monica's class. She often plans lessons that involve small groups of students working together. Monica feels that, "...they learn from different people in the class...". During group work, often structured as cooperative learning, students are teaching each other and supporting their peers' learning.

> Even amongst themselves, you will always find students willing to help other students that are struggling. I have always had that experience, in the computer lab or if we are in the gym. If students ask their peers for help, they will get the help they are asking for...I think they learn a lot...I think that they often learn from one another and even the way it is explained by someone else at their level, it may click...I think that the sharing of ideas, that is where they do a lot of their learning.

Monica believes that students are independent learners as well: "I do see the importance of them also doing independent study, I do see that...That is why it is important to have that balance. They need to...some independent learners feel they can do something on their own and be successful." Frances echos this belief. In discussing active learning in her French immersion classroom, she points out that:

> They become better, more independent workers and also they see the importance of sharing with others. ..They also become better leaders. And in the literature circle I find, they become more tolerant of what others have

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to say. They see it a certain way and think that their way is the right way. But then they hear somebody else say something and they listen to that person explain why they think it is the way it is and then they become more tolerant and more accepting of what others have to say.

Student ownership is exhibited in a reading program offered by Theresa. After assessing their reading levels, she forms groups of students with similar reading skills. For the first part of the program which consists of independent reading, the students choose what they are interested in reading about from the library. For the second part of the program, the novel study, they are given a book series by Theresa to read. Even though the reading material is selected for them, students are responsible for making day-to-day decisions and evaluating their work at the end of each day.

> Then we setup this other thing called a literature circle and they had responsibilities. They had to decide what responsibility each person had, how many pages their report would be and there was vocabulary to make the connections. ..And they really ran the show.

She found that her students welcomed the challenge of organizing their own work and has used this approach to teach grammar to teach homonyms. Students are asked to find out the meaning of the word and then create a game which will illustrate its meaning to the class. Theresa feels strongly that when students take charge of their learning, they will remember it, "When you figure something out on your own you don't forget that". She uses this approach in her writing program for peer editing. She explains, "You could start to see kids starting to look at well maybe this sentence doesn't belong there or chucking them out and they really would. That is a bit of them taking [on] their

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own work."

Frances shares this view on active learning for the same reason, "because obviously, they remember it much better and then they get to see how it happens in everyday life." She points to using student-led learning in science as an example of how active learning can be successful in the classroom. "In science it is wonderful. You get hands-on manipulatives. You get to make your experiments. You get to hypothesize about what the outcome is going to be." However, according to Crawford (2000), teachers need to be cognizant of the fact that 'hands-on' does not necessarily mean inquiry-based learning. He states, "There is a danger in equating inquiry based instruction with the currently accepted notion of 'hands-on' science in which teachers provide students with a series of hands-on activities that often are unconnected to substantive science content" (p.918).

Role of the Teacher.

The second category is the role of the teacher. How teachers teach and plan learning experiences are evolving. As students develop skills to become self-directed and independent learners, teachers are redefining their role in the classroom to support their students' second language learning. Codes in this category are teacher as facilitator, teacher as guide, and teacher as model. Crawford (2000) claims that the role of the teacher in the classroom is becoming more complex and multifaceted. In his study of inquiry-based science teaching, he discovered ten different roles assumed by the teacher including: motivator, diagnostician, guide, innovator, experimenter, researcher, modeler, mentor, collaborator, and learner. He explains:

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Common descriptors of roles for teachers using constructivism and inquiry oriented approaches include 'teacher as facilitator', 'teacher as guide'. However, this study suggests a more expansive range of teacher roles necessitating more active and complex participation than that of facilitator or guide (p.934).

One example of the role of a teacher as facilitator can be found in Jane's views of active learning and constructivism. She sees herself as a facilitator and guide in the classroom, "seeing the teacher as more of a facilitator in the classroom and a guide. Some people don't quite agree that you can with young kids but I say that you can." Jane suggests that second language teachers don't have to develop traditional student-teacher relationships or rely solely on behaviouralist teaching practices like drill and practice. She supports the notion that teachers can enhance language learning by allowing students to direct their own learning. In speaking about her Olympics unit that she teaches in Core French, she explains:

> I worked on the Olympics - summer and winter Olympics. And that was pretty well the only think I determined. ..so if you had learnt a lot about synchronized swimming and I learnt a lot about...we would each share something we had learnt. And it didn't matter that I knew nothing about what you were talking about yet I could still learn some vocabulary from you.

She acts as a guide and facilitator, organizing the lesson around an Olympic thematic unit but leaves the other decisions up to her students. Students share what they have learnt with the class or group in a culminating activity which she organizes like a game of Trivial

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Pursuit.

Jane feels this type of approach can be used at a very young age, even with students just beginning their second language education. In the primary grades, her students are required to present a sentence of five words to the class. They are free to choose the topic and content of that presentation. Structuring the activity like a conversation, students feel less inhibited and more confident in front of their peers. The presentation occurs in a more natural, life-like setting. For older students, they help Jane choose the themes they are most interested in studying for the following year, "I ask my kids because I will have them next year, 'what...these are the kinds of themes I have and that would be appropriate for your age, tell me what ones would you like to do?'"

Frances also believes that teachers act as guides in the classroom. The role of guide in Crawford's (2000) view, "involves [the] teacher directing students and helping them develop strategies" (p. 931). Frances affirms that, "it is true that children have to learn as much as they can [on their own] but you have to guide them along the way".

Teachers also model in the classroom. Martinello (1998) quotes Denney, Jones and Kreiger to argue that "children learn how to formulate better questions by imitating adult models and by hearing explanations of the steps taken, rules followed or strategies developed" (p.166). Jane finds modeling helps students when they are faced with a task they have never before performed or don't have the prior knowledge they need to begin the new activity. She says:

> Sometimes I have to do a lot of modeling and than it [lesson] becomes more active later on after doing it a few times. But say learning how to break into a text...it is very much guided by me. It is a good 20 minutes with all eyes

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stuck on the book...'Here is what you do first'.

She finds that modeling gives students a solid base on which to continue their work, "sometimes you just have to show them something". Theresa also uses modeling in her classroom to enhance learning. In order for the literature circles in her reading program to work successfully, she models the roles and responsibilities that students will have to assume during their group work, "They had all kinds of modeling before we did that [literature circle]".

Modeling is a particularly effective tool in Julie's senior kindergarten class. Because of their limited vocabulary at this early stage in their second language learning experience, Julie uses the gymnasium to help her students further develop their oral and comprehension skills. To demonstrate the verbs "run", "jump" and "walk", she has students act out the meaning of the words. As well, Julie makes use of modeling during her math period as students use their bodies to configure groups of two, three and four.

Frances focuses on oral language development to support her use of modeling in the classroom.

> You look at reading, you look at writing but also at the oral part where they
> do have to use their skills and present them. The literature circle is
> wonderful for that. Even though it is not a formal presentation, they are
> forever talking in their group. You know it is wonderful to teach and teach
> and they listen to you talk in French but they have to at some point be able
> to use it in a comfortable situation where it is not so stressed.

The students listen to Frances speaking as well as other members of their group, using the examples they hear in their own conversations. Theresa affirms this viewpoint of

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modeling. "The expectation now with the new curriculum when you are teaching, even a second language, are pretty clear. You know what you have to teach in grade five grammar...You are still explaining, showing, modeling..." Modeling supports second language teachers and their students' learning. Students can see and derive meaning from modeling in the classroom. The participants also used a variety of teaching strategies to enhance the language development of their students.

Teaching Strategies

The participants with whom I spoke used a number of teaching strategies to enhance language learning in their classroom. Equipped with information about different learning and teaching styles, Jane believes that, "I find that I really like my classroom where active learning takes place. But I learn[ed] in core French that it is really important to have little bits and pieces broken up by active [learning], physically active or broken up by something directed by me." In her classroom, she employs a mix of teacher-directed and student-driven teaching strategies, placing more emphasis on the latter. She affirms the importance placed on student-led learning, "it is almost understood now that that is the way you run your classroom. ..in my school, anyway".

The categories resulting from the theme, Teaching Strategies, include a focus on language, focus on literacy and teaching tools. Codes emerging from the category, focus on language, include: reduced focus on grammar and increased emphasis on oral skills and promoting the language.

Focus on Language.

One example which helps to illustrate how the participants are focusing on language is Theresa's comments in regards to the new curriculum and the emphasis placed on problem-solving in mathematics in a second language context, "you might read it with them, especially in French because of vocabulary. If they don't get one word, they are missing the whole thing...That's language not math". If the students don't understand the vocabulary involved in the math question, they can't begin to work out the math problem. It becomes not only a math issue but language problem as well. This focus on the French language is important to Frances as well, "...and all this is done in French so you hit many aspects of the program...That's [French] always been my main focus."

Currently, greater importance is being placed on oral communication skills in language learning rather than on grammatical knowledge of French. This is supported by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training curriculum document which outline the aims of the French language program, "The ability to communicate in French is a valuable skill, because French is one of Canada's two official languages and is also widely used around the world" (1999, p. 2) Jane explains, "...and now there is so little emphasis on grammar yet they do need to be familiar with them [verb conjugation]". More class time is spent developing oral language skills. Theresa agrees, "tons of oral, tons of oral...you set it up so there is a lot of repetition..so you practice it orally". Julie also focuses on the oral development of her young students. At the beginning of each day in Julie's classroom, everyone sits on the rug for "circle". When everyone is comfortable, she initiates a conversation and asks the students to respond to her questions. She uses this exercise to help them build their vocabulary base and to "get them to speak". Sheehy (2002) contends that whole class constructivism occurs during a situation where the discourse is

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assumed by the students. Although the young students in Julie's class may not have the necessary vocabulary to conduct a long and detailed conversation at this point in their learning experience, "circle" seems to be loosely based on this idea of student-directed dialoguing.

Promoting the language is another code that emanated from the data. It is one part of teaching that Monica especially enjoys. She feels that her beginning experiences as a core French language teacher were particularly rich because:

> I think I really enjoyed it because I was really promoting the language. I enjoyed it. It was always something I was enthusiastic about and because I was enthusiastic I was able to...it was easier for me to...share that. I think the students picked up on that - that I was enthusiastic.

She has very fond memories of teaching during those early years.

> ...thinking back to my career those first two years teaching core French and they are very fond memories for me. I loved teaching core French. I loved it so much because you are just teaching the language...found it really rewarding.

Focus on Literacy.

The second category under the general theme, Teaching Strategies, is a focus on literacy. All of the teachers felt there was a lot of energy directed toward supporting student literacy. The codes in this category are reading and writing programs. In Jane's school:

> The big draw on now is literacy and early literacy...what I like though...is that

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books are always around and you are encouraged to go to a book and look at it. You are not told that the book is too old to look at. Primary teachers at our school are really trying to promote...now it is that books are around and discover them.

In developing literacy, Jane feels it is important to "[e]ncourage kids to be explorers and to get involved with books before they ever get to school." Further, Jane contends that "whether it is French or English or even the parents' mother tongue if it is not French or English...just exposing them to books, letting kids figure things out and get excited by it." She also makes the connection between active learning and exploration, "And that to me prepares them for active learning in the classroom...because they are anxious to discover things..." Julie also noted a strong focus on literacy in the early grades among her French primary colleagues. Her school recently purchased a new reading series to help teachers promote literacy in their classrooms. The stories are funny and she remarked that her students enjoy listening to them.

Two of the five participants that I spoke with tried something different last year in their language program after attending a workshop given by a resource teacher on how to use literature circles in the classroom. Referring to literature circles as a teaching strategy in her language program, Frances suggests:

> I know but I will tell you about an experience that I did for the first time last year with my grade five class. It was called a 'cercle littéraire' or literature circle. If you want to talk about constructivism, it is awesome for that...

Students were divided into small groups. Each student was given a role to perform to

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support the work of the group. Assignments dealt with the description of the setting, vocabulary building, or identification of the main theme, for example. Frances explains:

> The neat part is where they come back together in their groups afterwards; they have done their reading, done their assignment. Then they get into their circle, their little group. Everybody in the circle has a role to play. So that is when each student has to focus on a particular theme or thing...they are teaching their peers because they have had to focus [on one particular aspect of the novel] but at the same time they aren't focusing on ten different things.

Sheehy (2002) also refers to changes in the classroom brought about by new practices and routines. Citing Baker, she suggests:

> ...that when a teacher introduces change to the classroom, the entire social order changes...When students practiced the literacy routines of reading, writing, defining vocabulary, and taking a test, they develop an identity for school in relation to those routines. They knew what to expect of the social order and knew where they fit into it (p.296).

Through literacy training held in Theresa's school, she was able to introduce literature circles to her class as well and was pleased with the results, "I was really happy with my reading program this year." Her school is focusing on literacy strategies using First Steps.

> The big push was on First Steps writing for a few years and it is still very important. And that was the kids learning to revise and edit their work. Conferencing with teachers, whole class conferencing, checklist grids and

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getting them to go back and to reread their stuff...Some kids are getting really good. This is the third year.

In her classroom, writers' workshops are also key teaching strategies to help her promote second language literacy, particularly with her older students, "I have done. these years before with intermediate kids". The workshops help her students become better writers and readers in their second language. Theresa's language arts program is also supplemented by independent reading. Students are encouraged to select stories at their level and of personal interest from the school library.

Monica uses an independent reading program to help her students focus on their French literacy skills. She takes advantage of a student reading activity program purchased by her Board.

> ...it is very individual. I remember when I was a student we had these labs. I didn't think they were still in existence but it is. It is wonderful. You do a couple of stories with the students. Everything is the same. You assess their level. And then they work independently...a little story booklet and they would be really interesting stories they would want to read.

Students are able to see their progress as they advance through the colour scheme. The programs develops comprehension, vocabulary building and grammar in French. Monica believes that "it covers everything and you can really see their advancement. It is rewarding for them."

Teaching Tools.

The third category emerging from the theme, Teaching Strategies, is teaching tools.

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The participants spoke about a number of different tools they use in their classroom to enhance second language learning. The codes in this category are multi-intelligence theory, cooperative learning, inquiry, and problem-solving. During our conversations, Monica, Julie, and Frances referred to a recent workshop they had attended on the different learning styles of students. Monica asserts, "[b]ecause in your classroom you realize that there are different learning styles...you establish early on in the school year what kind of learner each student is and use a variety of teaching styles."

Theresa uses Gardner's theory of multi-intelligences as the foundation for many of her lessons throughout the year.

> Just having that in the back of my mind - A. different learning styles, B. organize my year around the seven intelligences , [and] C. really making sure that everyday - more than once a day that there is some really active stuff...

Theresa ensures that the activities she plans address the different learning styles of her students. "Whenever we were doing kinesthetic intelligence stuff, we were practicing our dictation words so they drew words in a hopscotch grid and they spelt the words by jumping on the letters...It was a lot of fun." She plans lessons that are innovative and engage her students, "You look up and the blind is closed. [In my classroom], [t]hey never know what is coming". To address interpersonal learning styles, she ran an independent reading program in her classroom last year, recognizing that some students learn best by themselves in a quiet environment. To help visual and artistic learners, during her writers' workshop she adopted a system of colour highlighters to show students different areas they need to improve upon. Blue signified grammatical errors, for example.

Instead of writing it, it was so visible and physical...It was great for anyone who had an artistic or visual intelligence...different colours...adds a whole other dimension to their work. And you can just pick it up and look at it. Julie also recognizes that students learn in different ways and spoke about using Gardner's theory in her senior kindergarten class. Her use of movement, interaction between students, circle and songs in second language learning lend itself naturally to many of the intelligences that Gardner outlines in his theory of learning such as kinesthetic, linguistic and musical intelligences.

Cooperative learning is another code that emerged from the data. Jane talks about cooperative learning in her classroom, "I do use cooperative learning." She uses a mix of teaching strategies to accommodate the many different learning styles of her students, cooperative learning among them. She says, "I would say that we have learned to put it in our tool box as one of our tools". Jane also contends that, "some kids do like to work quietly on their own", echoing Theresa's observations. Therefore, Jane plans cooperative learning opportunities a few times a week or has a culminating cooperative learning activity at the end of a unit.

Monica also employs cooperative learning stating, "I know that we often use cooperative learning." Teaching in French immersion, she uses the opportunity provided through group work to strengthen and develop her students' oral skills. This viewpoint is supported by Crowhurst (1994) who advances that working in a cooperative or collaborative learning situation, helps language skills develop. Students interact, using the opportunity to practice their second language in a natural setting. Monica finds it particularly purposeful in science in a second language context. "I know that even when

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we are doing science experiments and things like that I try to vary the groups. I assign them different roles: one will be the leader, one the recorder, one does the presentation in class." Science period is not the only place Monica finds cooperative learning meaningful. In her writing class, she uses cooperative learning to help students brainstorm ideas at the beginning of the writing process and for peer editing near the end, for example. "So far as cooperative learning, I know that I use it a lot for different things...sharing writing when they are doing creative writing." Monica organizes groups of four students or less to ensure "that everyone takes an active role."

Inquiry is another teaching tool used by the participants. Martinello (1998) describes inquiry-based learning as "higher-order thinking, classifying, interpreting, analyzing, summarizing, synthesizing, evaluating, decision-making, and metacognative skills" (p.164). In her classroom, Jane uses short inquiries in thematic units to enhance second language learning. Students chose areas of interest connected with the thematic unit and use a variety of resources to answer their questions and direct their learning. Frances employed inquiry during her grade five social science unit on the explorers last year. After modeling the type of information she wanted students to gather, they were free to pick an explorer and trace his voyage across the ocean.

> And then I throw at them a list of early explorers and say, 'I want you to pick one of these explorers and do the same thing. Find out where he is from...where he wanted to go...where he ended up...who funded his voyage'. So then they kind of do what I did but they do it on their own. But they look on the Internet, in books, in their dictionary.

Problem-solving is another code that falls under this category. Theresa refers to a

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focus on problem-solving strategies in mathematics:

> In the last few years with the new curriculum they have really been pushing hands-on math, problem-solving. With the problem-solving, you are really teaching kids some strategies and they have to come up with the strategy and talk about it...that really works well. They are the ones who find the solution...they figure it out.

Together, all of these strategies help the participants focus on the language and concentrate on the second language literacy skills of their students. The participants use of teaching strategies are influenced by the supports and constraints they experience on a daily basis in the classroom.

Constraints and Supports

The theme, Constraints and Supports, refers to the constraints and supports the participants encounter as they apply to second language learning and constructivism. The categories that apply to this theme are: the new curriculum and the school environment. Codes that fall under the category, new curriculum, are flexibility and time restraints.

New Curriculum.

There were mixed feelings in regards to the participants' perceptions of support for active learning under the new curriculum. Jane felt that language teachers in core French classrooms still exercised some freedom in terms of the context in which to teach a second language but recognized that the curriculum doesn't allow teachers to follow

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student interests as easily as in the past.

> Yeah, only because a lot of times children will lead you in a certain direction and years previously you could just run with it. If something didn't really interest them you could just 'well, that's okay' because they could learn a particular skill in a different context. But now the government has really defined the context and that does make it more difficult. In core French, it is not so defined...so in an immersion class it is more difficult now but in core French there are certain skills we have to teach them but the context is up to the individual teacher...or Board.

Frances spoke about the amount of content they needed to cover during the school year.

> Our program is very regulated. I mean we have the curriculum that we have to follow, the units we have to cover. So if it [constructivism] presents itself, yes.. .you try to do that daily in every activity but it doesn't always present itself as a perfect situation.

Theresa and Jane voiced concern about the limited time and resources available to meet the expectations outlined in the new curriculum. Theresa contends that time does factor into the equation, "But in immersion, it [writers' and readers' workshop] is [are] much tougher because we have that English time but it works." She is referring to the portion of the day that is taken up with English lessons. Jane also notes the issue of time, observing that teachers in core French must often work against the clock.

> And I am going into other people's classrooms too. Because if they haven't done a lot of group work in their classroom, I have half an hour basically if you take off the beginning and end. I can't start from scratch if I want to get

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through a unit in three months...You kind of have to chunk things, whereas if

I had my own class, I could push them a little bit further or if I knew that a

certain activity would take an hour with an introduction and a culminating

activity but I have to say no and plan for chunks.

In general, Monica feels that the second language program is facing difficulties in the

older grades, "things have changed so much in the curriculum that second language

classes at the secondary level are really suffering." She asserts that something has to be

done to rectify the situation, "I think something has to be done to help promote the

language again. It has been put on the backburner." In referring to the new curriculum

she argues that, "...the curriculum is set up so...it doesn't give you the parametres to just

do whatever."

School Environment.

The school environment influences participants' use of active learning and

constructivism in their classroom. The codes in this category are parents, teachers,

principals and resources. Theresa offers this comment about parental support for active

learning in her classroom: "I get supported. If your kids are happy, the parents support

you..." Frances agrees.

...I think the parents are on the same wave length if it is going to benefit their

child and help them gain more confidence, share with others. I think they

are more than willing to go along with it.

Julie plans to have parents more involved in her classroom this year. She already sends

letters and includes words to songs and rhymes so that students can learn important

vocabulary at home.

For the most part, the participants also felt that they had support from their colleagues although one participant that I spoke with felt that there was not a lot of support for active learning in her school. Frances worked closely with her English partner developing her literature circle last year.

As well, my English partner had done it [literature circle] so I got to rely on what she had done and she had given me tips, 'try to do this or try not to do that and make sure your groups are no more than five because it gets a little overwhelming or whatever'. If you talk between or among yourselves, you can learn what to try, what not to try and I think that as teachers we are...we are all willing to try something new if we think it is going to benefit the children.

Support for teachers to try new teaching strategies in their classroom is also shown by workshops organized in the school. Frances adds:

We had [a resource person]...coming in...there were different strategies that we could use to help us such as close activities [and] literature circles. So yeah, we do have support. We do have somebody come in and explain to us what we can try in our classroom, what works well, what would benefit the children. So, yeah, there is support.

Monica attended a workshop on different learning styles last spring.

There has been in the past. I know that this year...I know that even the last one we went to was about different learning styles. And that was one I went to...It talked about how to help students with different learning needs in the room.

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Theresa feels that she is supported by her principal in her school but wonders how the new legislation will effect her. She suggests:

> My principal supports me on anything that I do...Now there is new legislation about how we are supposed to be evaluated which will be impossible.. There is not enough time in the year to do everyone.

On the whole, Jane feels that her work is supported by her colleagues and enjoys an openness at her school. "I really like the school I am in because for the most part we have similar styles. If there is a difference in styles we kind of get together ahead of time..." Monica experiences similar interaction and peer support from her colleagues at a large elementary school.

> I have been quite fortunate for the last couple of years. I am teaching at a large elementary school where there were three grade six classes. That was a real bonus. As grade 6 teachers, we would often get together...That worked out very well.

In discussing resources available for active learning experiences in the classroom, many of the participants noted that budget constraints had an affect on classroom tools and manipulatives. Theresa and Frances agreed that while resources for math activities and science experiments were readily on hand in the schools, translated materials for new teaching strategies like literature circles were scarce. However, as part of their focus on literacy, particularly in the French primary grades, many new series of books and other reading materials had recently been purchased by their schools. Frances concludes, "There is not a lot [of resources]." Theresa notes, "I have been doing teaching strategies since my third year teaching...we had no resources. Now we have a really good book and

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we have all the resources from First Step reading."

In Theresa's school, a math series has been purchased but not the manipulatives that are needed to follow the lesson plans. She still feels that the math resources are inadequate, "It is a money thing. We are fighting over math things all the time...we don't even have a set of centicubes in the class." At the same time Theresa believes that, "...the school is supportive and whenever they have the money they buy what they can." Although the school environment supports their work in the classroom, the participants like other teachers, face school budgets constraints and a lack of resources. Despite the constraints they refer to, the participants feel that the various resources such as math and science manipulatives help them to create a classroom environment that makes learning fun and meaningful for their students.

Learning is Fun

Throughout our conversations it became apparent that one of the guiding themes of this research was engaging students by making learning fun. The participants spoke warmly about their own experiences as second language students in and out of the classroom. These experiences helped to build the foundations of their own second language learning and their teaching philosophy today.

Monica believes that the experiences she had as a language student have shaped her views as a teacher. "I think that is why I was drawn to those classes [language classes] because they were different. They weren't your usual dry [classes]." This has influenced how she structures her lessons and teaches her students today.

I think in learning a second language you have to make it fun in order to get any of

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the students. There is that barrier - it is so foreign to you that you have to break that barrier in order for you to learn the language.

As a new teacher starting her career many years ago, she recollects, "I had all these neat ideas and I wanted to make it fun for the students."

The theme, "Learning is Fun", consists of two categories, past experiences as a language student and current teaching philosophy. Codes emerging from the category, past experiences as a language student, are love of languages and positive relationships with past language teachers.

Past experiences as a language student.

Although most of the participants were not particularly fond of the activities they remembered having to engage in elementary and high school language classes such as drills and flash cards, they still retain a positive feeling toward their experiences as language students.

In referring to the dialogues she was required to learn in high school French class, Jane suggests, "Pitou, pitou...that sort of thing. But it didn't really bother me because I always had a love of languages." She goes on to add, "And in high school I had a couple of great teachers who did field trips with us, even if it was in ... or had after school things. We learned a lot more than in the classroom." The affection she felt for her teachers as well as her love of languages influenced her desire to continue her language studies and become a language teacher.

This was a feeling expressed by the participants I met. Thinking back to her experiences as a language student, Monica points out:

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In high school, those were the classes I enjoyed the most. I remember at [school] my French teachers were amazing...that's how I knew when I went to university I wanted to take language classes...I didn't know what I wanted to do but I knew I wanted to get my Honours in French...

Language study has always been a focus for Monica as a former student and now as a teacher. She speaks three languages and enjoys opportunities to use her language skills to meet new people from different cultures. Theresa also felt positive about her teachers, "The teachers were really nice and lively" and was not discouraged by memorizing dialogues in the hallway, "I was really good in French so I got stuck out in the hallway learning dialogues."

Teaching philosophy.

The second category that emerged from the data is the teachers' philosophy of teaching a second language. All agreed that it must be fun for the students and engender a positive feeling toward learning a second language. The codes that resulted from this category are students are happy and learning through play.

As an example of the category, students are happy, Theresa discusses her students' positive attitude towards learning French and points to how they respond to her lessons. She feels that the students in her class are eager to learn, "I know the kids are happy in my class." Theresa measures this by the way they behave in class and how their parents support her work. In speaking about her students, she offers, "They love it. They have fun. And they cooperate." Even when teaching more traditional subjects such as grammar, Theresa likes to try to make learning fun by using songs, music and drama.

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There is nothing dryer than learning grammar and spelling. I don't have a

speller. We make up our own words and activities. That is a perfect time to

get them...even with spelling lists. Yeah, they've got the words. Yeah,

they've got the spelling but what is a different way they can practice it..

For example, she uses the Mexican hat dance to teach the imperfect form of the verb

"avoir". In response, "they [students] laugh and they have a great time."

Julie has also found that structuring learning experiences that are fun is imperative

to her young kindergarten students. She wants them to be happy to learn, reiterating the

point that it is important to have the students feel successful and want to learn.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the five themes that emerged from the research data. The

data was gathered from conversations held with five French teachers. Their personal

experiences, observations and comments have given us a clearer picture of how

constructivism or active learning as they refer to it is used to enhance second language

learning in both the core and immersion contexts.

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CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

Chapter five explores how constructivism is used by the participants and what role this theory plays in enhancing second language learning. An examination of the five key questions that guided this study in relation to the data that was gathered from conversations with French teachers is used. The five key questions are:

1. What are FSL teachers perceptions of constuctivism?

2. How do French language teachers define constructivism?

3. How do they use a constructivist theory of learning in their classroom?

4. Does a community of learners play a role in second language learning?

5. Do FSL teachers feel establishing a community of learners in their classroom is important?

Key Research Questions

What are FSL teachers' perceptions of constructivism? Generally, the participants with whom I spoke felt very positively about incorporating constructivism or active learning into their daily lessons. One participant remarked that teachers in her school were expected to include active learning as a part of their teaching practices. The participants that taught in the French Immersion stream had used active learning in a variety of subject areas such as language arts, science, and social studies. For instance, examples of active learning were employed in the literature circles of two participants,

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applied in a grammar lesson on the use of imperfect verb tense, *avoir*, and utilized in individual research projects on the early explorers. Similarly, participants in the Core French program also felt that it promoted language learning and willingly incorporated it into their lessons. For instance, one participant used active learning in an Olympics unit, allowing students to choose topics in which they were interested. The unit culminated in an activity which gave students an opportunity to share what they had learnt with their peers.

The participants listed several advantages to using active learning in their classrooms. Referring to their own experience with active learning, they felt that it helped students to develop social skills, to accept multiple ways of knowing, to build on prior knowledge, and assisted teachers in providing an education that is meaningful and relevant to students. Hausfather (2001) suggests that learning becomes purposeful as learners work together, discussing and sharing ideas in order to construct knowledge. Each learner makes his or her own sense of what has been constructed. Sharing this viewpoint, Schniedwind and Davidson (2000) contend that:

> ...when teachers implement cooperative learning thoughtfully and differentiate tasks within it, they can personalize student learning, helping students collaborate while challenging each individual in the context of a group effort, and encourage students to appreciate their peers' diverse competencies and experiences...every student learns something that he or she doesn't already know; all students contribute to a common goal (p. 24).

Francis believed that it enhanced learning by helping students to develop

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important social skills such as acceptance of other students' views and tolerance. For her, active learning supported the notion of multiple ways of knowing and the idea that there is no one right answer. Monica referred to how her students supported each other's growth and worked together to construct meaning in group settings. Students often asked each other for help and/or clarification before approaching her for assistance. Peer support and encouragement result from a situation where cooperative learning is employed by a teacher. Schniedewind and Davidson (2000) state that, "all students benefit from the social skills taught in cooperative learning, skills that are needed for working democratically with others" (p. 26).

Monica felt that students could also be teachers in the classroom. According to Crawford (2000), learners in a student-driven classroom assume new roles, becoming "active collaborator, leader, apprentice, teacher and planner" (p. 932). He noted that these roles were often assumed by the teacher in the past. In Theresa's classroom, students assumed the role of teacher, evaluator as well as learner during a literature circle. Theresa's students were "active participants", responsible for organizing their work and decision-making during the reading program.

Another advantage of active learning referred to by the participants is that it builds on students' prior knowledge. Jane spoke about how students come to class with a wealth of prior knowledge and how this prepares them for active learning opportunities at school. She also believes that active learning motivates students, making them want to learn, to discover and to explore the world around them. Motivating students is an important role of the teacher in a student-driven classroom. Crawford (2000) asserts that the "role of motivator involves the teacher encouraging students to take responsibility of

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their own learning" (p.931).

The participants also confirm that learning becomes meaningful and relevant to their students when constructivism forms the basis of classroom opportunities. Theresa pointed out that students remember more when they participate in the learning experience, have to problem solve and generally, to "figure things out on their own". Julie felt that constructing meaning through movement, in particular, also helped very young students learn new vocabulary and concepts in a second language.

According to the participants, making learning relevant and meaningful means letting students sit "in the driver's seat" when it comes to lesson planning. Roelofs and Terwel (1999) refer to the importance of incorporating students' interests in lessons and learning opportunities. They refer to making a connection to the students' personal world. Choosing topics that will interest her students is the key to Jane's success in the language classroom. Student interest guided her selection of topics for the following year after consultation with her class of Core French students. She takes note of what is going on in the lives of her students to help her focus and plan interesting units for the following year. Jane also asks her students what they are interested in studying. Julie encourages her young students to share what is important to them during *montre et raconte*.

Although citing a number of reasons why they use active learning in their classrooms, the participants also acknowledged that using a range of teaching strategies allows them an opportunity to reach all of the different learning styles and intelligences of their students. Theresa plans her year with three items in mind: different learning styles, Gardner's theory of multi-intelligences, and active learning. Roelofs and Terwel (1999)

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suggest that a range of teaching strategies allows teachers to better respond to the needs of their students. In their study of English language lessons in the Dutch school system, they noted that a mix of teaching methods was employed by teachers in second language classrooms. As well, a variety of factors influenced how and what was taught in the classroom such as time constraints and lack of resources. Likewise Harris and Graham (1996) contend that "no one intervention or viewpoint can address the complex nature of school success or failure..."(p.29).

Jane states, "I really like my classroom where active learning takes place". Jane likes to incorporate different activities, mixing group work, independent work, student-driven learning and teacher-directed lessons throughout the school day. She finds that there are times when she doesn't want to "leave it up to them" and guides her students more directly. This occurs particularly when she is introducing a new skill to her students such as how to analyze a text. Learning becomes more teacher-directed with "all eyes stuck on the book". According to Puk (1993), students first need to learn how to become more self-directed learners. Martinello (1998) also refers to the modeling that teachers need to engage in before students can begin to ask questions that will help to construct knowledge and make meaning from learning opportunities. Once they have the skills they need to start or the questions they need ask, students can assume more responsibility for their learning.

Jane also cites grammar lessons, in particular, conjugation of verbs as another example of a lesson in her classroom that is more teacher-directed. She asserts that by showing them a basic formula and having them practice it many times, students will better understand a grammatical rule. Frances points out that using different teaching

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strategies throughout the day helps her to teach different subject areas. For instance, she contends that teaching grammar involves using teacher-directed teaching methods to avoid frustration and misunderstanding on the part of her students. She feels that there are certain times, grammar lessons in particular, where active learning does not work as well as more traditional methods of teaching. In her view, students often need more focused guidance to grasp difficult grammatical concepts. Under these circumstances, she prefers to lead the lesson rather than have the students search out the answers and become frustrated. Lastly, both Frances and Theresa explain that active learning takes more time and effort on behalf of the teacher than more traditional methods of teaching and that sometimes there "are [just] so many hours in a day". Crawford (2000) contends that student-led learning, particularly during inquiry-based learning, involves greater teacher involvement.

How do French language teachers define constructivism? During the conversations I had with the FSL teachers, one participant used the term constructivism in speaking about learning experiences in her classroom. The expression, "active learning", was more often used to describe the theory of learning used in the classroom and was a term adopted by teaching staff in the schools. The five participants had similar definitions of active learning.

The participants felt that active learning described a classroom learning environment where students are moving physically around the classroom throughout the day rather than sitting down quietly at desks. There was a focus on the physical aspect in active learning. In the primary grades, this might mean a grammar lesson in the

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gymnasium as students explore the meaning of the words jump, run and walk. In the intermediate years, it might involve a geography lesson interpreted through drama. Students are learning by moving, touching, feeling, sensing, and constructing knowledge through active participation. The participants also referred to hands-on activities to describe what happens in a classroom where active learning takes place, again, focusing strongly on the term "active".

The participants felt that active learning opportunities were student-driven and based on the personal interests of the student, echoing the viewpoint of Roelofs and Terwel (1999) as discussed previously. The participants stated that it was important to incorporate students' interests into the learning experience as often as possible in order to keep students motivated and to help break down the barrier of learning a second language. They wanted to make learning fun. For instance, songs, rhymes and dance were used in the early grades while current events and technology were incorporated into lesson and unit planning for older students.

Another point touched on by the participants was giving students ownership over their work and education. The teachers explained that when students were a part of the decision-making process, they welcomed the challenges that it brought, gaining knowledge in the subject area as well as developing important leadership and organizational skills. Schniedewind and Davidson (2000) assert that "when practicing social skills such as 'encouraging others' or 'criticizing ideas and not people',-students learn more than academic content" (p. 26) in cooperative learning situations.

Frances felt that students became better leaders after experiencing active learning in her literature circle. Theresa believed that her reading program also helped students

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to more effectively manage their work and make decisions as a group. The participants recognized the importance of the role of the student not only as learner but as an active participant and teacher in the classroom. They felt that active learning also meant changing roles for themselves as well as students.

How do they use a constructivist theory of learning in their classroom? There were many examples of how active learning can be used in both the French Immersion program and the Core French stream. The participants referred to their own classroom experiences to illustrate how they use constructivism to help their students learn a second language. Their examples put theory into practice.

In the Immersion program, the participants remarked that active learning opportunities could be used in all subject areas because French was the language of instruction throughout the day except during a short English language period. To further reinforce active learning in their classrooms, Theresa and Frances mirrored and supported the active learning methods used by their English partners which helped to compliment their own language arts program. However, Frances, Jane, and Monica indicated that for certain subjects traditional methods of teaching and learning were more helpful to them. Frances stated that active learning should only be used when it would be most successful and give students an opportunity to succeed reiterating the findings of Roelof's and Terwel's (1999) study of three Dutch schools.

In Core French, active learning was used to direct lesson and unit planning. Participants strove to plan learning experiences that would be of interest to students. Jane noted that there is more flexibility in terms of teaching context in the Core French

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program which allowed FSL teachers more leeway in planning experiences that are of interest to their students. The curriculum suggests that certain skills and knowledge be developed at certain grade levels but the context for learning these skills and developing knowledge is a decision made by the teacher, the students and the Board. Very few illustrations were given for a connection between the outside world and the student's school life as advanced by Roelofs' and Terwel's (1999) study. Jane did refer to gathering data from various sources for her students' short inquiries, including the media and the Internet.

The participants cited the physical arrangement of their classrooms as another example of how active learning is used. The room is arranged to allow for group work as well as independent work. Placing the desks in groups allows students an opportunity to work together in cooperative learning situations, for example, sharing ideas and coconstructing meaning. However, Jane recognizes that active learning not only takes place as students work together but can also occur as students "figure things out on their own".

Active learning in the Immersion program, in particular, was used in many subject areas. During our conversations, the participants focused on examples in math, in language arts, and in science to illustrate how this theory of learning enhances language acquisition in their classrooms. There were many instances of active learning to help students improve their reading and writing skills in French. Strong emphasis was placed on working in group situations and cooperative learning settings to help students practice their language skills as well as to model their peers and teacher. Crowhurst (1994) confirms that students of a second language need greater opportunities to practice

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language skills. Crowhurst views students working in small groups as an opportunity to hear the target language and an opportunity to practice it. Science and math lessons were also highlighted as good active learning opportunities because of the abundance of manipulatives available for teachers to use in hands-on activities. In regards to teaching grammar, there was a difference of opinion among the teachers. Jane, Frances, and Monica felt that more traditional methods and teacher-directed strategies better served students while Theresa found that active learning gave a new twist to teaching this subject.

Does a community of learners play a role in second language learning? The participants felt that a community of learners plays a significant role in their second language classrooms, allowing students opportunities to use their language skills in a comfortable, supportive, and familiar environment. Roelofs and Terwel (1999) refer to learning experiences for language students that situate the student in a natural and life-like setting (p.203). In her conversation, Jane asserted that learning a second language should unfold in a similar way to learning a first language: naturally. Frances contended that her students practiced their language skills while talking informally with each other during group work. She believed that these informal conversations allowed students an opportunity to speak in a comfortable setting and to model language from herself and their peers. Cooperative learning activities afforded students many occasions to use the language skills they had learnt in a natural setting and during the natural flow of conversation as previously suggested by Crowhurst (1994). Curtain and Pesola (1993) reiterate the importance of using group work, particularly community of learners, to help

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students practice the target language. As such, today there is a greater focus on the oral communication skills of students rather than grammatical competency (Roelofs and Terwel, 1999).

The participants, again, recognized the multifaceted roles of both teacher and student in a classroom where a community of learners has been established. Teachers and students are modelers, learners and educators, drawing upon their unique strengths and skills in order to learn their second language and support others in their education. This echoes the changing roles in the classroom advanced by Crawford (2000).

Do FSL teachers feel establishing a community of learners is important? The participants all felt that establishing a community of learners in their classroom was an important component of active learning, citing examples of peer teaching, peer support, sharing knowledge, and coconstruction of meaning. There were many instances of how the participants used peer teaching and support in their classroom to enhance language learning. None of the participants felt that it was their role to stand up in front of the class and transmit knowledge. In fact, they were insistent in many cases that it was important for the students to "figure things out on their own" and "to lear[n] it themselves".

During Frances' literature circles, students were encouraged to become an expert in their particular topic area and to share their knowledge with the other members of their group. Each person was responsible for teaching the others about the setting, theme, main characters among other points of the novel. Theresa noted that her students loved to teach others and employed this aspect of active learning in her grammar program. Sharing knowledge was an important element raised by Monica. She felt that students

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often learnt best from sharing ideas with their peers and it also helped to validate their work. By working together, Jane recognized that students coconstructed knowledge in a community of learners in order to make sense of what they were learning.

Conclusion

The five key research questions helped to focus the conversations in order to reveal and better understand how the participants use constructivism to support second language learning in their classrooms. Through this study I found that the participants do use active learning to help their students learn a second language in a variety of subject areas, not just French class.

The participants listed many advantages to using this theoretical framework in their classroom. They found that constructivism, or active learning, encourages students to work together to make meaning. In their classrooms, students worked both independently and in group settings to make sense of what they were learning. After working on their own, students often came together to share ideas, ask their peers for comments, edit writing, and brainstorm for projects. In cooperative or collaborative learning situations, tasks were assigned to individuals in the group and discussed the following day. Teaching was shared by all group members.

Another advantage of constructivism was the development of communication skills. Students had many opportunities to practice the target language throughout the day in the French Immersion program or during French class in the Core French program. Teachers sought a variety of ways to have students communicate in French. Communication and dialogue were key components of the participants' language program. This was also

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illustrated in the way in which the classrooms were physically arranged. Tables were used instead of desks in some rooms and groupings of desks replaced row seating to encourage students to work together in others.

Active learning also helped students to support each other's development, academically as well as socially. Constructivism allowed teachers to build on prior knowledge and to apply new skills to new circumstances. Students learned subject content in accordance with the curriculum while at the same time developing oral and written skills in the target language. Active learning provided students with an opportunity to develop important social skills. Students learned how to accept differences, to understand that there are multiple ways of knowing and to respect each other.

Leadership skills and the ability to be independent learners were two other benefits that the participants referred to in a classroom where active learning takes place. Students assumed responsibility for what they were learning and were active participants in their education. They organized projects, led discussions, and explored new topics. Students were encouraged to discover knowledge actively. Students also learned how to question, to research and, to challenge traditional sources of information. This was done by teaching students how to be self-directed learners.

Among the participants, there was a strong focus on physical activity and movement to support language acquisition in both the early and later grades. The participants asserted that although some of them used more traditional teaching and learning methods at times, active learning offered their students an opportunity to be successful and to have fun while learning. It should be emphasized that the participants encouraged the use of a variety of teaching and learning methods. They found that by

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using a number of different teaching strategies throughout the day, they could respond better to the different needs of their students. Simpson (2002) also advocates for this type of flexibility in the classroom, stating that, "no single strategy exists that will achieve success with all students" (p. 351). Warren and Yoder (1994) suggest that a "cross-paradigmatic approach to communication and language intervention because of its inherent flexibility..." (p.255).

The teaching of grammar using active learning was difficult for the participants. Although one teacher employed a constructivist approach to teach grammar, the majority of the others were more comfortable using teacher-centred teaching. The participants found that the teaching of grammar necessitated the use of more traditional teaching methods. One participant explained that she used teacher-led learning in order to avoid frustration on the part of the students. Another participant held that in order to ensure that students understand new skills, she used more explicit instruction. Time constraints was also an issue. The participants found that it was often more effective to adhere to a teaching approach that had proven successful in the past instead of searching for new ways to teach subjects such as grammar. Even though there has been a shift from grammar to conversational skills in recent years, the participants recognize that grammar construction plays a part in oral skill development and focus on it accordingly. They use a variety of teaching strategies to help their students grasp grammar skills in the target language.

Constructivism also supports the changing role of the teacher and student in the classroom, creating opportunities for students to become the teacher as well as learner. Teachers become learners in a constructivist classroom, adapting and growing along side

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their students as they search together for multiple ways of knowing. The participants often stated that they felt it was not their role to stand in front of the class and transmit knowledge. They suggested that students learn better when they discover knowledge on their own.

Construction of knowledge, connection to the student's personal world and cooperation and communication are elements of active learning or constructivism that the participants incorporated into the learning environment of their classrooms and their teaching practices (Roelofs and Terwel, 1999) Introducing lessons based on what students were interested in kept their classrooms active and allowed them to make learning fun. Making learning fun was a common thread that ran throughout the study. The participants felt that student motivation was important to them. By planning learning experiences that were authentic and relevant to their students, the participants sought to bring energy and focus into their classrooms. Active learning helps students make sense of what they are learning and participate in an educational experience that is created with their input.

Since language, itself, is interactive and dynamic, teaching strategies that help students develop listening, writing, and reading skills in the target language must be as well. Constructivism offers educators and their students a new way of learning a second language which focuses on the student and his or her particular needs, creating an important partnership between students and teachers.

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APPENDIX A: LETTER OF CONSENT

Dear Participants,

I am a graduate student in the Master of Education program at the Faculty of Education, Lakehead University. As one of the requirements for completing the Master's degree, I am required to conduct research for a thesis or project proposal. I have elected to write a thesis and will research core and immersion French language teachers' perceptions of constructivism as a theory of learning. I am interested in studying how constructivism is being used to support learning experiences in second language classrooms.

To collect my data, I will interview 5 core and/or immersion French language teachers in Northern Ontario using a semi-structured interview format. I would like to invite you to participate in this study. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes.

Participants will be granted anonymity during the reporting of the data. All data collected during the study will be stored for seven years. Findings will be shared with my thesis committee and will appear in my thesis report.

If you give your consent, it is important for you to understand the following:

- There are no risks involved to individuals participating in the study. I would be happy to discuss this further with you at any time.
- You have the right to withdraw your consent at any time.
- Your anonymity and confidentiality will be protected. Your name will be changed in the interview transcript and in the report of the findings.
- The results of the study will not be disseminated to the participants of the study but a copy of my thesis will be available at the university library.
- The research proposal has been reviewed by my thesis committee.
- The data will be stored for seven years.

If you are willing to participate in my research study, please sign the attached form. If you have any questions concerning the study, please contact my supervisor, Dr. Tom Puk at Lakehead University at (807) 343-8710.

Thank you,

Laura Hope-Southcott

APPENDIX B: LETTER OF CONSENT - PARTICIPANTS

I have read the letter informing me of the research study which Laura Hope-Southcott is conducting.

I agree to participate understanding the following:

- The study is about the role of constructivism as a theory of learning in the FSL (core and immersion) classroom.
- There are no risks involved to individuals participating in the study.
- I will be participating in a semi-structured interview format
- I have the right to withdraw my consent at any time.
- My anonymity and confidentiality will be protected.
- The data will be stored for seven years.

I, _____ will participate in the study.

_____   _____
        Date   Participant's Signature