Engaging with Picture Books: Exploring Students’ and Teachers’ Experiences with Literature and Collaboration in Immersion Classrooms

by

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the experiences of teachers and students engaging with picture books in immersion classrooms. Drawing on social constructivist theories of teaching and learning and reader-response theory, this study examines the multiple ways that teachers and students engage in aesthetic reading and collaboration for the co-construction of meaning. This master’s study was conducted within the bilingual context of two French immersion schools in Québec. The study involved two pairs of teachers working with the same group of students in each school.

A biliteracy project, based on Canadian picture books, was developed for the teachers to follow in both English and French. The aims of the biliteracy project included 1) linking English and French language arts through picture books and literature-based pedagogy, 2) fostering dialogue among immersion students as they worked collaboratively in both languages, and 3) enabling students to make personal connections with literature. Observations were centred on students and teachers engaging with and responding to the picture books. Data includes observational field notes, interviews, artifacts of students’ work, and audio-recordings of peer interactions.

Through read-aloud sessions and classroom conversations, teachers provided scaffolding to students and encouraged them to engage in actively interpreting the visual texts. Children responded in multiple ways to the picture books as they engaged in the co-construction of meaning. The results of this study reveal that picture books provide stimulating opportunities for conversation, meaningful learning experiences and collaboration to occur across languages.
Résumé

Cette étude qualitative explore les expériences des enseignants et des élèves dans leur engagement avec les livres illustrés. Dans le cadre de la théorie du constructivisme social ainsi que la théorie de lecture, cette étude examine les multitudes de façons que les enseignants et les élèves utilisent pour participer à une lecture esthétique. Ce projet de mémoire a eu lieu dans deux écoles d’immersion française au Québec. Il a été conduit par deux enseignantes de langue anglaise et française qui ont travaillé avec les mêmes élèves dans chacune des deux écoles.

Un projet littéraire bilingue, basé sur des livres illustrés canadiens, a été conçu pour les enseignants afin de suivre avec leurs élèves. Ce projet a pour but les objectifs suivants : 1) aider les élèves à faire des liens entre les deux langues 2) faciliter le dialogue et la collaboration et 3) encourager les élèves à faire des liens avec leur vie personnelle. Les observations étaient centrées sur les engagements des enseignantes et des élèves avec les livres illustrés. Le recueil des données inclut les notes d’observations, les entretiens, les travaux des élèves ainsi que les enregistrements sonores des interactions entre élèves.

L’analyse a révélé que les enseignantes donnent du soutien aux élèves afin de favoriser l’engagement et la participation active à la lecture. Les enfants réagissent de façons variées à la littérature et participent à la co-construction du sens. Les résultats révèlent que les livres illustrés fournissent des occasions enrichissantes pour la conversation, la collaboration et les expériences significatives dans les deux langues.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Context

This study takes place in two French immersion schools on the south shore of Montréal. While the first French immersion schools began in the same school district in St. Lambert in the 1960’s, the demographics have changed considerably since that time. French immersion programs were initially planned for Anglophone children to receive French language instruction across subject matters in order to become bilingual. On the south shore of Montréal today, many of the children attending French immersion schools come from bilingual or multilingual families where French, English and heritage languages are spoken. As a result, the immersion classrooms in this context are not composed only of students learning French, but also students learning English. In other words, these students are members of a bilingual classroom environment in which both French and English languages may be either a first or second language for the students.

My field work took place in one Grade 3 classroom and one Grade 3/4 classroom. Being in two different classrooms in different communities provided me with the opportunity to observe two unique learning environments. In each school, the students receive instruction from two different teachers for French and English language arts, respectively. This study seeks to examine the collaboration of students and teachers engaged in
a literacy project involving the reading of picture books and their participation in extended activities surrounding the literature.

1.2 Motivation for the study

Stories have always been an integral part of my own learning and teaching experiences. Upon graduation with my B.A/B.Ed. in Humanities (French, English, and History) and Modern Languages Education (French), I embarked upon an adventurous and exciting teaching career. My experiences in classroom teaching in diverse contexts, both in ESL and French immersion, inspired me to find innovative ways to engage students with literature-based instruction. Stories have played a central role in my teaching and learning experiences.

While taking a range of graduate courses in Education, I have acquired a deeper understanding of learning and teaching theories. In addition to my graduate courses, I worked as a Teaching Assistant in Children’s Literature and a Research Assistant for a multicultural picture book project which enabled me to become deeply familiar with a vast range of fascinating texts available for children. In my research study, I seek to examine the experiences of students and teachers engaging with literature in the language classroom through a sociocultural lens.
1.3 Purpose of the study

This qualitative study explores the experiences of students and teachers in immersion classrooms as they respond to and engage with picture books. Through classroom observations, audio-recorded interactions of students, and interviews with students and teachers, I investigate the multiple ways that students and teachers co-construct meaning through literature-based teaching. As this is a qualitative study, I am not proving or disproving a hypothesis. Rather, I will attempt to describe the experiences of teachers and students engaged in reading and collaborative activities of a bilingual nature. To be clear, the books themselves are not bilingual, but they are published by the same authors in both English and French. Thus, the teachers were able to read the same version of the book in both English and French class and engage the students with related activities. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate the value of reading children's literature in the immersion classroom. Through a phenomenological approach, I examine the shared experiences of students and teachers engaged in reading picture books in two languages. The context-specific nature of bilingual classrooms in Québec offers a unique view of the co-existence of two or more languages in classrooms.
1.4 Research Questions

This qualitative study examines the collaboration and interaction between students in one Grade 3 class and one Grade 3/4 French immersion class in two different schools. My research is focused on the ways that students and teachers co-construct meaning through the shared readings and discussions surrounding the texts. The present study focuses on the following two research questions.

1. What are the ways that students construct and co-construct meaning through literary experiences involving picture books in immersion classrooms?

2. What is the role of the teacher as mediator as students engage in literary experiences with picture books in immersion classrooms?

1.5 Organization of the thesis

In this chapter I have described the context, my motivation for the study, the purpose of the study, and my research questions.

In Chapter 2, I review the literature that has provided me with a theoretical foundation for my thesis study. Chapter 3 describes the methodology for my study on teaching and learning through literature in immersion classrooms. Chapters 4 and 5 describe the findings of my study
related to teachers and students, respectively, engaging with literature. In Chapter 6, I discuss both implications and limitations of the study as well as directions for further research in the field of language and literacy education.
Chapter Two: Teaching and learning languages through literature

To see inquiry as an act of language is to see it as a kind of dance: Inquirers turn to others, asking for help in moving beyond their present understandings. They shift from the edges of what they know to pull another into their space of confusion, perplexity, or wondering. In language, inquiry is an act of interpretation. The dance is in the dialogue. (Townsend, 2005, p. 112).

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to critically review the academic literature relating to teachers’ and students’ interaction and engagements with stories in socially constructivist classrooms. Collaboration is based on the philosophy that learning does not occur in isolation; rather, we learn through relationships with those around us. Picture books, an aesthetic art form of literature, are an integral part of the language arts classroom, and story book read-alouds enable teachers and students to share the aesthetic experience of reading. Drawing on reader-response theory, I provide a review of the literature on the multiple ways that teachers and children engage in the co-construction of meaning as they read and respond to literature.

I use the terms constructing meaning or co-constructing meaning to refer to the process of mediating a shared understanding of ideas as children and teachers engage in literary experiences with picture books. I use the term literary experiences to describe the process of reading, discussing and responding to the words and images of picture books.
Social constructivism and sociocultural theory

Social constructivism is an approach to learning that considers knowledge and reality as socially constructed by students and teachers (Sipe, 2008). This means that teachers and students co-construct their understandings of reality through interpretation. As noted by many researchers, the social constructivist paradigm is particularly useful in considering students’ and teachers’ engagements with literature as the teachers and students participate in a shared literary experience that enables them to construct literary understanding of the texts. What are the implications of social constructivist theories for classrooms? Oldfather (1999) emphasized the possibilities for empowerment that social constructivism offers both teachers and students as she noted:

Social constructivist teachers help their students understand that they are co-constructors of knowledge, that they can make sense of things themselves, and that they have the power to seek knowledge and to attempt to understand the world (p. 16).

Sociocultural theory, developed by the Russian psychologist L.S. Vygotsky, is based on the social nature of learning and therefore provides a useful framework for thinking about and examining the interaction that occurs in classrooms. Vygotsky was interested in child development and he developed many theories related to learning in one’s social environment that
are applicable to language education. Central to Vygotsky’s ideas about the social nature of learning is the way that speech is used as a semiotic tool that mediates social action (Wells, 1999). One of the key constructs developed by Vygotsky is the way that children learn through interaction with others, thus gaining independence and developing problem-solving skills. Vygotsky’s studies on the development of conscious thought and the process of mediating understanding are central to sociocultural theory (Lantolf, 2000). This means that teachers assist students in reaching their full potential by providing scaffolded assistance. Lantolf et al. (1994) noted that language is central to the learning process for children, remarking that the “shift from the intramental to the intermental plane marks the beginning of the child’s control over his or her own behavior that is self-regulation. The role of language in the appropriation process as the primary symbolic cultural artifact is critical.” (p. 11). What is significant about the way that teachers and students use language as they engage in mediated interaction in language arts?

Sociocultural theory is applicable to second language learning as students are constantly in the process of mediating relationships while making use of their second language to negotiate understandings and meaning with both their peers and the teacher. It is important to consider the social environment of the language classroom. How do the interactions between teachers and students contribute to their language development?
Many researchers have drawn on sociocultural theory to investigate the scaffolded learning that takes place within the zone of proximal development (ZPD) in second language classrooms (Adair-Hauck & Donato, 1994; Anton, 1999; Gibbons, 2003; McCormick & Donato, 2000; Moll, 1990).

Vygotsky studied the psychology of the development of thought and language. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning occurs through interaction.

An essential feature of learning is that it creates a zone of proximal development, that is, learning awakens a variety of internal development processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and cooperation with peers. (p. 90)

The ZPD is defined by Vygotsky (1978) as “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). Within the ZPD, teachers assist students through a multitude of ways, such as questioning, supporting, offering suggestions, and encouragement. Many theorists in education have drawn on Vygotsky’s theories to gain an understanding of the social process of learning and teaching. Gallimore and Tharp (1990) describe how teachers guide students in the gradual process of
“unassisted to self-regulated performance” (p. 184). In a discussion of the learning process, Gallimore and Tharp noted that “both teachers and peer models are highly important sources of assisted performance” (p. 179). Therefore, students working in pairs or groups in response to literature benefit as they are assisted by their peers as well as their teachers.

Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) developed the term “scaffolding” to describe the process in which adults provide assistance, enabling “a child to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts” (p. 90). Scaffolding is an important concept to consider during picture book read-aloud sessions as teachers provide support to students in order to encourage students to construct their own understandings of the texts. From a social constructivist perspective, educators may improve the experiences of students by establishing “students’ ownership of literacy as the overarching goal of the language arts curriculum” (p. 309).

Sipe (2008) noted that during storybook read-alouds, scaffolding involves “listening closely to the children and being willing to follow the conversational trajectories initiated by them, even when those trajectories may seem to be off task or contradictory to the teacher’s own agenda for the story” (p. 234). Listening and responding to children is at the heart of social constructivist pedagogy, as it is when children feel that their own ideas are
validated that they will develop the confidence to contribute further to the
discussion, thus extending their own ability to articulate their inner thoughts
and feelings in relation to literature.

*Teaching and learning through inquiry*

Exploration and collaboration are central to a social constructivist
approach to learning as students and teachers engage and interact to co-
construct knowledge (Gibbons, 2003; Moll, 1990; Wells, 2000). Based on
theories developed by Dewey (1938) and Vygotsky (1978), social
constructivism considers the teacher and students as collaborators in
learning. Dewey noted that “all human experience is ultimately social: that it
involves contact and communication” (1938, p. 38). Each student has a
unique voice in the classroom and the teacher plays an important role in
fostering dialogue within the classroom community.

Within a social constructivist paradigm, both children and teachers
participate in constructing knowledge, as “reality is not found “out there,”
but rather socially constructed by groups of people” (Sipe, 2008, p. 36).
Teachers play an important role in inviting the participation of students and
extending their understanding of both language and content through
interaction. Moll (1990) suggests that working within the ZPD necessitates
the “collaborative use of meditational means to create, obtain, and
communicate meaning” (See also Clay & Cazden, 1990; Goodman & Goodman, 1990). Wells (2000) emphasizes the importance of considering the dialogic nature of inquiry-based learning in collaborative classrooms. Thus, it is necessary for teachers to be aware of how to effectively engage students in the inquiry. Gibbons’ (2003) study in a content-based ESL classroom found the following:

> Exploring the ways in which students and teachers co-construct meaning also shifts pedagogical questions away from the well worn debate around traditional/teacher-fronted vs. progressive/student centred pedagogies toward a focus on the nature of the discourse itself and its mediating role in the broader framework of the curriculum. (p. 268)

Researchers have demonstrated that scaffolding is an essential component of story book read alouds with young children (Clark & Graves, 2005; Sipe, 2008). Sipe (2008) noted that scaffolding involves the “multiple roles” of teachers engaging students “during the give and take of literary conversation” (p. 200). The multiple roles of teachers providing scaffolding to students are analyzed and explored in various studies of language and literacy pedagogy (Anton, 1999; Gibbons, 2003; Gallimore & Tharp, 1990; McCormick & Donato, 2000). Anton (1999) demonstrates that teachers engage learners in the mental process of learning by “using various
discursive moves” (p. 304). McCormick and Donato (2000) explain ways that teacher questions provide scaffolded assistance in the second language classroom.

Building on Vygotsky’s notion of learning through social interaction, Wells emphasized that teachers and students work together to solve problems: “knowledge is created and re-created between people as they bring their personal experience and information derived from other sources to bear on solving some particular problems” (Wells, 2000, p. 67). Wells identifies the key elements of a social constructivist classroom as incorporating inquiry-based learning, dialogue, and community in the creation of collaborative classrooms.

Inquiry-based learning in language arts classes involves teachers and students sharing ideas, asking questions, and “interpreting the multilayered meanings” of literature (Townsend, 2005, p. 114). Inquiry stems from the ideas developed by Vygotsky, Dewey, and Bruner, and is central to providing meaningful experiences that actively engage students in learning (Audet, 2005). Literature provides opportunities for inquiry among students as the “creative instructor can use a literary selection as the springboard for an enthusiastic exchange of ideas” (Kennedy Vande Berg, 1990, p. 699).
2.3 French Immersion

French immersion programs were developed in Canada in the 1960’s and 1970’s. The first immersion program began in St. Lambert in 1965, on the south shore of Montreal where Anglophone parents saw the need for their children to learn to speak French fluently. Immersion programs have been developed across Canada, and many other countries have also modeled immersion programs on Canadian French immersion (Lyster, 2007).

Cummins (1998) noted that one of the problematic areas of French immersion is related to “the quality of French oral and written skills that students attain” (¶ 7). According to Cummins, “The differences between students’ receptive and expressive skills can be understood in the context of the lack of interaction with native francophone students...and the paucity of classroom opportunities to use French” (¶ 8). Research in immersion has demonstrated that collaborative dialogue is useful in helping students to “co-construct language they need to express the meaning they want and to coconstruct knowledge about language” (Swain & Lapkin, 1998, p. 333).

Immersion programs require resources that support the L1 and L2 of the students, and it is necessary for teachers and curriculum developers to consider how the linguistic needs of immersion students (Swain & Johnson, 1997). The potential for students to acquire better expressive skills would
appear to be greater in a bilingual context such as Québec, where students in some French immersion classrooms are from families with anglophone, francophone and bilingual family members. What teaching materials would benefit students in Québec immersion programs? There is a need for research to investigate the ways in which students in a bilingual context may contribute to one another’s language development through reciprocal learning (Lyster, Collins & Ballinger, 2009).

Cummins (1998) suggests that one of the problem areas in French immersion is that students “seem to be engaged in less creative writing in French and less reading of authentic French children’s literature than students in the regular program did in English” (¶ 10). This assertion by Cummins, based on an overview of research in immersion, demonstrates the need for further research that examines students’ experiences with literature-based pedagogy in immersion classrooms. It is important to understand how students in immersion programs, and more specifically in a bilingual context, may be empowered as they engage in collaborative literature-based instruction.

2.4 Literature-Based pedagogy

Incorporating literature into the second language classroom provides a unique experience for students and teachers to engage in meaningful
discussions and learning experiences (Donato & Brooks, 2004; Kennedy Vande Berg, 1990; Paran, 2008). Donato and Brooks (2004) examined the ways in which foreign language students in a university class were encouraged to employ their language abilities to discuss literature in a foreign language class. They analyzed the discourse of the students as they were engaged in group discussions. This study demonstrated that “literary discussion affords discourse opportunities to hypothesize, defend opinions, elaborate, and speak beyond words and phrases” (p. 196). In a survey of the role of literature in second language learning, Paran (2008) states that “the interest and love of literature for its various qualities is a human characteristic” (p. 469). As the majority of the research in literature in second language learning has been conducted in university settings, there is a need for research that examines the use of literature in schools (Paran, 2008).

Shared reading experiences involve students listening to stories read by the teacher, or students reading stories together. In a study of the social aspects of reading behaviours among children in classrooms, Hepler and Hickman (1985) proposed the notion of "community of readers" to describe how "children, in alliance with friends and teacher, learn to read" (p. 279). The present study explores the "community of readers" within a bilingual context. How do immersion students with bilingual language backgrounds
contribute to and participate in the community of the language arts classroom?

According to Hickman, “Students’ skills in reading and interpreting literature develop as they listen to, read, write about, talk about, and in many other ways respond to stories” (1992, p. 85). Hickman’s study examines the use of literature and whole language teaching approaches in elementary French immersion classrooms. As literature selected for immersion classrooms needs to be both interesting and accessible for children, Hickman acknowledges that whole language teaching in immersion classrooms requires consideration of the sociocultural context. It is important to note that within the bilingual sociocultural context of Québec, immersion students are likely exposed to both French and English through their interactions in the community.

Reader-response theory

Reading is a complex process that involves interacting and experiencing the text (Iser, 1978; Rosenblatt, 1978; 1982). Iser (1978) described the interaction with text as an aesthetic response. Building on Iser’s theory of aesthetic response, Rosenblatt developed a theory of reader response that is relevant to pedagogy. According to Rosenblatt, when students read or listen to stories, they participate in efferent or aesthetic reading (Rosenblatt 1978; 1982). While efferent reading involves finding information or answering a
question, aesthetic reading refers to experiencing the feelings and emotions of the images and words of the text. When readers engage with a literary text, Rosenblatt defines the transaction as a “lived through” experience. Here, the idea of “lived through” experience is concurrent with Dewey’s (1938) philosophy of educational experience, providing students with meaningful learning.

According to Rosenblatt (1995), “an aesthetic experience will require the reader to direct more attention to the affective aspects. From this mixture of sensations, feelings, images, and ideas is structured the experience that constitutes the story or poem or play” (p. 33). Importantly, Rosenblatt argues that literature provides readers with the chance to develop increased social sensitivity, cultural awareness, and understanding of abstract ideas and emotions.

Iser (1978) speaks of the “implied reader” meaning that the reader goes through a process of interpreting the text according to his or her personal experiences. Picture books require an “implied viewer” (Nodelman, 1988), constructing meaning from the images in texts, filling in the gaps as they look at both the illustrations and the words and think about the interaction of both (Nikelojeva & Scott, 2001). When children are invited to comment on both the words and images of texts, they develop an aesthetic appreciation of literature (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Coulthard, 2003).
Engaging with picture books and constructing meaning

Picture books are stories that include both visual and verbal elements, and both the illustrations and words are vital to the narrative structure. Picture books provide a unique experience for children as they engage in interpreting the words and images of the texts. For second language learners, the literary experience of reading picture books provides the opportunity to construct meaning while thinking about and sharing ideas related to the literary and visual elements of the text. The literary elements include plot, characters, setting, point of view and language. The combination of visual and verbal elements in a picture book offers a reading experience that acts as a hermeneutic circle; the reader must mediate between both the pictures and the texts to make sense of the whole (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Nikolejeva & Scott, 2000).

The power of reading picture books to provide meaningful learning experiences for children has been emphasized in research on children’s literature. Sipe (1998b) emphasized the ways that children engage in the process of reading picture books:

Picture books, through transmediation, give children the opportunity to engage in an unending process of meaning making as every rereading brings about new ways of looking at words and pictures. In
other words, picture books allow children to have multiple experiences as they engage in creating new meanings and constructing new worlds (Sipe, 1998b, p. 107).

It is important to examine the ways that students and teachers interpret and appreciate authentic literature in the classroom. Sipe (2008) suggests that Vygotsky’s theory of the ZPD is relevant for analysis of classroom situations as “learning occurs most powerfully in situations that are highly social, and in which children are engaged with one another and the teacher in meaningful activities where there is a great deal of talk” (p. 39). Sipe (2008) developed a grounded theory of children’s literary understanding from his observations of students’ responses and teachers’ guidance during picture book read alouds in elementary classrooms. Sipe’s theory (2008, p. 182) includes the five facets of children’s literary understanding:

- **Analytical**: Analyzing the text and make comments about the story.
- **Intertextual**: Relating the text to other texts, making links across texts.
- **Personal**: Connecting the text to one’s own life.
- **Transparent**: Entering the world of the story and becoming one with it.
- **Performativ**: Entering the world of the text and manipulating it. The text functions as a platform for children’s creativity.
Sipe’s research has examined children’s literary understanding of stories, and he noted that, “If teachers are to enrich their students’ aesthetic appreciation and understanding of the visual features of picture-books, they must first possess their own appreciation and understanding” (2008, p. 231). While Sipe’s research examines students in English elementary classrooms, I am interested in how bilingual elementary students in immersion classrooms construct their own understanding of picture books read aloud in French and English, as well as how teachers mediate this process.

Research demonstrates that there are numerous benefits to reading aloud to children in order to promote first and second language development (Coulthard, 2003; Cumming-Potvin et al., 2003; Elley, 1989; McGee & Schickedeanz, 2007; Pantaleo, 2007; Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). Snow and Burns (2005) indicate that teachers use particular strategies to enhance their students’ understanding of the language through interactive read-alouds. Coulthard (2003) emphasizes that the contextual support of the images in picture books and the opportunity to participate in collaborative group discussions are beneficial for young bilingual learners (p. 171).

Reading aloud is a social experience for students and teachers. Hepler and Hickman (1985) noted that literature enables students and teachers to connect as they share the reading experience.
Consider the primary child who laboriously wrote, when asked by her teacher for an opinion of a new book, "The book was okay. I love you." For this child, the book is not yet quite separate from the voice that reads it aloud; good feelings about teacher and story are intertwined.

(p. 279)

Ulanoff and Pucci (1999) demonstrate that reading aloud to second language learners has an impact on second language vocabulary acquisition, and that teachers play an important role in mediating and scaffolding student understanding. Their study in a Los Angeles bilingual school examined the effect of reading aloud on the vocabulary acquisition of third grade students who speak Spanish as a first language. The researchers examined two bilingual reading methodologies and found that the preview/review method, which involved reading a picture book in English and then reviewing in Spanish, was more effective than the concurrent translation method. Ulanoff and Pucci (1999) noted that the “key to vocabulary acquisition, as well as language acquisition, can be seen as mediation of meaning” as teachers draw on a range of strategies and techniques to scaffold the students’ understanding of text (p. 329).

When teachers read aloud in the classroom, students share a common experience that may promote a sense of belonging to the “community of readers” (Hickman, 1985). Second language learners have a sense of
empowerment when they participate in picture book read alouds and personally respond through collaborative activities with their peers.

Coulthard (2003) suggests that the visual images in picture books have a transformative power for second language learners; children “understand feelings and behaviour and have an emotional connection with the important human issues in the book” (p. 179), and as they respond to the text they are articulating their own thoughts in a second language.

The picture book, according to Nodelman (1988), is not simple. It is in fact “a subtle and complex form of communication” (p. 20). Picture books deal with universal themes that young readers can relate to and discuss in the classroom. Discussions of such issues related to human life elicit personal responses, and picture books often deal with complex issues such as feelings and emotions (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Coulthard, 2003; Nodelman, 1988; Sipe, 2000). Teachers encourage students to share their thoughts and insights on the literature, thus initiating an interesting dialogue surrounding the themes of the books and how they relate to the students’ lives. Children’s literature is powerful because it may enable children to “insert the texts they hear and read into the texts of their own lives, and to broaden their view of what is possible” (Sipe, 2000, p. 88). Cummins also asserts that it is useful for students to have the opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations:
At a cognitive level, writing about or discussion of complex issues with the teacher and peers encourages students to reflect critically and refine their ideas. (2001, p. 81).

Beck and McKeown (2001) observed the interaction of teachers and students in kindergarten and Grade one classrooms during read-aloud sessions. The concept of *Text Talk* (Beck & McKeown, 2001) was developed as an “approach to enhancing young children’s ability to build meaning from text in which the teacher intersperses reading with open questions and discussion, and follows each story with explicit attention to vocabulary “(p. 18). Bainbridge and Malicky (2000) acknowledge that teachers must have knowledge and skills in order to implement literature based instruction.

Not only must the teachers know children’s books (including their titles, authors, themes, plots, characters, and structures), but it is also helpful if they understand how books work and what the various literary techniques used in the books are teaching young readers. (p. 267).

It is particularly important for teachers in an immersion classroom to find authentic texts which “correspond appropriately and concurrently to students’ linguistic ability, their age, and immediate interests” (Lyster, 2007, p. 52). Thus, it is imperative to select texts that are relevant and interesting for the elementary school classroom and that will extend students’ linguistic
abilities. Wright’s study (1996) involved Grade 4 immersion students in reading picture books and making their own big book versions of stories they created, while studying French verbs of motion. Her study with Grade 4 students revealed that elementary immersion students experience enjoyment from reading picture books, while at the same time developing their awareness of and ability to use target vocabulary (verbs of motion).

2.5 Bilingual and multilingual literacy

Recent research in various Canadian and international contexts has demonstrated that bilingual and multilingual literacy programs have many benefits for children, teachers, and families (Cummins, 2006; Creese, 2005; Feuerverger, 1994; Gregory, 2002; Lyster et al., 2009; Naqvi, 2009; Rodriguez-Valls, 2009; Schecter & Cummins, 2003). It is important to consider the unique context of each school community in order to best meet the needs of the students, teachers and families.

In a study by Schecter and Cummins (2003), multilingual children in an English mainstream school created dual language stories. This study, in an English-speaking school with a multilingual school population, demonstrated that such writing experiences contribute to a positive sense of identity for students while also challenging them to think creatively.
The reciprocal relationship between affirming students’ identity and maximizing their cognitive engagement is evident in many aspects of instruction. For example, when students write, revise, and publish stories in the classroom, they are simultaneously stretched cognitively and affirmed as individuals with something important and interesting to contribute. (p. 11)

Feurgerver’s (1994) study of a multicultural literacy project in a school with a diverse student population in Toronto examines the sociocultural nature of the program through her perspective as a participant observer. The project involved including first language books in the library and with the objective of “creating partnerships between home, school, and university within a multicultural context” (p. 127).

Naqvi (2009) acknowledges the transformative power of reading multilingual literature in the classroom. Naqvi describes the research project, *Mirrors and Windows: Seeing Ourselves and Others Through Dual Language Reading*, a program that “investigates the use of dual-language books in the classroom as a support to literacy, diversity, self-esteem, and community-building in elementary schools” (p. 45). In Naqvi’s study, community members were invited into the classrooms to read the dual-language books with the teachers.
Valuable biliteracy and multiliteracy research has also been conducted in the UK (Creese, 2005; Gregory, 2002) and in the United States (Rodriguez-Valls, 2009). Creese (2005) examined the interaction between bilingual Turkish teachers and students in the UK and the value of enabling students to interact in both languages to facilitate learning. Gregory (2002) examined the sociocultural aspects of biliteracy and the implications for teaching that empowers families and communities. A recent study in an elementary school in California involved parents and students in reading picture books in Spanish and English. The study demonstrated that reading bilingually helps children to make connections between two languages. One of the Spanish speaking parents commented that the pictures were especially engaging for the children (translation provided in article by Rodriguez-Valls):

"Es impresionante como las ilustraciones sin leer las letras echan a andar la imaginacion, hacia un mundo lleno de colour de vida. Con esto los niños se motivan."

[It is unbelievable how the illustrations without reading the text activate the imagination towards a world full of colours and life. This motivates the students]. (Rodriguez-Valls, 2009, p. 121)

Lyster et al. (2009) conducted a bilingual study with six teachers in immersion classrooms in Québec. The teachers read aloud from three books in the series of historic adventures by Mary Pope Osborne called *The Magic Tree House* in English, and *La Cabane Magique* in French. The study revealed that the read-aloud sessions generated a “high level of motivation” as the students actively participated in discussions related to the stories in both
languages (p. 378). It was also apparent that more collaboration among teachers would have helped students to make more cross-lingual connections. Therefore, this study was designed to look at possibilities for providing English and French teachers with materials to facilitate collaboration and to encourage students to make connections across languages. How do children and teachers engage with a biliteracy project as they read and respond to picture books in English and French?

Students and teachers in bilingual and multilingual classrooms draw on their linguistic resources to communicate in one or more languages. Garcia (2009) uses the term *translanguaging* to refer to the act of using one’s knowledge of various languages for communication. Considering the bilingual context of French immersion schools in Quebec, the notion of translanguaging is useful in describing the acts of communication that occur in French immersion classrooms composed of students who have linguistic abilities in English and French. Through this study, I aim to examine the potential of the communicative activities following read alouds in both French and English with immersion students.

**2.6 Collaboration**

Interaction among students in the language classroom can benefit students as they “collectively scaffold” (Donato, 1994) one another’s learning.
When students have the opportunity to work together, they can help one another to extend their understanding and communicative abilities in the second language. Pair work enhances the sense of community in the classroom and enables students to take ownership of their learning.

Research on cooperative learning demonstrates that there are many benefits to working together (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). The language classroom provides an opportunity for students to work together, share ideas, and co-construct knowledge. The research on cooperative learning emphasizes the effectiveness of cooperation in “promoting intrinsic motivation and task achievement, generating higher-order thinking skills, improving attitudes towards the subject, developing academic peer norms, heightening self-esteem, increasing time on task, creating caring and altruistic relationships, and lowering anxiety and prejudice” (Oxford, 1997, p. 445). King et al. (1998) demonstrate that peers of equal ability may be able to scaffold one another’s learning through peer tutoring, and that they may be able to “mutually scaffold one another’s thinking and learning to progressively higher levels” (p. 149).

Damon and Phelps (1989) distinguish between peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and peer collaboration. Two important features of peer interaction are equality and mutuality. Peer collaboration differs from both peer tutoring and cooperative learning, as children are at the same level, and jointly work on
problem-solving. “This creates an engagement rich in mutual discovery, reciprocal feedback, and frequent sharing of ideas. In its ideal manifestations, therefore, peer collaboration is both high on equality and high on mutuality” (Damon & Phelps, 1989, p. 13). Equality refers to peer interaction in which both students take direction from one another; mutuality refers to the extensive, reciprocal and intimate discourse or sharing of ideas (Damon & Phelps, 1989; see also Storch, 2002). Peer collaboration provides the occasion for students to experiment and discover together in a socially supportive context (Damon & Phelps, 1989). A social constructivist approach to learning considers that all learning is inherently social, as we do not learn in isolation, but in relation to those around us. Therefore, it is important to examine the social nature of the collaboration among immersion students.

Studies in second language education have examined the nature of the dynamic of peer interaction (Donato, 1994; Storch, 2002) and collaboration (Bouffard & Sarkar, 2008). Storch (2002, p. 129) identified four distinct patterns of interaction in the ESL classroom:

**Collaborative:** The students work together on all parts of the task. Learners are engaged with each other’s ideas. Alternative views are offered and discussed, leading to resolutions that seem acceptable to both participants. (High equality, high mutuality)
**Dominant/Dominant:** The participants both contribute, but they are unwilling to fully engage with each other’s contribution. (High equality, low mutuality)

**Dominant/passive:** One of the participants is authoritarian, while the other is passive. The participants do not negotiate with one another. (Low equality, low mutuality)

**Expert/novice:** The expert actively encourages the novice participant to participate. (High mutuality, low equality)

Storch (2002) found the following:

Learners, when working in pairs can scaffold each other’s performance. However, such scaffolding is more likely to occur when pairs interact in a certain pattern: either collaborative or in an expert/novice pattern. (p. 147)

Bouffard and Sarkar (2008) conducted research in a Grade 3 French immersion classroom in Montreal, where the students were trained in language analysis, and the results indicated collaborative work and group discussions “clarified several aspects of the children’s knowledge of L2 form” (p. 21). It is important to further investigate the ways that collaborative interaction contributes to students’ language learning.
Oxford (1997) makes an important distinction between cooperative learning, collaborative learning and interaction in the language classroom. While each of these terms may overlap, they are also each unique and important concepts related to learning and teaching. Cooperative learning is based on the principals of positive interdependence, accountability, team formation, team size, cognitive development and social development (Oxford 1997, p. 445). The principles of cooperative learning can be implemented in the classroom through structured activities such as group projects in which students are all accountable to the group.

It is important to note that cooperative learning is not simply placing students in groups and expecting them to work together. “Cooperation is the working together to accomplish shared goals. It is the use of small groups so that individuals maximize their own and each other’s productivity and achievement” (Johnson & Johnson, 1994, p. 95). There is a lack of research on cooperative learning and collaboration in bilingual or immersion classrooms.

Collaborative learning is a philosophy based on social constructivism which stems from the concepts developed by John Dewey, an American education philosopher, and Leontiev Vygotsky (Oxford, 1997). The social constructivist classroom is one in which teachers recognize the social nature of learning, and students are encouraged to express their opinions and work collaboratively (Bainbridge & Malicky, 2000). In other words, collaborative
learning in a social constructivist classroom fosters the negotiation of equal relationships among the members of the classroom community and the co-construction of knowledge. This philosophy recognizes that students are active participants in learning who are supported by their teacher and peers. Classroom research supports the use of collaborative learning in the second language classroom (Donato 1994; Gibbons, 2003; Lantolf, 1993; Pica & Doughty, 1985; Storch, 2002). While many studies have been conducted in university settings, there is lack of research in elementary second language classrooms. In-depth studies that focus on the experiences of young children engaging with literature in linguistically diverse classroom settings are needed.

2.8 Summary

In this chapter, I have reviewed the literature on theoretical perspectives related to the social nature of learning and teaching with literature. Drawing on social constructivist approaches to learning and teaching and reader-response theory, this chapter has explored the value of literature-based pedagogy in second language learning. Teachers and children are active participants in interpreting stories, and scaffolding is central to the children’s literary experiences in classrooms. In the next chapter, I will describe the methodology of my master’s thesis study. The
findings are presented in Chapter 4 (teachers engaging students with literature) and Chapter 5 (students entering the world of literature).
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I begin by describing my motivation for the present qualitative study. This is followed by a description of the research methodology, which includes the context, participants, data collection, and data analysis procedures. I also describe the biliteracy project, based on Canadian picture books, that was developed for the teachers and students in this study.

3.3 Motivation

As an educator and researcher with a focus on language and literacy, I am interested in Rosenblatt’s notion of the “lived experience” of reading picture books in the bilingual classroom. What is unique about this experience for bilingual immersion students, as they engage in reading books bilingually, in both French and English language arts? Students were encouraged to share their personal response to literature, express their opinions, and make connections to their own lives. Each story that the students read provided an opportunity for collaboration and extensive language use.

In my experience as a classroom teacher both in teaching ESL and French immersion, I have used literature as the basis of my pedagogy. My
passion for French literature developed as I immersed myself in books while studying the French language. My experience in teaching children positions me as an “insider” as a researcher in the classroom context. My approach to this research is to examine the complexity of the social setting and engagements with literature that occur in the classroom.

I had the opportunity to collaborate with a McGill doctoral student in Second Language Education, Susan Ballinger, who was planning to do her research in the French immersion classroom context on the south shore of Montreal. Collaborating with another student researcher for this study was an enriching experience as we were able to share and exchange ideas and impressions throughout the project. My background as a language teacher with a strong interest in literacy made me appreciate having the opportunity to conduct field work with a co-researcher who was experienced with research methods in immersion classrooms.

During this classroom-based research project, I was a participant observer in the classroom settings. In my role as participant observer, I became involved in the classroom community and interacted with the students and teachers. I observed and assisted students with their activities in the classroom as they engaged with language and literacy activities. While observing the classroom environment during my field work, I was interested in describing the world of the bilingual classroom. According to
Emerson et al. (2001) “participant observation involves not only gaining access to and immersing oneself in new social worlds, but also producing written accounts and descriptions that bring versions of these worlds to others” (p. 223).

3.4 Context

This study builds on a previous study (Lyster et al., 2009), in which teachers in the same school board were engaged in a bilingual reading project. During the previous study, the teachers participated in bilingual readings of a chapter book series of adventures for children called *The Magic Tree House* written by Mary Pope Osborne. The teachers collaborated by reading alternating chapters of the books in English and French. This project builds on the previous bilingual reading study in order to engage students in reading picture books in English and French and responding through a variety of language activities including reading, listening, writing, speaking, and drawing.

The schools in which this research was conducted are situated in urban areas on the south shore of Montreal. In this context, the class consists of anglophone, francophone, and allophone students. All names of participants and schools in my thesis are pseudonyms. Susan and I collaboratively submitted our research proposal to the ethics committee at McGill University.
for approval. The school board also reviewed and approved our research proposal. Sample letters requesting informed consent from the participants, are included in Appendix 4.

The planning process for our project began in the spring of the school year prior to our research. Initially, we had one French immersion teacher, Mme Marie France, who was interested in participating as she had been involved with the previous bilingual read-aloud study and had found that it was an enjoyable learning experience for the students. The principal, teacher, and students were very welcoming.

The project was accepted by the ethics boards and we confirmed the participation of the French and English teachers at École Gabrielle Roy. We also contacted other schools in the same school board to see if teachers at the same grade level would be interested in participating and we had confirmation from the Grade 3 teachers at École Michaëlle Jean. The school principal also welcomed the opportunity to have researchers on language learning and bilingualism in the school. Letters requesting informed consent were sent to all of the parents informing them of our collaborative research project and asking for parents’ consent for their children to be audio-recorded during the class and the interviews. The parents were also invited to participate in a telephone interview. The forms were signed and returned to the teachers.
Classrooms

The present study takes place in two French immersion classrooms in two different schools. École Gabrielle Roy is a dual track school with both French immersion and mother-tongue English programs. École Michaëlle Jean is a French Immersion school. Both of these schools are located in a suburban area on the south shore of Montreal. All of the teachers in this study are dynamic professionals who bring their individuality, creativity and passion for teaching to the classroom.

École Michaëlle Jean

At École Michaëlle Jean, the Grade 3/4 classroom is linguistically and culturally diverse with 24 students who speak many languages at home including French, English, Urdu, Bengali, Spanish, Punjabi and Portuguese. The students alternate their days of schooling in English and French, respectively. This means that they spend one day in a French classroom and the other day in English. The students are familiar with the routines of both their French and English classrooms.

The Grade 3 teachers at École Michaëlle Jean, Mme Catherine and Miss Jones, alternate between English and French teaching days. Each teacher has her own classroom and the students spend alternating days in each language. Both teachers are also responsible for teaching Grade 4 English and French to another group of students on alternating days.
Mme Catherine

Mme Catherine is francophone and has been teaching in French immersion for 10 years. She has a passion for teaching the French language and teaching young children. Mme Catherine completed her Bachelor of Education in Preschool and Elementary Education at a francophone university in Quebec. She acknowledges that her own pedagogy has changed since she was in university, as the reform in Quebec has introduced many changes to the curriculum.

Miss Jones

Miss Jones was born and raised in Eastern Quebec and received most of her schooling in English schools in Quebec. She is fluently bilingual in English and French and finds that she uses French often in her current teaching position, especially in communication with teachers. Miss Jones is in her sixth year of teaching. She has taught at various schools in the south shore, and is very pleased to have her own classroom and to be teaching at the same grade level and school for the second year.

École Gabrielle Roy

At École Gabrielle Roy, the students have their French and English language arts classes in the same classroom. The French instruction is 80% and English instruction is 20%. There are 21 students in the class and the students are bilingual speakers of French and English. A few of the students
also speak another language, mainly Spanish and Italian. The French teacher, Mme Marie-France, is the homeroom teacher, and she teaches all of the core subjects, while Miss Goodman teaches English language arts. This is a multi-level class composed of both Grade 3 and Grade 4 students.

*Miss Goodman*

Miss Goodman is in her first year of teaching English. She has a busy schedule due to her assignment which includes teaching many classes in English at different grade levels in the school. She was enthusiastic about participating in the biliteracy project and viewed it as a valuable opportunity for professional development. She finds that because she is a first year teacher, lesson planning can be overwhelming, and she was pleased to have the opportunity to share her experiences with us as well as to engage her students with the biliteracy project.

*Mme Marie-France*

Mme Marie-France has been teaching French immersion for several years at Gabrielle Roy. She is francophone and received her teaching degree from a French university in Québec. As the homeroom teacher, she teaches the students in many different subject areas across the curriculum in French immersion.
3.5 Bilingual Literacy Project

I developed a biliteracy project, along with my colleague Susan Ballinger, for the French and English teachers to follow with their students. Direct links were made to the language arts and cross-curricular competencies outlined in the Quebec curriculum. Central to the biliteracy project was the linking of languages through literature-based activities developed for French and English language arts. The project was intended to help teachers and students bridge languages through picture books, written in English and French. The project was based on the philosophy that children and teachers explore literature through dialogue and collaboration. The activities were developed to foster creativity, imagination, and an aesthetic appreciation of literature as children and teachers engaged in reading and responding to the stories.

We met with teachers at both of the schools to consult with them for the plans to collaborate on a bilingual literacy project. We also provided the teachers with a bilingual teacher’s guide that we created for the picture books. Throughout the project, the students worked in pairs on a variety of literature-based activities including sharing ideas about books, writing, drawing, and reading. As a participant observer, I assisted the students and teachers as they worked on the biliteracy project.
Canadian picture books

The project was based on the following Canadian picture books which were read aloud in both French and English in each classroom: *If you’re not from the prairie* (Bouchard, 1993) and *Si tu n’es pas de la prairie* (Bouchard, 2007); *The Montreal of my childhood* (de Thomasis, 1994) and *Le Montréal de mon enfance* (de Thomasis, 1994); *Have you seen Josephine?* (Poulin, 1985) and *As-tu vu Joséphine?* (Poulin, 1985). David Bouchard, Stéphane Poulin, and Antonio de Thomasis are exemplary Canadian bilingual writers whose texts encourage an aesthetic reading as they evoke the pleasures and playfulness of childhood.

*If you’re not from the prairie* is a picture book that transports the reader to the Canadian prairie through the nostalgic words and images of the visual and verbal text. The poetic writing of David Bouchard opens the window of our imagination as we feel the wind on a prairie afternoon, the bitter cold of winter, and see the beauty of the sunset. Bouchard’s text invites readers to participate as they reflect on their own connection to nature and the land as he describes the unique beauty of the prairie landscape.

*The Montreal of my childhood* is a picture book in which Antonio de Thomasis vividly describes his childhood memories in 1940’s Montreal. The book is divided into several small stories that each tell of an episode in his childhood such as the games he played, the transportation system, and the
weather. It is interesting to note that, like many children in the French immersion classes on the south shore of Montreal, the author is fluent in more than one language as he speaks French, English, and Italian.

Stephan Poulin’s *Have you seen Josephine?* takes the reader on an adventurous journey around Daniel’s neighbourhood in Montreal as he looks for his cat Josephine, who disappears each Saturday. Daniel encounters many different people in the neighbourhood and asks them if they’ve seen his lost cat. The twist at the end of the story is humorous and clever as Daniel discovers that his cat attends weekly cat parties hosted by his friendly neighbours, the Gagnons. Poulin’s colourful illustrations enhance the story and bring the boy’s adventure and neighbourhood to life. In addition to the read-aloud of *Have you seen Josephine?* the students read another book in the Josephine series, *Catch that cat!*, and created their own endings to the story.

The visual texts are evocative of childhood memories and are written and illustrated by Canadian authors and illustrators. Based on reader-response theory (Rosenblatt, 1982) and the language arts curriculum, students were encouraged to respond aesthetically to the texts through discussion and extended activities. We brought multiple copies of the books to the classroom, as it was important for all of the students to have access to the books, and to be able to examine them closely while responding to the texts. I
created bilingual posters related to the stories and authors to be displayed in the classrooms.

3.6 Data collection

The data collection took place over eight months. The initial observations and interviews with teachers began in November. The biliteracy project took place from January-April. We visited each school approximately twice each week and observed English and French language arts lessons, respectively. Following the biliteracy project, we held semi-structured interviews with teachers, students, and parents. The interviews took place in April-May and the final school visits were in June. As this data collection is part of a larger study, I have drawn on selected parts of this data for my Master’s study.

The data collection consisted of classroom observations, field notes, semi-structured interviews with students, teachers, and parents artifacts (samples of students’ work), and audio recordings of the students interacting during pair or group work. Students were encouraged to share their personal response to literature, express their opinions, and make connections to their own lives. Each story, poem, and book that the students read provided an opportunity for collaboration and extensive language use.
In each of the language arts lessons, the readings were followed by activities which enabled the students to share ideas, construct meaning and collaborate through the language arts of speaking, reading, writing, listening, and visually representing. I observed the social nature of the learning and collaborative processes in relation to the way the students responded to the picture books. The bilingual literacy project data collection is described in Table 3.1.
Table 3.1: Bilingual Literacy Project Data Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>École Michaëlle Jean</th>
<th>École Gabrielle Roy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom observations before, during, and after the project</td>
<td>• 5 hrs before</td>
<td>• 4 hrs before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 12 hrs during</td>
<td>• 12 hrs during</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 2 hrs after</td>
<td>• 2 hrs after</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcribed interviews with individual teachers before and after the project</td>
<td>• 25 mins with each teacher = 50 mins</td>
<td>• 25 mins with each teacher = 50 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio recordings of student-student interactions</td>
<td>• 27 hrs of 11 dyads</td>
<td>• 35 hrs of 8 dyads and 1 triad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcribed interviews with students after the project</td>
<td>• 2 hrs with 8 dyads</td>
<td>• 2 hrs with 7 dyads and 1 triad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifacts of students’ work including bilingual collaborative writing, journals, and drawings</td>
<td>• 24 student portfolios</td>
<td>• 21 student portfolios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone interviews with parents</td>
<td>• 5 interviews totaling 39 mins</td>
<td>• 11 interviews totaling 1 hr 13 mins</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Observations and field notes

In the early stages of the research, I spent time becoming familiar with the context. I observed a variety of the teacher’s language arts activities, including readings of each picture book in both language classes. While I actively listened to the story read alouds, I took notes on the interactions that occurred during the readings. Dalamont (2008) suggests that educational ethnography involves being “systematic about observing, and recording, some basic ‘facts’ in every setting” (p. 43). In my field notebook, I took notes on the classroom surroundings, as well as the interactions between teachers and students. Throughout the study, I attempted to write “descriptive accounts of the people, scenes and dialogue” in the classrooms (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2001, p. 353).

Establishing a relationship with the participants was very important from the beginning. Maguire (2005) states that “qualitative and ethnographic relationships with child participants necessitate not only the establishment of rapport, trustworthy relationships with child participants but also a reconceptualization of their role as human beings and as real engaged participants in inquiries” (p. 331). Throughout my research, I felt that having a good rapport and relationship with the students was essential. The students realized that I was interested in the work that they were doing and
they often showed me books they were reading, their art work or told me about events that were happening in their daily lives.

At the very beginning of the data collection, I informed the classes that I was really interested to hear their thoughts about the books that we would read together. I let the students know that I valued what they had to say because I believe that children are able to see a lot of details in books and I want to hear their opinions.

*Interviews*

In conducting semi-structured interviews, I wanted to give the participants, both the children and the teachers, an opportunity to be empowered to express their thoughts about participation in literature-based learning in an immersion classroom. I had participated in a focus group as part of another doctoral student’s dissertation research and had found the experience to be very empowering. I believe that interviews provide the participants with a chance to articulate ideas and this experience has the power to create a greater sense of self awareness and agency for participants. The interviews were conversations with the students and teachers about their experiences in reading and working with a partner on the biliteracy project.

I planned to interview both the students and teachers as a line of inquiry into their personal experiences in the bilingual classroom. Susan and
I conducted all of the interviews together and all interviews took place at the schools, either in the classroom, library, or in a teacher’s office area.

We interviewed the teachers at the beginning and end of the field work. The preliminary interviews with the teachers were held in December. In the first interviews with the teachers, I asked the teachers questions about language and literacy in their teaching. In the final interviews with the teachers, my questions were related to their experiences with reading the picture books and engaging students in the project. We conducted the interviews in either English or French according the first language of the teachers. Following the interviews, the teachers commented that participating in the interviews enabled them to reflect on their pedagogy.

The students were interviewed in pairs at the end of the research project. We conducted interviews with pairs of students, and one group of three students, at the schools. The student interviews lasted 15-20 minutes and the students were invited to share their thoughts about the picture books and collaboration. The interviews were conducted in both English and French. Students were encouraged to speak in the language that they felt most comfortable speaking. For the student interviews, the students were informed about the research and we had the students agree verbally to be interviewed. The parents signed the consent forms for students to participate and be audio-recorded during the interviews.
I also planned to interview parents in order to find out more about the students’ language and literacy experiences at home. The parents signed forms indicating whether or not they would like to participate in the interviews. Parent interviews took place over the phone and the interviews were audio recorded. During the interviews, I took notes that I could refer to in my data analysis. The interviews were conducted in English and French, depending on the parents’ preference.

Peer Interactions

All of the students worked with one or two partners during many of the literature-based activities during the project. Following our initial observations in the classroom, we worked in consultation with the teachers in matching up the students according to who the teachers thought would work best together as well as considering their linguistic strengths. As the project was in English and French, we matched up partners so that they would be able to help each other in both languages. While the students worked together in the classroom, they had small digital audio recorders on their desks to record their dialogue.

Consent forms were sent to parents and signed before we began the audio-recordings in the classroom. We explained the project to the students in class and they gave oral assent to being audio recorded. For students who
had consent from their parents, they were asked if they would like to be recorded during the pair work. Also, they were aware that they could tell us if at anytime they did not want to be recorded.

I ensured that we had enough recorders for all students who were interested to be able to participate. We found that participating in the project was something new and exciting for the students. For some students the recorders were slightly distracting at first, mainly because the students were curious about whether we were listening to the recordings. The students were very interested in being recorded and had many questions about the project.

The audio recordings of the interactions and interviews were transcribed for analysis of the ways that students engage with literature-based activities and co-construct meaning. Susan and I worked on transcribing the data together. As we collected a lot of data, it was helpful to be able to share the transcription and to talk about it together. We met regularly to share our impressions of the transcriptions. By listening to the audio recordings of the students, I was able to gain a more profound understanding of how the students construct meaning through their interactions in the classroom community.
Artifacts of students’ classroom work

Prior to beginning the project, I decided that it would be important to include artifacts from the classroom that demonstrate the ways that students construct meaning in their language arts classes. I collected examples of the students’ work including pre-writing, drawing, and writing activities.

3.7 Data analysis

I drew on a set of qualitative research methodologies including bricolage and quilt making (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) as I worked on interpreting and assembling the complex images of my data to form a story that represents the life in the classrooms. I applied the bricolage approach to my research by assembling data from the observational field notes, interviews with students, teachers and parents, audio-recordings of classroom interactions, and artifacts of students’ work to form a story that represents the multiple perspectives and voices in this setting. As an interpretive bricoleur or quilt maker, I understand that my research is an “interactive process” shaped by my own personal experiences and by the people in the community I am researching (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Having a variety of qualitative data enabled me to look at my research from multiple perspectives as I investigated students’ and teachers’ engagements with literature in immersion classrooms. I have interpreted the
data as a quilt maker, selecting excerpts from the data that relate to my questions of how teachers and students mediate language and meaning through literature-based instruction in immersion classrooms. The structure of my thesis is like a quilt, “a sequence of representations connecting the parts to the whole” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 6).

3.8 Analysis of observational field notes

Throughout the research I continually read and reread my field notes as I reflected on my observations of the classrooms. As my field notes were handwritten in a notebook, I typed up excerpts from my field notes, and included many relevant examples in my findings. Emerson et al. (2001) noted that, “in reducing the welter and confusion of the social world to written words, field notes (re)constitute that world in preserved forms that can be reviewed, studied, and thought about time and again. My observational notes of the classroom settings enabled me to reflect upon and analyze the engagement of students and teachers reading literature in French and English language arts. In my analysis, I highlighted selected excerpts that portrayed the experiences and responses of both teachers and students in the classrooms. Themes emerged from my data that were related to the multiple ways that students and teachers engaged in and responded to the picture books.
3.9 Analysis of interviews

As I transcribed the interviews with the teachers and students, I listened to the voices of the teachers and students and reflected on their perspectives. As I read and reread the transcriptions of the interviews with the students and teachers, I was able to identify patterns and themes related to my research questions. As I selected excerpts from the interviews, I felt that it was important for the students’ and teachers’ voices to be heard in my writing.

As for the parent interviews, I analyzed my notes according to the perspectives of the parents on their children’s experiences with language and literacy at home. These data were useful in providing background information on certain students that I describe in my study.

3.9 Analysis of peer interactions

I analyzed the transcriptions of the classroom recordings by looking at themes related to my research questions. Primarily, I examined the students’ co-construction of meaning and personal responses to the literature and extended language arts activities. I focused on selected audio-recordings from the French and English language arts classrooms. The selected excerpts illustrate the students’ collaboration as they responded to the literature and connected the texts to their personal experiences.
3.10 Analysis of artifacts

I collected the student portfolios that included their written and illustrated work produced during the biliteracy project. The collected work was analyzed for examples of students’ expression of personal connection to the texts as well as engagement with the literature. I included selected verbal and visual artifacts from the students’ portfolio work that represent their construction of meaning in French and English language arts.

3.8 Summary

In this chapter, I described the methodology of the present qualitative study which explores students’ and teachers’ engagements with picture books in a bilingual context. I described my background and motivation for the study and provided details on the unique context of French immersion classrooms in Québec. The biliteracy project developed for the participating teachers and students served to bridge the French and English languages through literature. In Chapter 4, I present data on the teachers engaging students with literature, and I present the data on the students’ experiences in Chapter 5.
Chapter 4: Teachers engaging students with picture books

*Good picture books, then, offer us what all good art offers us: greater consciousness—the opportunity, in other words, to be more human.*

*(Nodelman 1988, p. 285)*

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the ways that teachers engage students with literature in the classroom. Throughout my fieldwork, I observed English and French language arts in one Grade 3 class at École Michaëlle Jean and a Grade 3/4 class at École Gabrielle Roy. Each classroom is a dynamic space in which teachers and students co-construct meaning together through ongoing dialogue and interactions. During my fieldwork, I explored the ways that teachers and students bring to life the language arts curriculum while engaging with children’s literature. The themes that emerged from my data are related to my review of the literature in this study. Here I describe the social nature of the classroom communities, the ways that teachers connected the literature to the realities of the students through an inquiry-based approach to learning (Audet, 2005; Townsend, 2005). This inquiry-based approach involved interacting with others, asking questions, and sharing multiple perspectives.

In relation to the teachers’ mediation of student engagement with literature in the immersion classrooms, the following themes were notable:
• community of bilingual readers
• reading aloud
• connecting with literature
• classroom conversations
• imagination and creativity
• inquiry-based learning
• collaboration

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the biliteracy project involved the reading of picture books by three Canadian authors: *If you’re not from the prairie* by David Bouchard, *The Montreal of my childhood* by Antonio De Thomasis, and *Have you seen Josephine* by Stéphane Poulin. Each of these texts was read in the English and French language arts classes and followed by extended activities. In this chapter, I also make reference to additional books that the teachers were using in their classroom teaching, including fiction and non-fiction texts. I describe the social nature of the bilingual classroom communities, focusing on the ways that teachers connect the literature to the realities of the students through meaningful learning experiences.
4.2 Community of bilingual readers

From the very early observations in the classrooms at both schools, it was clear that both the students and teachers enjoyed literature and easily became absorbed by books. In each of the classrooms, I observed students reading books individually and as groups, in both English and French. The following excerpt, from one of my initial observations at École Gabrielle Roy, illustrates how reading is a shared learning experience which forms a classroom “community of readers” (Hickman, 1985).

The students selected books from the baskets on the bookshelf after their work is finished. Amélie was absorbed in the realistic fiction book of the Junie B. Jones series. Two girls, Anna and Jade, were quietly reading an informational picture book about the Titanic. They were each holding one side of the book and examining the details on each page. Jon chose to read The Party by Barbara Reid. As he turned the pages, he appeared to be fascinated by the bright and colourful images made from plasticine. The teacher called the class back together to discuss their reading comprehension questions. Jon is still looking at his book The Party and it appears as though he is lost in the book. Ten minutes before the lunch bell rings, Miss Goodman begins to read a chapter from The Witches by Roald Dahl to her class. There were exclamations of joy from the students when she tells the class they will have time to read today. A hush fell over the class as she begins to read from the novel. The children delighted in the descriptions and humor in the story. While they were listening to Miss Goodman read The Witches, the entire class participated spontaneously in the reading with responses such as “OHHHH” as she described the characters in the text. (Field notes, November 17th, 2009)

While the above example of engaging with literature took place in English language arts, in describing my findings I attempt to illustrate the community of bilingual readers in two classrooms through engagements with English and French picture books. In this community of bilingual readers,
the students and teachers experienced the pleasure of reading, sharing responses to the images and words in the picture books.

École Michaëlle Jean

At École Michaëlle Jean, Madame Catherine teaches French and Miss Jones teaches English to the same group of Grade 3 students. They each have their own classroom and the students alternate between French and English instruction every other day. Miss Jones’ and Madame Catherine’s recent involvement with the Reading Power program offered by the school board has contributed to their use of literature in the classroom. The Reading Power program was first launched by a Vancouver school board and the book Reading Power by Adrienne Gear (2006) describes “powers” that help students to engage with literature. Miss Jones and Madame Catherine have classrooms beside one another, and they frequently meet to discuss their students.

Madame Catherine is a dynamic and experienced teacher who embraces change in her pedagogical approach. She acknowledged that the reform in the Québec education program has had an impact on her own teaching and that her teaching has changed remarkably since she began teaching 10 years ago. Along with her colleague, Miss Jones, Madame Catherine has recently implemented strategies from Reading Power, known as Lectures engagés Cerveaux branchés in French (Gear, 2006). Madame Catherine
follows a social constructivist and child-centred approach to teaching. In both the interviews and in my fieldwork in the classroom, I was able to observe that the students in Madame Catherine’s classroom were frequently moving and interacting with one another, exchanging ideas and learning together. Madame Catherine told me that she likes to include the students in making choices about the projects that they partake in.

This immersion classroom is culturally and linguistically diverse, and Madame Catherine acknowledges that many of her students speak French as a second or third language. She embraces the diversity in her classroom and fosters a sense of respect among her students. She told me that she often played music in her class in languages other than French as she wanted to enrich her students’ musical repertoire and appreciation for diversity. The sense of community in the classroom is enhanced by the seating arrangement, with the student’s desks arranged in groups of five in order to facilitate dialogue. The social environment in the classroom is comfortable.

Miss Jones is in her sixth year of teaching and her second year in the same school teaching Grade 3 and 4. Miss Jones is bilingual, and finds that it is very useful to be able to speak French with her colleagues. Through observations, conversations, and the semi-structured interviews with Miss Jones, it is evident that her sense of confidence and identity as a teacher has developed during the first few years of her career. In her Teacher Education
program, Miss Jones studied Young Adult Literature, Language Arts, and Reading and Evaluation of Reading. She combines her understanding of teaching practice, theory and experience and applies it to her own classroom in order to plan for interesting activities. In an interview with Miss Jones, she explained that she liked to involve students through a variety of activities such as discussions, writing, and literature circles. She is interested in professional development and likes to try innovative teaching strategies in the classroom. It is clear from observing and speaking with Miss Jones that creativity and collaborative learning are central to her teaching philosophy.

Inside the entrance to her classroom are large colourful photos of each individual student, framed with decorative drawings by the children. During my time spent in Miss Jones’ class, I was able to gather that the children are at the centre of Miss Jones’ planning, as she considers ways to connect the curriculum to their personal interests.

École Gabrielle Roy

Madame Marie France teaches French immersion and Miss Goodman teaches English Language arts for the Grade 3/4 students at École Gabrielle Roy. The majority of the instruction is in French with Madame Marie-France, while Miss Goodman teaches 4 hours of English Language arts per week. Due to their teaching schedules, the teachers at Gabrielle Roy do not have a
designated time in which they may plan together. Therefore, they are able to communicate briefly when they switch classes, at lunchtime, or via email.

Madame Marie-France seeks to find books that will suit the various interests and abilities of her students. She includes a range of children’s literature for activities and projects, including *les bandes dessinées* and information books. For example, during a project on the 2010 Olympic Games taking place in Vancouver, the students worked with information books on sports to research and create their own posters about an Olympic sport. These posters were displayed around the classroom and the students were proud of their work.

Miss Goodman is in her first year of teaching and was hired at the school after the beginning of the academic year. She teaches the Grade 3/4 classroom for the English Language Arts class for four hours per week. In her teacher education program, she had taken a few classes on teaching language arts and reading. Being part of the research project was something that she was pleased to do in order to be involved in trying out new ideas for teaching literature. During my observations, I was able to observe Miss Goodman’s use of humour and scaffolding as she guided the students in their engagements with and understandings of literature.
4.3 Reading Aloud

Reading aloud is a shared literacy experience that brings together all members of the classroom community. It is a shared literacy experience which has the potential to lead to stimulating dialogue. Reading aloud with children and “talking to them about stories is a very important factor in ensuring their development as independent readers and writers” (Sipe, 2008, p.). In the first interviews with the teachers that we had prior to beginning the biliteracy project, we talked about reading aloud in the classroom. All of the teachers said that they felt that they would like to have more time for reading aloud as they saw many benefits for their students.

Read-aloud experiences are a special time in primary classrooms and each of the teachers expressed that they were pleased to participate in a project that valued reading aloud in the classroom. Madame Catherine ensures that her students are involved in the reading experience by making it pleasurable for the class. As described in the interview excerpt below, her creative teaching methods include having students listen to stories in different places, sometimes even while standing on their chairs. In the next extract, with Madame Catherine shared her thoughts on engaging students in reading.

Heather: Est-ce que tu fais l’animation avec les livres?
Madame Catherine: Mais oui. Je suis quand même dynamique donc...c’est sûr que je fais les voix, quand ça parle fort, je parle fort, quand ça chuchote dans le livre je chuchote. On va s’asseoir par terre. Ou on va faire sur les bureaux. On va écouter l’histoire debout sur la chaise. Les bureaux on fait un peu moins maintenant parce que là ils sont rendu plus vieux c’est un peu dangereux (elle rit). Ou aller dans un autre local. C’est quelque chose qui est plus amusant!

Heather: Quels livres est-ce que tes élèves aiment le plus?


It is interesting to note that Madame Catherine loves to read to her class. She expressed her concern regarding the lack of French literature, including sets of novels or picture books, available for her students in the classroom. Access to authentic French literature has been cited as a problem in French immersion (Cummins, 1998). It was clear that Madame Catherine was interested in including more authentic and diverse texts in her language arts classes. During the biliteracy project, she was pleased with the enthusiasm and responses from the students during the read-aloud sessions.

Madame Catherine: Je dirais ma classe a embarqué dans tous les livres. Ils ont embarqué...Je trouve qu’ils se sont laissés aller et c’était très agréable. (Interview, April 8, 2010)
Throughout the biliteracy project, I observed the teachers scaffolding the language and meaning for students by leading discussions surrounding the texts, asking questions, and encouraging students to also initiate discussion. The following excerpts from my interview with Miss Jones provide insight into a teacher’s perspective on reading aloud.

Heather: How often do you read aloud to your class?

Miss Jones: I’d like to read every day, but I don’t usually get to it, so I’d probably say two out of three days.

Heather: Do you think there are advantages to reading aloud to your class?

Miss Jones: Oh, for sure, the children, especially for the children who speak English as a second language, they can understand it when I read it aloud, but if they were reading it to themselves, they might not necessarily understand it. They can do the activities without getting stuck on decoding.

Heather: So for second language learners, you see that as an advantage. What about reading picture books?

Miss Jones: Well, I enjoy picture books. We’ve read one novel so far this year and we’ll probably do one more. Hopefully we’ll have time for literature circles. I prefer to teach with picture books because I find you can do a variety of activities. If you don’t have time to read it one day, you don’t lose it. I find sometimes with reading a novel in immersion, it ends up taking months to finish it, and we may have forgotten what the beginning was. (Interview, December 3, 2009)

Picture books allow for a reading and extended activity to take place within a short timeframe, whereas novels require a greater commitment.

According to Miss Jones, picture books may be combined with other
curricular projects, such as a novel study or a social studies project. Miss Jones stated in her final interview that she would love to plan a unit that would combine both *If you’re not from the prairie* with the novel *Sarah, Plain and Tall* (MacLachlan, 1985) as both of these books have a prairie setting.

In my first interview with Miss Goodman, she mentioned that she usually saved the reading for the end of the class because she felt the students may be too excited if she read at the beginning. It seemed as though, in the first interview, she was reflecting on her own teaching, as she stated that she did find that they loved to listen to the story, but she had not yet planned a unit that was centered on the literature itself. However, during the course of the bilingual reading project, literature became the central focus of the lessons and it seemed to be a transformative experience for teacher and students as they engaged in a literature-based unit that fostered collaboration.

Following the reading of *The Montreal of my childhood*, Miss Goodman told me that she was very pleased with the high level of engagement and the responses of the students with the literature. She said, “The students are so excited about the books! They are really getting into it.”

Sipe (2008) noted that in order to “get the substantative talk and thoughtful literary interpretation we desire, teachers have to be serious and knowledgable about literature, and be able to foster the development of children’s higher-level interpretive skills” (p. 5). It appeared that as the
teachers and students engaged in reading and discussing the picture books in this study, the teachers were attentive to the students’ interpretations, and encouraged them to think about the meaning of both the words and images in the texts. Following the readings, the students often asked to look at the books again independently. They were interested to take a closer look at the stories that their teachers read aloud.

4.4 Connecting with literature

Connecting literature to the actual life experiences of students is an essential means of engaging young readers in thinking about books. In the following excerpts from my data, I describe how the students and teachers make connections with literature. The teachers played a key role in engaging students with texts and encouraging them to reflect on their own lived experiences.

As the children come in from their recess break, they select a book from the classroom library and sit down to read. Some students have library books and others are borrowing from the classroom bookshelves. The bookshelves contain a large selection of chapter books, picture books, and information books. There is a rotating basket of books on Miss Jones’ desk which contains the series Geronimo Stilton—these appear to be very well liked by the students. A sign on the wall reads I RECOMMEND…and then lists books recommended by Miss Jones. The recommendations include Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs and the sequel Pickles to Pittsburgh, both written by Judi Barrett. The first part of the English class is devoted to individual reading and the teacher herself is also reading at her desk. One of the books in the classroom library has been made by the class. It is based on The Important Book by Margaret Brown, and each child has written and illustrated a page that describes something important to them. One of the
students selects the classroom book for her reading choice. (Field notes, November 30, 2009)

By providing a wide range of texts and encouraging individual choice in reading selections, the teacher supports the students in developing an interest in reading. Publishing a classroom book is an experience in which students have co-constructed meaning by writing about what they think is important in their own lives. Miss Jones described the experience of publishing a classroom book as one that was meaningful and successful for the entire class.

Miss Jones: I really enjoy it because I find it’s much more realistic in terms of how we look at literature throughout our lives. It talks about making connections between literature and our lives, the questions that arise from it. (Interview, December 3, 2009)

Connecting literature to the personal experiences of children was key for the teachers involved in this study. Prior to reading Le Mont réal de mon enfance, Madame Catherine engaged by beginning the class with a short video clip about tramways from You Tube called “Les Tramways de Montréal” which she showed on the classroom SMART board. The students were absolutely fascinated by the video clip which included factual information such as the speed of the tramways. The video clip served as a compelling introduction to the text from Le Montréal de mon enfance.

During the reading of Le Montréal de mon enfance, Madame Catherine encouraged the children to make personal links between the author’s
description of waiting for the tramway on a cold day in Montreal and their own experiences of winter. While the text requires the reader to think about the past, as we now have modern modes of transportation, the children were able to relate to the ideas expressed in the text following the viewing of the tramway video clip. Also, it seems as though experiencing a snowstorm is an essential Canadian experience.

“Par un jour de tempête de neige, rien ne nous plaisait plus que la vue du tramway s’approchant. Il arrivait en sauveteur, faisant tinter ses clochettes et ouvrant ses portes en signe de bienvenue.

Nous pénéttrions dans sa chaleur, secouant la neige comme les chiens secouent l’eau. Il y avait foule et que nous allions au Mont-Royal, nous nous tenions à l’arrière en serrant nos trains sauvages contre nous.” (De Thomasis, 1994, p. 31)

While the teacher read the text, the students were focused and eager to see the pictures. Madame Catherine circulated around the room to ensure that all of the children could see the images of the tramway, the cold winter in Montreal, and the frozen laundry hanging outside. She asked the students to look closely at the book. As a result of the teacher’s scaffolding, the children delighted in the words and images of the text. Here, the teacher acknowledged that the images and words are meaningful, and the text was treated as a “highly sophisticated aesthetic object” (Sipe, 2008, p. 6).
The following excerpt from my fieldnotes illustrates the multiple ways that the teacher, Madame Catherine, guides her students in making connections. She also listens closely to their comments during the reading. I observed that the teacher and students interacted in a playful manner in their discussion of the text.

Antonio de Thomasis describes the thrill of watching the tramways line up as though they were floats in a parade or “les chars allégorique attendant que le défilé se mette en branle” (p. 31). The teacher asks the students if they know the meaning of the word “char allégorique”, and she draws a picture on the board. When she asks if they have been to a parade before, one of the students jumps up and exclaims that he is Irish and has attended a big parade. The teacher acknowledges his experience with the St. Patrick’s day parade as she replies “Oui, la parade Irlandaise.” This leads the student to provide more details, “Il y avait des chars et des personnes. Il y avait un camion avec pleine de personnes dessous qui dansaient!” Other students shared experiences of watching a parade at Disney. There is excitement in the class as students connect their own experiences with the text. (Field notes, February 19th, 2010)

As playing is a universal aspect of childhood, Antonio de Thomas’ text Le Montréal de mon enfance provides the opportunity for students to talk about their own favourite activities. Madame Marie-France’s students were working on an Olympics project, and she connected their project to the students’ current research on winter sports. As suggested in the teacher’s guide for the biliteracy project, the students wrote in their journals about their own favourite winter activities. At the end of the class, Madame Marie-France asked the students to share their writing. One girl wrote about playing on her hockey team, and how she aspired to play on the Canadian
women’s hockey team and win a gold medal. The teacher seized the opportunity to talk about the women’s hockey team. Having the chance to write in a journal and share ideas was a way for students to use oral and written language while making personal connections with literature.

4.5 Classroom conversations

Teachers provide scaffolding to students as they listen closely to what children have to say and encourage their participation (Paley, 2007; Sipe, 2008). In the language arts classrooms, the teachers and students frequently held conversations about the picture books. In order to help students understand the text, teachers asked questions to help students connect to the book and to elicit responses. Importantly, the teachers listened to the students and valorized their contributions to the conversation. Questions were used to engage students in participating in a class discussion surrounding the text. Students were encouraged to also ask questions. One teacher expressed her way of using questions to activate students’ prior knowledge and experiences.

Madame Marie-France: Je vais demander aux élèves de repérer le titre, souvent avant de travailler un texte on fait appel à leurs connaissances. Par exemple...si c’est quelque chose sur la cabane à sucre. Est-ce que quelqu’un est déjà allé dans une cabane à sucre? Avec qui? Qu’est-ce qui s’est passé?  (Interview, November 25, 2009)
In my observations, I noticed that when the teachers spent time discussing the meaning of the titles and having students examine the images on the cover of the books, the students were interested in finding out more about the text. Questions often sparked the interest of the children and encouraged them to listen closely as well as to make predictions. While reading *Have you seen Josephine?* Miss Jones asked her students, “Where does Josephine go on Saturday?” One student guessed, “To the park!” and another student said, “I think she’s going somewhere to have her babies. It’s possible.” By asking a question, the teacher engaged the students with making predictions and the class focused on the text to find out where the cat disappears to in the story. Miss Jones encouraged a variety of responses from the students and listened to what they had to say.

Following the readings, teachers asked questions that encouraged students to provide their own opinions and co-construct meaning through participation in the *literary experience*. Madame Marie-France asked her students if they agree with the author David Bouchard that they can’t know the cold if they are not from the prairie. The students had a variety of responses and the teacher encouraged each individual to contribute to the conversation. Importantly, the teacher listened attentively to their responses and the children participated eagerly.
Si tu n’es pas de la prairie
Tu ne connais pas le froid
Tu n’as jamais eu froid. (David Bouchard, 1993, p. 20)

Anna: Moi, j’ai souvent froid!

Madame Marie-France: Alors, es-tu d’accord avec l’auteur?

Amélie: Non!

Jon: C’est peut-être plus froid qu’ici!

Madame Marie-France: Tu ne me connais pas. Tu ne peux réellement me connaître. Qu’est-ce que l’auteur veut dire?

Layla: On ne connaît pas sa vie. La neige, peut-être qu’il y a beaucoup plus…

Madame Marie-France: Tu ne connais pas comment il vit.

Jade: Là-bas, il y a moins de maisons, moins d’arbres qu’ici pour couper le vent.
(Field notes, February 10, 2010)

Miss Jones read to her class the dedication of the book, “To Françoise, my mother whom I love.” One curious student asked why we didn’t see the mother in the book. The teacher acknowledged the child’s curiosity as she listened to the student and asked the class to think about why the boy’s mother wasn’t in the story. This open-ended question provided students with the opportunity to think about the possibilities, such as the mother being at war, sleeping, sick, or in the hospital. When the teacher said, “Maybe Daniel lives with his Dad,” acknowledging the diversity of families, another student replied “Maybe his parents are separated.” While this discussion
was not directly related to the story itself, it demonstrated how the teacher and students engaged in co-constructing meaning following the reading of the text. Importantly, the teachers and students had created a classroom community in which students were comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings. The literature gave the class something interesting to talk about. Sipe (2008) indicates that scaffolding involves “listening closely to children and valorizing the conversational trajectories initiated by them, even when these trajectories may seem to be off task or contradictory to the teacher’s own agenda for the story” (p. 234).

Reading provides a unique opportunity to introduce new vocabulary words to students within the meaningful context of a story. While reading *The Montreal of my childhood*, Miss Jones emphasized words such as *sanity* and *rickety*. She provided examples for the students so that they would understand the words. While talking about the word *sanity* she explained: “Why did the mothers send the children outside to play? It’s like at school—the teachers send you outside at recess so we don’t go crazy!” For the word *rickety*, she asked, “What does rickety mean? If stairs are rickety, are they in good condition or bad condition?” The students were able to understand that *rickety* meant old or in bad condition. Miss Jones’ sense of humour and tone when speaking engaged the students with the conversation about these specific vocabulary words. In the French class, Madame
Catherine also introduced French vocabulary while reading *Le Montréal de mon enfance*. She acknowledged the resources in the classroom, by asking the students to explain vocabulary words and to help each other to understand the meaning of terms, such as *renouvable* and *ruelle*. The students actively participated in these discussions.

### 4.6 Imagination and creativity

Children’s literature that is aesthetically engaging provides an enriching experience for students and teachers. On my first visit to her classroom, Miss Jones read the story *If* by Sarah Perry (1995) to her class. This was not a component of the biliteracy project, but rather a lesson that the teacher developed following professional development related to Adrienne Gear’s book *Reading Power*. This text encouraged the children to stretch their imaginations by thinking about various scenarios, such as what it would be like if caterpillars were toothpaste. While reading the book, Miss Jones encouraged responses from students, and the students participated with many spontaneous responses to the book such as “OOHHHH” and “That’s cool!” When Miss Jones read the line, “If clouds were spirits,” one student asked, “What’s that?” Miss Jones showed the students the picture of the clouds and said “If you look closely, you can see the faces.” She paused for a moment, and let the children examine the book more closely, allowing the pictures, as semiotic tools, to mediate the meaning. During this observation, I
was able to see that the Miss Jones played an important role in encouraging children to enter the imaginary world of literature.

Following the reading, the teacher asked the students to choose one sentence from the story and to finish that sentence with a creative ending. There was tremendous excitement in the room as the children decided on which sentences to write about. While they were working, the children talked to one another and shared some of their ideas in their groups. At the end of the class the teacher invited the children to read aloud their ideas. One boy in the class who struggled to come up with an idea, was so proud to stand up and read the sentence he wrote: “If your head had arms, you would be the best in basketball.” At the end of the class she asked students to share their responses. The students’ writing was celebrated as the teacher exclaims, “You guys are VERY creative today. I like it!” On a later visit to the class, I noticed that the students’ pictures were compiled in a book of creative possibilities.

In an interview with Miss Jones, she shared her thoughts about literature and language in teaching. Engaging students with picture books that will stimulate their creativity is a priority for Miss Jones.

Heather: What is your favourite book to read to the class?

Miss Jones: Well, I think the book I read when you were here, If, that is one of my favourites. It really gets their imaginations going. I also like the book Mr. Peabody, it’s by Madonna. It talks about rumours. I
like that one because it gets a good discussion going. (Interview, Dec. 3, 2009)

The pictures in the texts are extremely important and the teachers acknowledged that it is through reading picture books that language is mediated. In the excerpt from an interview, Madame Catherine described her experience of reading a wordless picture book in her classroom and realizing that the students are able to understand the story through the illustrations.

**Heather**: Est-ce que tu fais des activités autour des images?

**Madame Catherine**: Oui, beaucoup. On peut lire sans mots.

**Heather**: Des livres sans mots.

**Madame Catherine**: (elle se lève pour montrer Mardi *de David Weisner*) Oui, j’avais un livre ici…c’est un livre sans aucun mot. Et je me suis rendu compte que oui, ils lisent! (Interview, December 7, 2009)

During my fieldwork, I observed the pleasure of teaching and learning with literature that results when stories become a central aspect of the classroom. In my second interview with Miss Goodman, following the biliteracy project, she expressed her experience with the literature-based unit.

**Miss Goodman**: Well, I liked how the kids were super involved. Maybe it’s because of the pictures; to take the time to go through the pictures. They were really able to pick up on it and really understand what I was saying…At the beginning of the year they were really excited and I had trouble doing things with them, but during this whole project I found they really changed. And the way they were sitting and listening I found was really good. (Interview, April 7, 2010)
In addition to the bilingual books, Miss Goodman incorporated mystery stories into her classroom and engaged the students in examining the elements of the mysteries in order to produce their own stories. Many students worked on writing their mystery stories when they had extra time and even took the stories home to continue writing. As part of a unit of mystery stories that Miss Goodman developed for her students, she displayed a poster in the classroom that described the elements of the mystery genre.

**What’s in a Mystery?**

**Crime:** Missing, Stolen, Broken, Fishy.

**Clues:** Help you to find suspects.

**Suspects:** Clues lead to suspects.

**Detectives:** Looking for clues.

**Red Herrings:** Distract you from the real clue.

**Evidence:** Prove that the clues are right.

Figure 4.1 What’s in a Mystery? (Field notes, March 15th, 2010)
If you’re not from the prairie...

On a Wednesday morning in January, Miss Goodman read If you’re not from the prairie to her Grade 3 and 4 students. The students gathered around the teacher on the floor so that they could see the pictures. Prior to reading, she introduced the author David Bouchard. When she mentioned that the book takes place on the prairie, one of the students exclaimed that he was born in Calgary. Miss Goodman encouraged the students to make predictions about the book by looking at the cover. The students examined the cover page and made predictions such as “Maybe one kid is from the prairie. Maybe he’s telling you to go there.” There was excitement as the teacher began to read and the students noticed the rhythmic language.

Throughout the reading of If you’re not from the prairie, the students were fascinated by the details on each page; both the words and images provided an aesthetic reading experience for the class. The teacher enhanced the reading experience by sharing with the students the names of the titles under the paintings including “Sharing secrets,” “Snowball fight,” and “Our tree swing.”

As David Bouchard’s book describes a prairie child’s experiences in nature, the children respond to the book with their own personal experiences. The teacher encouraged such responses. When the author described the hard,
bitter cold of the prairies, and how, if you’re not from the prairie, you don’t
know the cold, a student exclaims, “Miss Goodman, I don’t think they know
how cold it is here!” The teacher encouraged this critical thinking and replied
“That’s true. Have any of you been cold?” One of the students, Amélie, said
“I’m allergic to cold!” At the end of the story, Amanda exclaimed,
“Mommy, I want to go the prairie now!” The literary experience of If you’re
not from the prairie opened a window that enabled the class to imagine what it
would be like to live on the prairie.

The reading was followed by a discussion surrounding aspects of the
author’s description of the prairie as well as differences and similarities
between life on the prairies and in Quebec. The students participated with
many comments and questions about the book. One student who was born in
Calgary asked where exactly the author was from in the prairie. He was
interested to know that the author was originally from the francophone town
of Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan. Throughout the discussion, the teacher
encouraged the students to think about the author’s intentions of writing the
book. When the teacher asked what David Bouchard likes about the prairie,
one girl replied, “He likes how he hears the grass, the grass is whispering, he
likes sharing secrets.” These comments demonstrate the students’
engagement with the text, as they recall specific details from the text and infer
that the author has written about his own love of nature.
When the same group of students read the book *Si tu n’es pas de la prairie* with their French teacher, they continued to reflect on the uniqueness of the prairie. Madame Marie-France said that although she had not thought about the prairies as being a particularly exciting place to visit prior to reading the book, she was enchanted by the beauty of the images and the words of the text. In our interview with Madame Marie-France, she said that this was her favourite book to read during the bilingual picture book unit. The book also provided the opportunity for the students to write poems that described what they found to be unique about their own province.

**Madame Marie-France:** C’est *Si tu n’es pas de la prairie*. D’abord pour les images. La beauté des images. Ça fait voir ton pays et travailler les poèmes. C’est sûr que je vais utiliser encore et je vais faire des poèmes…ce n’est pas les images, c’est plutôt les tableaux! *Si tu n’es pas de la prairie, tu ne connais pas la prairie.* Ça vient chercher l’attention…C’est un livre qui fait réagir beaucoup parce que c’est comme si tu n’es pas de la prairie, tu ne peux pas savoir! On a fait une histoire si tu n’es pas de Montréal ou du Québec…ça c’était intéressant! (Interview, April 7, 2010).

### 4.7 Inquiry-based learning

The Quebec curriculum, which is based on developing competencies across subject areas, requires students to solve problems, think critically, and provide opinions when reading diverse selections of texts.

Madame Catherine expressed that, as a result of the educational reform in Quebec, she bases her teaching on projects and has a student-centred approach.
Madame Catherine: C’est sûr que si je me fie à ce que j’ai appris à l’université et qu’est ce que je fais maintenant c’est deux choses complètement différentes. Parce que j’ai appris la reforme et ce n’est plus la même façon. Je dirais justement le programme Cerveaux branchés, ça aide beaucoup là-dessus…surtout au niveau de l’inférence. Maintenant ce qu’on demande aux enfants, de faire de l’inférence, mais ce n’est pas quelque chose qu’on enseignait avant…l’inférence. C’est beaucoup de questions, l’opinion et tout ça. (November 30, 2009)

Madame Catherine uses strategies with her students to have them visualize and make inferences while reading. According to Madame Catherine, literacy and language development is more than grammatical structures. It is about understanding ideas. The teacher’s role is to guide them in using strategies which will assist them in the complex process of constructing meaning.


This classroom is culturally and linguistically diverse, and Madame Catherine acknowledges that many of her students speak French as a second or third language. Madame Catherine encourages collaboration among her
students and active participation as she ensures that everyone is involved in learning.

**Catherine**: Oui, ils aiment bien ça. La lecture est toujours suivie par quelque chose qui va les obliger à les faire bouger. Donc s’ils vont lire sur un sujet quelconque, il y a l’étape deux, soit qu’ils vont aller sur l’ordinateur, un bricolage. Je veux que la lecture soit toujours en perspective de quelque chose qui les fait bouger. Surtout en français, c’est la troisième langue quelquefois... Il faut vraiment que je sois vraiment très intéressante sinon je les perds.

**Heather**: Oui. Quels sont les critères qui vous guident dans les choix des textes?

**Catherine**: Mais, je vais avec des projets.

**Heather**: Des projets, comme des thèmes?

**Catherine**: Il y a certaines choses que je dois voir dans la troisième année dans l’univers social, et les sciences et technologie. Mais c’est eux qui choisissent. Comme là on fait l’espace, mais il y avait le choix. Au début de l’année, j’avais écrit au tableau les animaux, l’espace, le corps humain. Eux, ils ont choisi les mammifères. On a commencé comme ça. Mais je sais c’est des choses que qu’il faut voir.

J’essaie de faire les projets. Je trouve les textes soit les livres de la bibliothèque du quartier ou soit dans les livres comme ça.

**Heather**: Donc c’est les élèves qui choisissent les livres? C’est intéressant.

**Catherine**: Oui, j’ai appris si je leur enseigne quelque chose qui n’a aucun intérêt, ça ne donne à rien. Et comme je n’ai pas plusieurs copies d’un livre, souvent on va avoir un thème général comme l’espace, mais à l’intérieur de ça je vais avoir des élèves qui lisent sur le soleil, la lune, les constellations. Donc on va chercher les différents textes. C’est plus sur forme de textes en troisième année que des romans. Je ne peux pas vraiment...comme je les ai une journée, une
Antonio de Thomasis’ *The Montreal of my childhood* is an evocative text that describes the author’s childhood in Montreal in the 1940’s. This book provides a unique opportunity for teachers and students to talk about similarities and differences between the past and present. As the author describes aspects of his childhood with nostalgia, such as playing in the back alleys and inventing games, the teachers were able to ask students about the games they like to play. This book led to an inquiry-based project, developed by the researchers, in which the students interviewed members of their family or in the community, such as a grandparent or neighbor, about their own childhood experiences. The children shared their findings with their class and these findings led to interesting classroom discussions as the students were able to bring in information about their own family history. It was also an opportunity to acknowledge the linguistic and cultural diversity of the classrooms, as many students shared stories about the diverse backgrounds of their grandparents who speak many languages including French, English, Italian, Urdu, Greek, Spanish, Punjabi, Bengali, and Portuguese.

In order to set the context of the 1940’s, when reading *The Montreal of my childhood*, the teachers showed a variety of pictures of children playing in
that time period. Miss Jones took the opportunity to have students make a comparison between life in the 1940’s and the present time. She asked the students to think about what their grandparents might have played when they were children. One of the boys in the Grade 3 class asked “My grandmother is 70, so how old was she in the 1940’s?” Miss Jones used the SMART board to demonstrate that 2010 minus 70 equals 1940. The boy was very pleased to know that his grandmother was roughly the age of the children that the author described in *The Montreal of my childhood*. This was a successfully seized teachable moment. The fact that the children’s grandparents are the same age as the children in the book made it seem very relevant to them. The teacher described how she views the importance of taking the opportunities to make cross-curricular connections as they arise in class. In the following excerpt from an interview with Miss Jones, she explains how she connected math with language arts.

**Miss Jones:** When I first started teaching that was one thing that would stress me out, if I had to deviate from my plan. But with the classes that I’ve had over the past couple of years I’ve found now that is ok…I believe in not missing out on a learning opportunity because we have to stick to the schedule. When that came up about his grandmother being this age and it made sense to pull that in and review a concept, because it was borrowing that we had done before. So let’s review it in context. (Interview, April 7, 2010).
4.8 Collaboration

While students had opportunities for reading authentic literature and writing for authentic purposes, the outcome was that both students and teachers were engaged in collaboratively constructing meaning in the classroom. Collaboration is beneficial for both teachers and students, as Madame Catherine pointed out, "Même pour nous c’est mieux, parce que travailler toute seule c’est difficile."

When asked about the frequency of collaborative activities taking place in her classroom, Miss Jones indicated that group work was part of the regular routine. The students often work together on their assignments. Opportunities for collaboration occur throughout the school day. She did mention that she had used literature circles in the past, and would also like to try this with picture books in the future.

**Miss Jones:** Probably almost every day at some point they do something with someone else. I do a lot of centre activities where they work together. I try to have them do some things with a group and some things by themselves. (Interview, November 30, 2009)

In my observations in classroom, I was able to observe the social nature of the learning environment. By arranging the desks in groups of four or five, the teachers facilitated collaboration among students. Setting up the classroom to enable collaboration also requires that students understand their responsibilities. In all of the classrooms, there were posters on the walls
which explained the responsibilities of both the students and the teacher.

Learning to get along with one another is one an important aspect of the social environment. It is evident that the teacher plays an important role in fostering the collaboration among students.

Madame Catherine: Moi, je me promène toujours. Ils sont toujours en équipe. Jamais en rangée. Ça fait partie du programme, apprendre à vivre ensemble. (Interview, December 7, 2009)

In the first interview with Miss Goodman, she mentioned she had not yet had time to plan an in-depth group project. However, in our conversation it was apparent that she wanted to be able to do more group work with her students and she also would like to try to use some of the ideas that she had learned in her language arts courses at university.

Miss Goodman: In this class, I haven’t really done much collaborative [work]. I’m trying to think of what we have done. Sometimes, if they...actually most of the time, I’ve been keeping them on their own because in the beginning I had trouble getting them to do like discipline, you know? They were really a chatty bunch so they were working alone, but I mean if ever a project should come up, I’d like them to work together. I’m trying to think...like, sometimes if we’re doing predictions or something like that, I’ll get them to do it together, but I have not done one big thing like that yet where they were working in groups. (Interview, December 3, 2009)

Throughout the biliteracy project, I was able to observe how teaching with a literature-based and collaborative unit was a positive learning and teaching experience for Miss Goodman and her students. Prior to the bilingual reading project, she had saved her reading until the end of the class.
During the biliteracy project, the books and extended activities became a focus of each lesson. Miss Goodman commented throughout the project that she was delighted with the level of student engagement with the picture books and how well they were able to work in groups.

4.10 Summary

In this chapter, I described my findings in relation to the ways that teachers mediate the language experience for students as they engage with literature in the classroom. The teachers provide scaffolding by listening to the students, encouraging them to participate in dialogue related to the literature and to make connections to their own lived experiences. The biliteracy project fostered collaboration among teachers and students and provided opportunities for students to make connections across languages. In the next chapter, I will describe the experiences of the students entering the world of picture books.
Chapter 5: Students entering the world of picture books

At the heart of what I am asking for in the domains of the teaching of art and aesthetics is a sense of agency, even of power.

We want to enable all sorts of young people to realize that they have the right to find works of art meaningful against their own lived lives.

(Greene, 1995, p. 150)

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe my findings related to the students’ experiences with literature in immersion classrooms. In the classrooms at École Gabrielle Roy and École Michaëlle Jean, I collected data through observations in the language arts classrooms, semi-structured interviews with pairs of students, audio-recordings of students working together, and artifacts of students’ work in English and French. As mentioned in my methodology chapter, I also conducted phone interviews with parents in order to gain a better understanding of the students’ language and literacy experiences. In describing the students’ experiences with literature in immersion classrooms, I draw on theories of reader-response and social constructivism to portray ways that students construct meaning through shared experiences with picture books.

This chapter has been organized according to the following themes:

- Children’s responses to bilingual picture books
Aesthetic experiences with picture books

Making personal connections

Talking about literature

Collaboration

5.2 Children's responses to bilingual picture books

Dialogue

According to Townsend (2005), “discourse about literature that is dialogic—that invites multiple perspectives and multiple possibilities—can help students to open their minds and think deeply.” (p. 114). Students responded to texts in divergent ways as they constructed meaning through inquiry and collaboration with their peers and teachers. While they listened to each of the picture books, children shared their thoughts and interpretations. The process of participating in classroom dialogue gave students an opportunity to share opinions and to be involved in the co-construction of meaning. Throughout the biliteracy project, the students worked collaboratively in response to the books. Here, I will provide examples of the construction of meaning while students responded to the picture books If you’re not from the prairie, The Montreal of my childhood, and Have you seen Josephine?
When Miss Goodman showed a page from *If you’re not from the prairie* with the scene of a farmhouse and a broken tree swing beside a pond, a conversation began among the children as they examined and debated the usefulness of the tree swing. The title of the painting, “Our Tree Swing,” signifies a sense of how important play is to children and how they need to have their own spaces. The painting evoked a strong response from the children. While one child commented that the tree swing was broken, another student said “It’s still fun to go on” and this was followed by a comment “Yeah! They probably swing into the water!”

The teachers often asked the students to recall details or to summarize what they had worked on in their previous class. When Madame Catherine asked her French class to recall details from the first reading of *If you’re not from the prairie* with their English teacher, Hassan exclaimed that, on the prairies, “Le gazon parle et les nuages sont différentes!” to describe Bouchard’s description of the grasslands and the cloud formations. As Madame Caroline read the story to the class in French, she acknowledged Hassan’s comment when she read the excerpt “Les blés et les herbes sans fin y dansent. On entend leurs secrets, leurs chants, leurs murmures. Il parle de la vie rythmée par la nature.” (Bouchard, 1993 p. 14). She said “Ah, c’est ça que tu voulais dire, Hassan, quand tu disais le gazon parle, c’est les herbes.” Hassan smiled as the teacher acknowledged what he had explained as his understanding from
hearing the story in English, and by pausing at this point in the poem, she allowed for the students to appreciate the aesthetic beauty of the poem and illustration in French. Other students were eager to add their perspectives. Hannah commented that trees are special as she said, “Les arbres nous aident à respirer!” These are moments when listening (Paley, 2007) was so important as the teacher and children connected with the book.

Interestingly, reading in both languages gave students the opportunity to notice differences in the two versions of the books. For example, one observant and dynamic student, Amanda, noticed that the books Have you seen Josephine? and As-tu vu Joséphine? have slightly different endings. In the English version, Mrs. Gagnon tells Daniel that they have a cat party every Saturday. In the French version the text reads “Comment aimes-tu notre petite fête de chats? Nous en faisons une de temps à l’autre” (Poulin, p. 22). Amanda, a bright and energetic student, was very engaged in the reading as she explained to her French teacher, Madame Marie-France, “En anglais c’était: we always have one on Saturday.” For the students, it appeared that being able to notice differences in the wording of the text made them feel confident and interested in talking about the books.

**Heather:** Was it helpful to hear the story in French because you had already heard it in English?

**Amanda:** Yeah, it was helpful because you had already heard it in English and now you hear it in French. And the French and English
were a little bit different. It’s kind of cool how you see it’s different. (Interview, April 7, 2010)

While listening to *The Montreal of my childhood*, the children delighted in hearing the description of the street hockey game in which de Thomasis describes children playing in the backlanes of 1940’s Montreal.

*Nous n’avions pas de rondelle; nous nous servions de crottins que les chevaux laissaient sur leur passage et que nous appelions pommes de routes. Ils n’étaient pas très durables, mais la ressource était renouvable. Notre gardien s’entourait les jambes de carton. Les manches à balai faisaient d’excellents poteaux de but. Quand à nos bâtons de hockey, nous les rubanions religieusement.* (de Thomasis, 1994, p. 35)

The children were eager to see the picture that showed the road apples that were used for hockey pucks; they gathered around Madame Catherine while she showed the picture of the children playing street hockey and there were many exclamations of “OH!” as they were intrigued by the resourcefulness of the children using a road apple for a hockey puck. This humourous and authentic detail in the story enabled the children to imagine the reality of the author’s childhood.

*Have you seen Josephine?* is a story about Daniel who is searching for his cat Josephine. Following the reading of the book, the class discussed the places that Daniel explored in his neighbourhood. In the discussion, the students shared ideas about the meaning of neighbourhood, a place where, according to one student, “everyone knows everyone.” Each pair or group of students drew a map of the story *Have you Seen Josephine.* It was evident that
the students were actively engaged in the drawing activity and talking about the setting of the book enabled the children to articulate their thoughts and ideas. Working on the story maps was an opportunity for students to revisit the text, experience the aesthetic details, and think about the community in the book. It was evident in the drawings, as seen in the example in Figure 5.1, that the students focused on drawing many details from the story such as the ice cream shop, the Katz fish shop, and the bridge where Daniel sees the city.

![Story Map](image)

Figure 5.1: Story Map *Cat Party* by Anna, Jade and Noah (March 11, 2010)

The story map in Figure 5.1 was drawn by Anna, Jade and Noah, students at École Gabrielle Roy. They told me that this was one of their favourite activities as they were able to plan the map together and work creatively. In our interview with the students, we asked the students if they
had suggestions for future projects related to books. The children provided ideas about working on future collaborative literature-based projects, and made a suggestion about working on a large scale art project involving the whole class.

**Jade:** I have an idea. You should make a big map all together the whole class together.

**Susan and Heather:** That’s a good idea!

**Jade:** That can fit on the whole wall!

**Susan:** Oh, yeah. That would be really cool.

**Noah:** I have an idea. You take the ideas of the stories and you make a book of them all. (Interview, April 7, 2010)

Jade, a Grade 4 student, provided us with a suggestion for a group activity with books, while Anna suggested that we have more activities with drawing. She suggested that we divide the class into groups of four and have four different books and have the class draw a large map.

**Jade:** You would give them a book. Then they would draw all the scenes on one corner. Then the other team would draw the scenes of their book on one corner. And it would make a village.

**Anna:** I have an idea. You could look in the library for a new book. Then you could bring it to the school and read it to them. Then if it’s an adventure, they could draw pictures of places they’ve never been before. (Interview, April 7, 2010)

The students’ enthusiasm for drawing in response to the picture books was remarkable. Perhaps the most engaging collaborative activities in this study centred on the story mapping activity with the text *Have you seen*
Josephine? Prior to starting the activity, the teacher modeled the story mapping by drawing on the board. After working on this activity in English, the students were so enthusiastic that they asked their French teacher if they could do it again by asking “Est-ce qu’on peut le faire encore? C’était le fun!” Miss Goodman celebrated the work of the students by displaying the maps on the classroom bulletin board.

The students’ enthusiasm for collaborative activities, and especially drawing in response to literature was also evident in the interviews. I had observed that Amanda and Thomas were especially engaged and collaborative on the day they worked on their story map. As Amanda and Thomas poured over the picture of the bridge, they attempted to draw a picture like Poulin’s that demonstrated the perspective of looking down from a higher level. In the interview, they told me this was their favourite activity.

**Heather:** The map. OK, what did you like about that?

**Amanda:** Well, I liked to do every detail that I saw in the book. I liked drawing because I’m really good at it and I just liked the drawing part. (Interview, April 7, 2010)

My findings demonstrate that students benefit from having the opportunity to read and respond to quality children’s literature in French and English language arts classrooms. Class discussions about the texts enabled the students to hear different perspectives and to voice their own opinions. Students constructed meaning by responding to books through speaking,
writing and visually representing. The class discussions and activities that I observed indicated that picture books provide children with interesting and relevant topics of discussion, enabling children and teachers to negotiate language and meaning.

5.3 Aesthetic experiences with picture books

While they listened to the stories, students shared their thoughts and interpretations of both the text and the illustrations in the books. I found that students responded to the pictures by participating in conversation in which they expressed original ideas. The students’ engagements with the aesthetic elements of the texts were particularly telling.

In an interview with Hassan, a Grade 3 student at École Michâelle Jean, he told me that he especially appreciated the images of the book If you’re not from the prairie. 

Heather: Hassan, what was your favourite book?

Hassan: They’re all good. But the one I liked the most was If you’re not from the prairie because it has nice pictures. It looks like 3D a little. (Interview, March 25, 2010) 

Hassan also explained that he liked listening to his teacher read picture books. He related to the sensory details expressed in the text and images of Le Montréal de mon enfance. For Hassan, listening to the stories being read aloud contributed to his aesthetic experience with the books.

Hassan: I like it because when you see it, it looks hot, it’s warm in winter.
Heather: It’s warm inside?

Hassan: Yeah, like when you read it. It’s snowy, ok, outside. It’s going to be more fun.

Heather: Do you like when your teacher reads books to your class?

Hassan: Yeah, but if I had my warm blanket it would be more…

Heather: Cozy?

Hassan: Yeah, and with my pajamas! (Interview, March 25, 2010)

In an interview with Hannah, she expressed that her favourite book was also If you’re not from the prairie, and it was the illustrations in the book that appealed to her. Although she told me that she was not an avid reader, she enjoyed hearing books read by the teacher.

Hannah: Well, I liked the pictures.

Heather: Ok, what do you like about the pictures?

Hannah: Well, it looks very realistic and the colours in the sky.

Heather: Do you like when your teacher was reading it to you in English and in French?

Hannah: I don’t like reading books, but I like when my teacher reads it to me.

Heather: Ok, do you like when she reads picture books?

Hannah: Well I sort of get bored if the book doesn’t have any pictures. It’s not that fun.

Susan: Why do you like it more when your teacher reads to you?

Hannah: Well, sometimes when I read a book I don’t understand, sometimes they use long words I don’t understand. And normally when a teacher will read it and there’s a long word she’ll explain what
it is. But when you read your own book you don’t know what it is.  (Interview, April 7, 2010)

Amanda and Thomas also shared that they enjoyed the aesthetic experience of listening to stories.

**Amanda:** I always like being read to. I always just sit and stare and even if it’s a story that I don’t usually read. Like let’s say Princess stories because I don’t really read them anymore, but I still listen to them and I always like them usually.

**Thomas:** I like it because when she reads it I get my own pictures in my head. But when I read it I don’t usually I’m more concentrated on the book and I don’t really get the pictures in my head. So when the other people read it I get the pictures in my head!  (Interview, April 7, 2010)

Antonio de Thomasis includes sensory details in *The Montreal of my childhood* as he describes the weather, the smells, sounds, and tastes of childhood, bringing each page to life in the eyes of the children. This visual text certainly offered an aesthetic reading experience for the students as they imagined what life was like in Montreal in the past.

“*Les hivers de mon enfance étaient froids. Chaque semaine, le lavage comportait de longues combinaisons de flanelle. Nos mères les suspendaient elles-mêmes à la corde à linge, mais elles avaient besoin d’aide pour les rentrer. Par temps très froid, ces lourds sous-vêtements figeaient immédiatement et tombaient dans la neige dès qu’on tirait la corde.*”  (de Thomasis, 1994, p. 35)

In his description of a cold Montreal winter of the 1940’s, Antonio de Thomasis describes how his mother used to hang laundry outdoors even on cold winter days. As the title of this part of his book is “*Nous avions de*
veritables hivers,” the teacher asked the student to think about whether their grandparents share stories of their own childhood winter’s such as “Est-ce que vous avez déjà entendu grandmaman dire ‘moi, quand j’étais petite là, on avait de la neige...” . This introduction to the story helped to activate the children’s prior knowledge and to situate the story in the context of the same time period as their grandparents’ childhood.

Madame Catherine asked her class “Pourquoi elle mettait sur la corde à linge et pas dans la secheuse?” and Mariana responded “Parce que ça n’existait pas!” Here, the painting by de Thomasis portrays the bitter cold as one can see a young boy helping his mother to carry in the frozen long underwear, with icicles hanging down. When the teacher showed the picture of the frozen long underwear, one of the students remarked that it was the same picture as the cover page. With each of the books that we read, the students were very observant of such details, and were pleased to be able to tell the teacher that they recognized the picture from the cover of the book.

It was evident in my observation that the students were engaged with both the pictures and words of Poulin’s Have you seen Josephine? While the teachers read the story, the students looked carefully to see where the cat was hiding on each page. This participation demonstrated that they were entering the world of the story, and by joining Daniel in his search for the cat, they were having a “lived experience” with the text.
In *Have you seen Josephine*? Daniel’s father takes him onto the bridge to look for the cat. This part of the story enabled the children to think about perspective, as the illustrations show the view of the neighbourhood from the top of the bridge. Some students spoke of their own memories of looking down from a bridge. For example, Hassan told the class that he had watched the fireworks on the Jacques Cartier bridge in Montreal. The interaction of the words and images of the text and picture enabled the children to understand Daniel’s excitement about seeing his city from the top of the bridge.

*I like looking down from the bridge.  
We often walk up there, even when I’m not looking for Josephine.  
We can see everything everywhere, all the streets and houses.* (Poulin, 1985, p. 10)

Students liked talking about their favourite parts in the stories. While Amanda worked with Thomas to talk about different elements of *As-tu vu Josephine*? in French, she said that the most interesting part of the book was “*Le pont! Il peut voir toute la ville.*”

In my interviews with the students, I found that they identified with the feelings and emotions that the author conveyed through the pictures. When Chloe, at École Gabrielle Roy discussed her favourite books, which were by Stéphane Poulin, she described the details in the pictures that appeal to her.

**Heather:** You could tell me what you like about the pictures.
**Chloe:** Well, I like this part where he finds Josephine. Josephine is sticking her paw out of his desk. That’s my favourite part!

**Heather:** How do you think Daniel feels there?

**Chloe:** He feels worried that he’s going to get into trouble.

Heather: How would you feel?

**Chloe:** I would feel scared too! (Interview, March 26, 2010)

Another student, Simon, at École Michaëlle Jean, also commented on the illustrator’s ability to portray emotions through the pictures in the story.

**Heather:** What did you think about the pictures Samuel?

**Simon:** Well, the author drew a lot of good pictures! Like, he really did the emotions well.

**Heather:** What kind of emotions?

**Simon:** Like being scared or surprised.

(Interview, March 25, 2010)

In the interviews, many of the students commented that they liked hearing their teachers read aloud and they especially enjoyed looking at the pictures in the books. Many of the students told me that they appreciated the artwork in the picture books. These findings revealed that when students have the opportunity to read aesthetically in school, they benefit by gaining an appreciation for literature as a form of art that addresses universal themes.

**Heather:** What did you like about it?

**Jade:** All the pictures. It was beautiful.

**Anna:** Me, it’s that we learned about life. And I loved all the pictures. They were amazing how they drew them. (Interview, April 7, 2010)
5.4 Making personal connections

In strong summer winds, the grains and grass bend
And sway to a dance that seems never to end.
It whispers its secrets—they tell of this land
And the rhythm of life played by nature’s own hand.

If you’re not from the prairie
You’ve never heard grass. (Bouchard, 1993)

When Miss Goodman read the above passage from the book and showed the picture of two children sitting in the grassy field, she asked the students if they had ever heard grass. The students replied, without hesitation, that they had, indeed, heard grass. By acknowledging that they understood what the author was describing, the students were engaging with the text. Many of the students were impressed by the painting of the two children speaking together that was entitled “Sharing Secrets.” The children entered the world of the book as they acknowledged that sharing secrets and listening to the sounds of nature is also something that they like to do.

In the ensuing discussion, Amélie and Chloe made a Venn diagram comparing life in Quebec and in the prairies. They drew on ideas from David Bouchard and made their own personal connection to the book by discussing the relevance to their own lives. In their discussion, Amélie and Chloe make reference to the painting of two children in If you’re not from the prairie that is titled “Sharing Secrets.” In the following excerpt from the transcribed audio-
recording, Amélie and Chloé engaged with the text as they thought about their own lives.

Amélie: Regarde. OK, now let’s look for information!

Chloe: Oh, sharing secrets.

Amélie: Sharing secrets, we do that everywhere.

Chloe: No, we put that in the prairie.

Amélie: Heather, for sharing secrets that could go everywhere?

Heather: OK. So in the middle. Do you share secrets?

Amélie and Chloe: Yeah!

Amélie: With my best friend.

Heather: With your best friend?

Amélie: We even told our password for our MSN. She told me her password for MSN so if she forgets it, I know it, and she knows mine! (January 26, 2010)

The students reflected on unique aspects of their own province of Québec, and worked in pairs to make mind maps that included all of their ideas about a particular season. In Miss Goodman’s class, the students helped the teacher to think about many ideas related to summer in Quebec. The discussion was lively and animated as the students contributed to the discussion, and the teacher wrote their ideas on the board. This demonstration provided a model for students to follow. When Emmanuelle and Charles worked on their map, they decide to focus on spring. As we see in the next excerpt, Charles drew on his prior experience of the sugar shack, a
traditional springtime activity in Quebec. In this excerpt, the teacher encourages the student as he expresses his ideas about spring. She also provides scaffolding as she tells him the English word for cabane à sucre.

Charles: ...When do we go to uh, the uh, uh, wait, I forget. It’s been a long time we didn’t go, um, cabane à sucre?

Miss Goodman: Yeah, sugar shack.

Charles: Yeah, sugar shack.

Miss Goodman: Good! That’s a good one! (January 26, 2010)

Students related parts of the stories to aspects of their own personal lives. In The Montreal of my childhood de Thomasis describes the warmth of being in the shed or cabane in winter, where they would tie up their skates at the corner ice rink. When the author describes his memory of a terrible smell in the shack, the result of a Chiclet someone had thrown on the stove, the teacher asked the class if they knew what Chiclets are and one of the girls in the class, Mariana, related her own personal experience and culture to the book by saying “Au Chile, il y a des Chiclets!” I observed that the children were comfortable sharing their thoughts as they received encouragement from their teacher.

Journal writing is a way for students to talk about their personal life experiences. When students have the choice to write about a topic that is meaningful, they can explore language expression through personal writing.

In response to The Montreal of my childhood, Emmanuelle wrote in her journal
about her favourite pastime, playing on a hockey team. In an interview I had with her father, he told me that her first language was English, but she has really been raised bilingually speaking both English and French. Her activities outside of school, including hockey, often take place bilingually. She speaks both English and French with her family. It is important to note that the journal was not corrected by the teacher; this was a free writing activity. Students did have a chance to share with the class, and Emmanuelle was very proud to read her entry presented in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3 Journal entry by Emmanuelle (February 17, 2010)
Children also made personal connections as they inquired about their own family history through interviews. In a class discussion, Hardeep shared with the class that her grandparents from Pakistan spoke Punjabi and Urdu. In the interview she conducted with her grandparents, she learned that in their childhood they planted rice and wheat crops. She also discovered that they played cricket and field hockey when they were young. When Hardeep shared this information with the class, Hassan raised his hand to tell the class that his grandparents came from the same country and spoke the same languages, and they also planted rice and wheat crops. In an interview with Hardeep’s mother, she explained that maintaining Punjabi and Urdu at home was a priority, so that she may be able to maintain her cultural identity and communicate with her family in Pakistan. While Hardeep’s first language is English, they also speak Punjabi and Urdu at home. She also attends an Arabic school bi-weekly so that she may read the Koran. Hardeep also enjoys watching Bollywood films in Hindi, which her mother said shares similarities with Urdu. Hardeep’s mother hopes that her daughter will be able to study Urdu when she eventually attends university.

The inquiry-based approach to learning enabled all of the students to discover more about the cultural and linguistic heritage of their peers, as other students also shared information about their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. For example, students shared stories about their grandparents
speaking heritage languages including Greek, Portuguese, Italian and Bengali. Minority students are empowered when they have the opportunity to express their cultural and linguistic heritage. In today’s classrooms with increasingly diverse students, there are many opportunities for students to learn from one another as they discuss and share stories of their cultural heritage. The diversity of students enriches the classroom discussion. Gregory (2002) suggests that teachers should give minority students and families a voice in education. The family interview in this project enabled students to feel a sense of pride in their own cultural heritage and to acknowledge the diversity of students in their classroom. Hardeep smiled when she told me that it was fun to call her grandparents on the phone to conduct the interview with them. This positive response leads me to believe that families should have more opportunities to be involved in schools, through multicultural and multilingual projects that acknowledge and effectively respond to diversity within the school community.

The stories Have you seen Josephine? and Catch that cat! were well-liked by the students. It seemed that the children’s familiarity with the characters in the texts contributed to their enjoyment of the stories. Many of the students appreciated the elements of surprise and humour in the books. The children also connected with the boy in the story who is looking for his cat as many of
the children have pets of their own. Sandra described her favourite books as those written by Stephan Poulin.

**Sandra:** I like both *Josephine* and *Catch that cat!* Cause I have a cat at home. She’s two years old. Her name is Bella. I’m not sure when her birthday is, but we got her in the summer so we’re going to have it then! (Interview, April 7, 2010)

Having the opportunity to read and respond to books in two languages encouraged the students’ capabilities to communicate in both French and English. The picture books by Québec authors and illustrators Stéphane Poulin and Antonio de Thomasis situated the students in the multilingual context of Québec. For example, while she was working on her story map, Layla, a francophone student looked at the English version of *Have you seen Josephine?* and pointed out to me that some of the words on the buildings were written in French. In her story map shown in Figure 5.2, she included the French words on the stores *Chez Clara* and *Katz Poisson Frais.*

![Figure 5.3: Story Map Katz Poisson Frais by Layla and Miles (March 11, 2010)](image-url)
5.5 Talking about literature

While the students were able to relate to the stories, they also told me about other books that they like reading. The interviews provided an opportunity for students to express their opinions about books. Through the interviews, I learned that many of the children read various books depending on their personal tastes and interests. I was able to observe that the students liked talking about their reading preferences. Throughout the project, the students often showed me books that they were reading. In the interviews, many of the students articulated their reading interests. The following examples illustrate the students’ interest in reading a variety of children’s literature.

**Heather:** Hassan, what did you think about reading books from Montreal?

**Hassan:** It’s nice. Sometimes when it’s winter, it’s cold. It’s very cold! But I like other books like alien books, math books, and geographics [sic]. I like math books too because I want to be an inventor. I always take these books. I’ll show you *(Hassan walked to the bookshelf to pick up a book)*.

**Heather:** We’re in the library. It’s a good place to look at books. Ok, the encyclopedia.

**Hassan:** Yeah. I like these books! They show you everything. It’s scientific. Like the pyramids, it’s about Egypt. *(He was leafing through the pages of an encyclopedia.)* *(March 25, 2010)*
Through the discussions with students and observations in the class, I was able to learn that they enjoyed reading a wide variety of children’s literature. Many of the students at École Gabrielle Roy commented that they liked mystery stories, as they were currently reading and writing mystery stories in English class. The students also told me that they liked to read a variety of genres including information books, comic books, fairy tales, fantasy, and sports magazines.

**Amanda:** I like mysteries. And I like books where I learn stuff, like this book right here...it’s like full of things about science. And it actually teaches you about science. You know how you put a Mentos in the Pepsi and it explodes. It teaches you how to do that. It also teaches you how to do a balloon that’s on fire, but it doesn’t get out.

**Thomas:** I like mysteries and I like books about sharks. I like sharks a lot. I like the books that are step by step to draw. (Interview, April 7, 2010)

The students at both schools visited the library each week to take out books in English and French. They also borrowed books from the classroom libraries. Some students also told me that they frequented the public library to borrow books. It is clear that having a wide range of texts is important in order to foster children’s appreciation of reading for pleasure.

Among the books most commonly mentioned by students were the series *Geronimo Stilton* (Stilton) and *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Kinney). *Geronimo Stilton* is a series of books about the adventures of a mouse named Geronimo, originally written in Italian and translated into many European
languages. *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* is a humorous series of books about a young boy’s experiences at home and school. Although these are chapter books, they also include graphic details such as pictures and various types of font that are visually appealing.

Many of the parents told me that their children read in both English and French at home. Some children also read in other languages. Sandra, for example, attends a Portuguese language school on Saturdays and likes to read the books in Portuguese.

### 5.6 Collaboration

The students engaged in collaborative work while they were involved with various literature-based activities. Here, I will provide examples of the collaboration that occurred in the language arts classrooms. It appeared that the students enjoyed reading the books in both languages and working on tasks that connected French and English language arts facilitated the collaboration among students. The collaborative nature of the tasks in the biliteracy project enabled students to combine their linguistic resources. As the children assisted one another, and also received assistance from their teachers, they worked within the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Throughout the project, it was very interesting to observe the interaction of students in both languages. The excerpt below is from an
interview with Jon and Malcolm at École Gabrielle Roy. When I spoke with their parents, I found out that Jon speaks mainly English at home and Malcolm speaks French at home. Both of them enjoyed having the opportunity to work together and help each other in French and English language arts. From the beginning of the project this pair of students was eager to participate. Here, the express their thoughts about the biliteracy project:

Heather: OK, what did you think about reading the stories in both languages, in English and French?

Jon: I think that it’s different and funner because it helps you understand the English and French.

Malcolm: La même affaire. Ça t’aide à parler en anglais et en français.

Susan: I just wanted to know what you thought about working with people in general. Were you able to help each other or learn something from each other?

Malcolm: Oui, Jon, puis moi, on l’a fait. Moi, je l’aidais en français et lui il m’aidait en anglais.

Susan: OK, comment?

Jon: Uh, I speaked in English and he speaked in French.

(Interview, April 7, 2010)

In response to the book If you’re not from the prairie, Hassan and Patrick worked together to brainstorm ideas for a winter poem, following the guidance of the teacher who first led the class in a collaborative brainstorming before asking the students to work in pairs. According to his
father, Hassan speaks a mixture of Urdu and Punjabi at home with his parents, and English and French with his friends at school. Hassan is invested in his academic work at school and likes to learn. According to his teachers, Paul is a student who requires more support in his academic work. He told me that he speaks mainly English at home, and French and English with his friends. Hassan and Paul worked together on all of their activities in class during the biliteracy project. Their interactions were collaborative as they scaffolded one another’s ideas in order to make a list of words related to hot chocolate.

**Hassan:** Let’s do hot chocolate!

**Patrick:** Hot Chocolate!

**Hassan:** Hot chocolate. We need marshmallows.

**Patrick:** Yeah, marshmallows.

**Hassan:** Milk.

**Patrick:** Yeah. Sugar.

**Hassan:** Yeah.

**Patrick:** Ummm. Cup.

**Hassan:** Cup! Finished!

**Miss Jones:** Ok, hands up who would like to share their work! Hassan!

**Hassan:** OK...hot chocolate: marshmallows, milk, sugar, heat and cup. (*with enthusiasm*)

**Heather:** Very nice!
Hassan: Steam, we need steam! *(whispering to Patrick while writing)*

(February 4, 2010)

Throughout this collaborative activity, I observed that Hassan motivated his partner, Patrick, to participate and to contribute ideas. Both students were engaged in the dialogue. Although Patrick’s teachers described him as being easily distracted, he was focussed and able to successfully work with his partner on this collaborative effort. Both of the students listened to each other and accepted each other’s ideas while they were brainstorming words related to hot chocolate. This is an example of “collective scaffolding” (Donato, 1994) as through speaking with one another the two students were able to complete the task. The students referred to their brainstorming list of words as they worked writing a poem in the next class. In the French class, the students learned about metaphors, adjectives, and personification. Hassan and Patrick decided to write their poem about the fall, describing the beauty of the changing colours of Québec trees in autumn. They received scaffolding from their French teacher during the writing process, as she modelled for them and also answered their questions.

*L’automne au Québec, les feuilles rouges comme les pommes.*
*L’automne au Québec, les feuilles jaunes comme les citrons.*
*L’automne au Québec, les feuilles oranges comme les carottes.*
*L’automne au Québec, les feuilles tombent de l’arbre comme la pluie.*
*L’automne, les feuilles sont comme nous.* (Poem by Hassan and Patrick, February 10, 2010)
In response to *If you’re not from the prairie*, the children were encouraged to relate the book to their own lives by thinking and writing about their personal experience of nature and seasons in Quebec. The poem below, a list of reasons why they like summer in Quebec, was composed by Sonia and Mohammad. Sonia and Mohammad are both active students in the class, and participate often in class discussions.

As they worked on their ideas, they received feedback from their teacher. The teacher provided them with a lot of feedback for this draft, although the children did not correct all of their spelling and grammar in the final version. In the poem in Figure 5.4, the last words are missing, although they wrote in the draft copy *faire de la bicyclette*. The teacher commented that children require a great deal of time and scaffolded support as they engage in the writing process. The students’ writing provided an opportunity to express their own ideas about what makes summer special in Québec.
Following the reading of *The Montreal of my childhood*, the students worked on interviewing a family member to find out about their childhood. This activity enabled students to learn about their family history and culture and share with the class. I found that during this activity, the students were very proud to share about their own families’ languages, culture and history.

**Hassan:** My grandmother’s from Pakistan. Where did your grandma live? I mean your dad?

**Patrick:** My dad lived in Quebec.

**Hassan:** My grandmother speaks Punjabi and Urdu. What’s yours?

**Patrick:** English.

**Hassan:** OK, in summer, the ‘*basant*’ is a kite flying festival. The winter is quiet.
Patrick: Mine is the summer because we can do whatever we want.

Hassan: What my grandmother liked to play was hide and seek. And she played more indoors because it was more safe and fun. What’s yours?

Patrick: My dad, he liked to get some fresh air.

Hassan: What did he play? What was his favourite game to play?

Patrick: His favourite game to play was tag. (February 25, 2010)

In their discussion, Patrick and Hassan demonstrate that they are engaged in a collaborative discussion. This conversation enables both of the children to share information about their family. Hassan was excited to share his story about the Basant kite festival that his grandmother remembered from her childhood in Pakistan. Throughout the discussion, they were both focused and eager to participate. This was an opportunity to share information that is personally and culturally relevant to the students own lives. Some of the students commented that when they do collaborative work, they would like to choose their own partners. While most of the students liked to participate in collaborative work, some students also mentioned that at certain times they also liked to work individually. Hassan explained why he liked both group and individual work.

Hassan: I like doing both. Sometimes I like doing it alone because if the kid isn’t doing his what he’s supposed to do. Sometimes I want to work alone. Sometimes I need to think a lot. Sometimes the other kid is telling me what to do. That’s why I prefer both. (Interview, March 25, 2010)
5.7 Summary

In this chapter, I have described my findings related to students’ explorations and engagements with picture books. My findings demonstrate that picture books provide a myriad of opportunities for immersion students to engage in stimulating conversations, inquiry, and aesthetic reading experiences. Collaborative activities following the readings enabled students experiences to the literature. The biliteracy project enhanced the literary experiences for the children while they enjoyed the richness and beauty of both languages through story book read-alouds.
Chapter Six: Engagement with picture books in immersion classrooms

The key is curiosity and it is curiosity that we model. As we seek to learn more about the child, we demonstrate the acts of observing, listening, questioning and wondering. When we are curious about the child’s words and our responses to those words, the child feels respected. (Paley, 2007, p. 157)

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapters presented qualitative descriptions of the teachers’ and students’ experiences with literature in immersion classrooms as they participated in a biliteracy project. This project was developed by the researchers to promote collaboration and an appreciation of literature in two languages. The discussion and conclusion chapter will present a synthesis of my findings related to my research questions focused on the experiences of students and teachers co-constructing meaning through literature-based pedagogy. I will discuss the students’ and teachers’ experiences with picture books and collaborative learning in the bilingual context of the present study in Québec. Finally, I will share my concluding thoughts on the implications for pedagogy and future research in language and literacy in immersion classrooms.

6.2 Teachers’ experiences with literature and collaboration

The present study demonstrated the value of literature-based pedagogy in immersion classrooms. As reported in Chapter 4, the teachers in my study acknowledged in the beginning of the project that reading aloud
was beneficial, although it was something that they felt they would like to do more often. Throughout the project, I was able to observe the pleasure and level of engagement that was experienced by the students and teachers reading and responding to picture books. When students and teachers read in two languages the literary experiences of the classroom communities were enhanced through enriching discussions and extended activities that fostered an appreciation for literature in both English and French. Reading and responding to picture books in both languages added to the literary experiences of the children as they made connections across languages. As reported earlier, the teachers commented that the students were fascinated with the images in the text and they were eager to participate. The sense of joy and excitement generated by reading aloud from picture books indicates that authentic literature has the power to transform classrooms into platforms for dialogue and lively conversation to occur.

As I described in my findings related to the classroom observations and interviews with teachers, the creativity and enthusiasm of the teachers ignited the students’ interest and appreciation for literature. For the experienced teachers in the study, they were able to put into practice ideas from recent professional development workshops related to reading, such as visualising and connecting to texts. Also, Miss Goodman, in her first year of teaching, was pleased when she found that the literature and extended
activities transformed the classroom into an engaged classroom community. She was able to draw on her knowledge from her university language arts classes so that stories became a central component of her classroom; her approach to teaching with literature was clearly engaging for the students as they read mystery stories and worked on writing their own. For the students and teachers in this bilingual context, the books provided a unique opportunity to talk about language within the context of stories. Imagination and creativity are central to language arts teaching; it was evident in my observations that the teachers and students entered the world of the visual texts through their participation in the read-alouds and ensuing discussions.

Collaboration

As reported in Chapters 4 and 5, the teachers and students in this study worked together on responding to the literature through various activities including sharing ideas, writing and drawing. While the students worked collaboratively on language arts activities, they were able to “collectively scaffold” (Donato 1994) one another. The teachers provided scaffolding to students through modeling, guiding and questioning. In this bilingual context, the teachers were able to draw on the resources of the bilingual students by having them contribute to discussions about language, such as providing their definitions of vocabulary in the picture books. As I reported in Chapter 4, when teachers modelled for students the use of venn
diagrams and brainstorming, they also demonstrated for students how to think about language and organize ideas for writing. These organizational skills transferred across languages as students worked on their literature responses in English and French.

Literature-based pedagogy in this bilingual context enhanced the opportunities for creative and collaborative work in response to the texts. Teachers encouraged students to use language to ask questions, make predictions, formulate opinions, and articulate their ideas in response to the picture books. Lyster (2007) proposed that “scaffolded interaction with its many opportunities for learners to negotiate language through content serves to fuse content and language” (p. 137). As reported in Chapter 5, when Madame Catherine provided feedback to her students on their poetry, the students were able to extend their abilities in French writing. While she worked with her students, Madame Catherine was able to assist students with expressing their ideas in writing a poem. These findings are consistent with research on collaboration in language classrooms that demonstrates the importance of having opportunities to work with others, as summarized by Oxford (1997):

In a community of learners, cultural and linguistic ideas are best shaped through reflective inquiry with other people...who help the
learner negotiate his or her own ZPD, that is the student’s degree of potential under the best conditions. (p. 448)

Madame Catherine told me collaboration is beneficial for the students and also for the teachers: “Même pour nous c’est mieux parce que travailler toute seule c’est difficile.” Although collaborating on literature-based projects also requires a commitment of time and planning by the teachers, the benefits for the classroom community are infinite.

6.3 Students’ experiences with literature and collaboration

This study sheds light on the experiences that students have in reading and responding to literature in immersion classrooms. My observations in the French and English language arts classrooms, as well as the interviews with students and teachers revealed that the students in the present study were eager to participate in discussions about literature. I was able to observe that the students had a sense of joy when they made connections in both languages during the bilingual readings and were familiar with the literature. The students’ aesthetic appreciation and attention to visual details is consistent with Coulthard’s finding that picture books offer for language learners the “potential for accessing deeper layers of meaning through the interpretation of both word and image and the spaces in between” (2003, p. 189).
The students in the present study in two immersion classrooms had an aesthetic experience with picture books and they were able to connect the books to their own realities through the use of imagination (Greene, 1995). As I reported in my findings, the conversations in French and English language arts contributed to a co-construction of meaning as well as increased language awareness for the students in this bilingual context. As I reported in Chapter 5, the students we interviewed told me that they enjoyed listening to their teacher read aloud in both French and English classes. Many of the students, even those who were not avid readers, commented that they like to listen to the teachers’ use of expression while reading and to look at the details in the illustrations. My findings indicate that listening to stories is valuable for students in immersion. These findings concur with studies that have demonstrated the value of bilingual readings to motivate student participation (Lyster et al., 2009; Rodriguez-Valls, 2009). This study was based on a previous study in the same context (Lyster et al, 2009), in which the stories were motivating for students, but actual teacher collaboration was rare and there were missed opportunities for cross-lingual language learning. The bilingual literacy project activities in this study provided the teachers with the resources to collaborate on language arts activities, and the teachers were able to build on the students’ prior knowledge and experiences in
English and French, respectively. As a result, the students and teachers engaged in highly communicative literacy activities in both languages.

My findings demonstrate that when children turn the pages of a story or listen to a picture book being read, they engage with the narrative and the “experience of art” takes place through this interaction. The children in both immersion classes took pleasure in examining the pictures and exploring the meaning of the visual text through the words and images. Students responded by writing about their own lives in response to the texts, discussing interesting aspects of the books, and working on projects related to the visual texts. The scaffolding provided by their peers and the teachers enabled students to extend their understanding of the texts in both English and French.

Dewey (1934) emphasizes that “the product of art…is not the work of art. The work takes place when a human being cooperates with the product so that the outcome is an experience that is enjoyed because of its liberating and ordered properties” (p. 222). The results of my study demonstrate that taking the time to closely examine the illustrations and text in picture books leads to thought-provoking discussions as students and teachers relate their own experiences while interpreting the stories. The collaborative nature of the read-alouds and extended activities in the biliteracy project enabled the
students to engage deeply with the literature and gain an aesthetic appreciation for the texts.

This study reveals that reading stories in both English and French enables children to become more familiar with the content and make connections across languages. My finding related to the students is consistent with a study by Martinez and Rozer (1985), which showed that repeated readings allow for “divergent responses” and it is through repeated readings that we can “be assured that children will have the opportunity to fully appreciate books as familiar old friends” (p. 786). The experience of responding to literature was empowering for the students in this study as they expressed their unique perspectives through speaking, writing, and visually representing in two languages.

This study reveals that aesthetic reading of picture books is an important aspect of children’s experience in French and English language arts. The results of my study are consistent with the research demonstrating that children are able to appreciate and interpret the complexities of visual texts (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Sipe, 2008). One of the many examples of the children’s attention to detail in the visual text was during the reading of If you’re not from the prairie. As reported in chapter 4, when Miss Goodman read this story to the class, the students noticed the small pictures with titles that appeared on the corners of some pages in the book. The teacher’s willingness
to read the names of the titles initiated a discussion among the students of the text and images, such as the picture of the boy at the creek. This is an example of the students and teachers aesthetically experiencing the verbal and visual text together. My findings concur with Sipe’s statement that, “Once teachers begin taking a close look at the visual material in picture books, they will begin to learn from children, because children tend to notice details that we adults would miss” (Sipe, 2008, p. 231).

While the students worked on the story mapping activity in response to Have you seen Josephine?, it was evident that they took pleasure in recalling specific details from the text to make a map of the story. Working collaboratively on drawing a map enabled the students to articulate ideas and to co-construct their understanding of the text through a discussion and visual representation. The responses from students in my interviews, as many of the students told me they enjoyed this activity the most, demonstrated that children would benefit from having increased opportunities for visual literacy experiences in language arts. As reported in chapter 5, the students at École Gabrielle Roy told their French teacher about the map they had drawn in English and expressed their enthusiasm by asking “Est-ce qu’on peut le faire encore?” As Sipe (2008) noted, “One of the unique affordances of picture books is the rich visual stimulation they provide” (p. 230). In the present study, it was evident that the picture books provided the
children and teachers with the opportunity to engage with the aesthetic
details of the text. As reported in chapter 5, while I observed the students
drawing the maps, I was impressed with their concentration and attention to
detail.

The present study illustrates multiple ways that students made
personal connections to literature. The inquiry-based approach to learning
enabled students to experience the texts, and also to reflect on and explore
aspects of their own lives. In the class discussions and writing activities, the
students made personal connections to the texts. One example of this was
when students interviewed their family members, following the reading of
_The Montreal of my childhood_, and shared about their family histories and
cultures. It was evident that this inquiry-based project contributed to a
greater sense of awareness of the diversity of the students in the classroom as
they shared their family histories.

6.3 Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is that I visited the schools
approximately twice a week over the course of three months during the
bilingual literacy project, and only during language arts classes. While I was
able to establish relationships with the students and teachers in both schools,
I did not experience the whole picture of life in their classrooms as I only
observed the French and English language arts classes. It would be
beneficial to spend more time in the classrooms to gain an understanding of
the integration of language and content across the curriculum. While the
teachers mentioned that they used literature, especially non-fiction texts, in
other subjects, such as science, I was not able to observe this work.

Another limitation to the study is that I was not one of the classroom
teachers, and therefore could not possibly know the students as well as the
teachers. I believe that it would be beneficial to collaborate with teachers on
another research project which would provide time for teachers to be
involved in creating and sharing ideas related to literature-based pedagogy in
this bilingual context. It could also be beneficial for teachers to be involved in
a focus group where they could reflect and discuss their experiences of
teaching language and literacy in the immersion classroom.

6.4 Implications for pedagogy and research

The present study in immersion classrooms has many implications for
pedagogy and future research in language and literacy. In this study, the
teachers mediated the children’s understanding of literature by listening
attentively to the students and encouraging them to respond to texts in
multiple ways, integrating language and content. The study demonstrated
that literature engages immersion students in exploring and developing
creativity through listening, speaking, reading, writing, and visually
representing. As mentioned above, future research in this bilingual context
may further involve French and English teachers in the process of planning and sharing engaging literature-based activities that would foster language and literacy development. In addition, it could be beneficial for novice language arts teachers to be mentored by experienced teachers in immersion schools, thus fostering a sense of community and professionalism in the teaching profession.

When students are actively engaged in learning through the sharing of personal responses to literature and discussing aspects of their own lives, they are able to share aspects of their own cultural and linguistic identities. This study demonstrates that students benefit from bringing in their own cultural and linguistic identity into the classroom. Further research may investigate teachers and students in inquiry-based projects based on explorations of their family histories, cultural and linguistic identities. Ideally, these projects would be ongoing in a school and would involve family and community resources. Investigations of the students’ family histories could begin in the preschool years and continue throughout elementary school. The potential for language learning could also be explored as teachers and students would integrate language and content across the curriculum.

This study revealed that there is a high level of interest in reading and responding to picture books among students and teachers in immersion
classrooms. Future research could further explore the potential for language learning through literature-based pedagogy in this context. Future research in immersion classrooms could examine students’ and teachers’ experiences with a diversity of genres of children’s literature, including multicultural texts, chapter books, and non-fiction texts. Teacher education programs should require future teachers to be familiar with children’s literature and with multiple ways of engaging students with texts. The results of this study illustrate the benefits of literature-enriched classrooms for students and teachers. In a bilingual context, such as the immersion classrooms in this study, literary experiences inspire and motivate students and teachers to reflect, inquire, and explore the world around them as they discuss and relate to visual texts. I hope that this study provides teachers and educational theorists with insight into the value of considering children’s and teachers’ engagements with picture books.
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instructional implications and applications of socio-historical psychology (pp. 175-205). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.


Appendix 1: Semi-structured Interview Questions

Preliminary interview with teachers:

1. How do you teach with literature in your classroom? How often do you read aloud in the class?
2. What are the benefits of reading picture books in the immersion classroom?
3. How do you activate the background knowledge or personal experience that students have while reading a story aloud?
4. What books do students enjoy reading and listening to in the class?
5. How often do you plan group work or collaborative activities?
6. How often do you read aloud in the class?
7. What makes a good book for reading aloud with your students? How do you select texts to read, including various genres (novels, picture books, non-fiction)?
8. Have you collaborated with the French teacher on projects?

French translation of questions

1. Quels sont les avantages de la lecture à haute voix dans une classe d'immersion ?
2. De quels livres les élèves aiment-ils lire et écouter ?
3. Quels moyens prenez-vous pour activer les connaissances préalables ou l'expérience personnelle des élèves pendant une lecture à haute voix ?
4. Quels sont les critères qui vous guident dans le choix des textes (récits, poèmes, romans pour enfants) pour vos classes ?
5. À quelle fréquence organisez-vous des activités collaboratives en classe ?
6. À quelle fréquence faites-vous la lecture à haute voix à vos élèves ? Avez-vous déjà fait une lecture « bilingue » à vos élèves en collaboration avec leur professeur d'anglais/français ?
7. Quel type de livres préférez-vous lire à haute voix à vos élèves ? Quel genre de livres préfèrent-ils ? Qu’est-ce qui vous guide dans le choix d’un livre à lire à haute voix ?
8. Avez-vous déjà collaboré avec le professeur d’anglais sur des projets dans le passé?
Follow-up interview questions for teachers:

1. Tell me about your impressions of the bilingual picture books. Did you have a favourite?
2. What was it about that book(s) that you and the students enjoy?
3. How did the students respond to the picture books If you’re not from the prairie, The Montréal of my childhood, and Have you seen Josephine?
4. How do you elicit responses from students when discussing the picture books?
5. Do students make connections with across the books and languages?
6. Do you feel that the students in your class learn from one another through the collaborative language activities with the literature?
7. Do you plan to continue reading picture books, bilingually or by the same authors, in your classroom?
8. Would you like to try different activities with other picture books?

French translation

1. Quel sont vos impressions des livres illustrés? Lequel est votre livre favoris?
2. Qu’est-ce que vous et vos élèves avez apprécié dans les livres illustrés?
3. Comment est-ce que les élèves ont aimé les livres illustrés Si tu n’es pas de la prairie, Le Montréal de mon enfance, As-tu vu Joséphine?
4. Quels moyens prenez-vous pour encourager la participation des élèves pendant une lecture à haute voix ?
5. Est-ce que les élèves ont fait des liens entre les livres et les langues?
6. Pensez-vous que les élèves apprennent ensemble pendant les activités collaboratives?
7. Est-ce que vous aimeriez lire d’autres livres d’une façon bilingue ou par les mêmes auteurs?
8. Aimerez-vous essayer les activités différentes avec les livres illustrés?
Appendix 2: Semi-structured Student Interview Questions

1. What book did you enjoy reading the most during the class activities? What was your favourite book read during the project? Tell me about that book. What did you like about that book? What was the best/most interesting part about the book?

2. What activity did you enjoy in language arts while we worked on the books?

3. Was it helpful to work with a partner on the book activities and projects? Did you help each other with English and French? How?

4. What did you like most about working with a partner?

5. Do you prefer working with a partner or working individually?

6. What was difficult about working together? How did you solve any problems?

7. How do you feel about reading the picture books in two languages, French and English, with your teachers? What do you like about it?

8. Do you like reading? What books do enjoy? Do you read at home? Do you read in French or English or both?

9. Would you like to read more books by the same author(s)?

10. Would you like to do more projects with a partner in French and English class?

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2. Quelle était ton activité préférée durant le projet? (Pour leur rafraîchir la mémoire, nommez quelques-unes de ces activités.)

3. Est-ce que tu penses que tu as aidé ton partenaire à apprendre de nouvelles choses en anglais/français?

4. Comment as-tu aimé faire le travail d’équipe?

5. Est-ce que tu préfères travailler par toi-même ou avec ton partenaire?

6. Est-ce que le fait de travailler avec ton partenaire a rendu les activités plus faciles ou plus difficiles à faire?

7. Est-ce que tu aimes ça quand tes professeurs d’anglais et de français te lisent les livres illustrés à haute voix? Pourquoi?

8. Aimes-tu faire la lecture? Quel genre de livres aimes-tu lire? Tu fais la lecture en quelle langue(s)?

9. Est-ce que tu aimerais lire d’autres livres par les mêmes auteurs?

10. Est-ce que tu aimerais faire d’autres projets collaboratifs?
Appendix 3: Parent Interview questions

1. What do you consider to be your child’s first language?
2. What languages do you speak with your child? If you speak more than one language, what percentage of time do you speak each language at home?
3. What languages do other adults living in the home speak with your child? If they speak more than one language, what percentage of time do they speak in those languages?
4. Does your child have siblings or other young family members living at home? What language(s) do they speak together?
5. What languages are the TV channels and films that your child watches and the radio stations he or she listens to?
6. Does your child like reading? What types of books does he or she enjoy?
7. Do you read with your child? What languages do you read in together? What types of books do you read together?
8. What languages does your child speak with his or her friends?
9. Does your child participate in other clubs or extra-curricular activities? What languages are spoken during these activities?

1. Quelle langue considérez-vous être la langue maternelle de votre enfant ? Quelle(s) langue(s) parlez-vous ? Quelle(s) langue(s) parlent les autres adultes habitant avec vous ?
2. Quelle(s) langue(s) parlez-vous avec votre enfant ? Si vous lui parlez dans plus d’une seule langue, quel est selon vous la proportion de temps qu’occupe chacune dans vos conversations ?
3. Combien d’adultes y a-t-il à la maison ? Quelle(s) langue(s) parlent-ils avec votre enfant ? Selon vous, quel pourcentage de temps chaque langue occupe-t-elle dans leurs conversations avec votre enfant ?
4. Votre enfant a-t-il des frères et des sœurs ou d’autres jeunes membres de la famille vivant à la maison ? Quelle(s) langue(s) parlent-ils avec votre enfant et quel pourcentage de temps chaque langue occupe-t-elle dans leurs conversations avec votre enfant ?
5. Quelle(s) est(sont) les langue(s) parlée(s) sur les canaux de télévision que votre enfant regarde ? Les stations de radio qu’il écoute ? Les films qu’il va voir ?
6. Votre enfant lit-il par lui-même à la maison ? Si oui, en quelle(s) langue(s) lit-il ? Quel genre de livres votre enfant lit-il (livres illustrés, romans pour enfants, livres documentaires, fiction, poésie) ?
7. Est-ce que vous ou une autre personne à la maison faites la lecture à votre enfant ? Si oui, en quelle(s) langue(s) ? Quel genre de livres lisez-vous à votre enfant (livres illustrés, romans pour enfants) ?
8. Quelle(s) langue(s) votre enfant parle-t-il avec ses amis ?
9. Votre enfant suit-il des cours ailleurs qu’à l’école ou appartient-il à d’autres organisations ? Si oui, quelle langue y est parlée principalement ?
Appendix 4: Letters requesting informed consent

Dear Ms./Mr. X,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our project. As you know, we are asking you and Ms./Mr. Y to read aloud to your students from picture and story books in both French (in the French class) and English (in the English class). Meanwhile, your students will be taught learning strategies that they can use to enhance their language learning when collaborating with other students on content and language activities. You will receive copies of the books to be read as well as a teaching guide containing information on the project’s pedagogical approach, detailed lesson plans on the implementation of the follow-up collaborative activities, and any materials you will need for the lessons.

We would also like to interview you before and after the teaching intervention takes place and to audio tape those interviews. The purpose of this letter is to request your formal consent to participate in these interviews and to allow us to use transcripts of the audio taped interviews for research purposes (For example, in a research presentation or publication). Signing below will give us that permission.

As is appropriate in research studies such as this, neither your name nor even that of the school will be mentioned in any research reports. Important to stress here is that the audio tapes are not for the purpose of teacher evaluation, but rather for the purpose of discussing the use of the pedagogical approach taken in the project.

If you have any questions about this research or would like to withdraw your consent at any time, please feel free to contact Susan Ballinger at 514-769-1906 or Heather Phipps at 514-268-3179. If you have any questions or concerns about your or your child’s rights or welfare as a participant in this research study, please contact the McGill Research Ethics Officer at 514-398-6831.

Sincerely,

Susan Ballinger, McGill University
Heather Phipps, McGill University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consent Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am aware of the purpose of the research project and have agreed to participate.</td>
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Name: __________________________ Signature: __________________________

Email: __________________________ Phone: __________________________
Chère Mme/Cher M. X

Nous vous remercions d’avoir accepté de participer à notre projet de recherche. Comme vous le savez, nous vous demandons, à vous et à Mme/M. Y, de lire à haute voix à vos élèves des extraits de livres illustrés et de récits tant en anglais (dans le cours d’anglais) qu’en français (dans le cours de français). Par ailleurs, vous enseignerez aux élèves des stratégies d’apprentissage qu’ils pourront utiliser pour améliorer leur apprentissage des langues en collaboration avec d’autres élèves au cours d’activités centrées sur le contenu et les aspects linguistiques. Vous recevrez des exemplaires des livres à lire ainsi qu’un guide pédagogique, des plans de leçon détaillés sur la mise en œuvre des activités collaboratives de suivi et tout le matériel dont vous aurez besoin.

Nous aimberions également vous interviewer avant et après l’intervention pédagogique et enregistrer ces entrevues au magnétophone. Cette lettre a pour objet de demander votre consentement formel à participer à ces entrevues et à nous permettre d’utiliser les transcriptions de ces enregistrements à des fins de recherche. (Par exemple, dans des présentations ou des articles.) Votre signature au bas de cette lettre nous donnera cette permission.

Comme c’est le cas dans les projets de recherche de ce genre, ni votre nom ni même celui de l’école ne seront mentionnés dans aucun rapport de recherche. Il convient de souligner que les enregistrements ne seront pas utilisés à des fins d’évaluation de votre enseignement mais plutôt pour évaluer l’utilisation de l’approche pédagogique mise de l’avant dans le cadre du projet.

Si vous deviez avoir des questions concernant le projet de recherche ou voudriez retirer votre consentement, n’hésitez pas à communiquer avec Susan Ballinger au ______________ ou Heather Phipps au ______________.

Cordialement,

Susan Ballinger, Université McGill

Heather Phipps, Université McGill

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**Formulaire de consentement**

J’ai été informé(e) des objectifs du projet de recherche et accepte d’y participer. J’accepte également que les entrevues enregistrées puissent être utilisées à des fins de recherche et d’enseignement.

Nom : ___________________________ Signature : _______________________

Courriel : ________________________ Téléphone : _________________________
Dear Parents or Legal Tutor:

I am pleased to inform you that your child's class has been selected to participate in a research study being conducted in School Board in conjunction with McGill University. As part of their graduate-level research, Susan Ballinger and Heather Phipps are conducting a study in which Mme X and Ms. Y will read aloud to their students from picture and story books in both French (in the French class) and English (in the English class). Meanwhile, students will be taught learning strategies that they can use to enhance their language learning when collaborating with other students on content and language activities. The study has been funded in part by Le Fonds québécois de recherche sur la société et la culture, which will cover the cost of the new books and teaching materials the school will acquire as a result of its collaboration in this study.

The reading-aloud, strategy instruction, and collaborative activities used in this study are considered part of the children’s regular curriculum and have been designed in such a way that students should find them both educational and enjoyable. During the project, some children will be audio taped as they work on the content and language activities. The purpose of this letter is to request your permission to have your child audio taped as he or she completes the content and language activities. Only the researchers and the students being recorded will ever hear the actual audio recordings. These recordings will be transcribed and excerpts of them, as well as any work that your child produces during the project, may be used for research and educational purposes (for example, to illustrate students’ ability to use language strategies in a research presentation or publication). These audio tapings will not be heard or read by the teachers and will not be used to give your child a classroom grade.

If your child is chosen to be audio taped and you give your consent for that to take place, the researchers would also like to ask you for permission to interview and audio tape your child in a brief conversation at the end of the project regarding his or her impression of the bilingual reading experience, strategy instruction, and collaborative learning activities. In addition, we would like to interview you or another parent or guardian regarding your child’s language-learning history and at-home language use. This would be a brief, audio taped telephone interview.

The names of parents, students, teachers, and the school will not be mentioned in any research reports. In addition, your child’s performance will not be evaluated in any way and will not be used by the school in the calculation of your child’s marks. Finally, even if you agree to have your child participate, you or your child may decide at any time to no longer participate in groups being audio taped or interviewed.

If you would like any further information, please call Susan Ballinger at 514-769-1906 or Heather Phipps at 514-268-3179. If you have any questions or concerns about your or your child’s rights or welfare as a participant in this research study, please contact the McGill Research Ethics Officer at 514-398-6831.

Sincerely,

xxxx, Principal

Please return to Mme xxxx before xxxx.

I will allow ________________________________

- to be audio taped during classroom activities Yes___/No____
- to participate in an audio-taped interviews. Yes___/No____

I agree to participate in an audio-taped telephone interview. Yes___/No____

Signature of Parent or Guardian: ________________________________
Chers parents/tuteurs

J’ai le plaisir de vous informer que la classe de votre enfant a été choisie pour participer à un projet de recherche mené conjointement par la Commission scolaire ________ et l’Université McGill. Dans le cadre de leurs études supérieures, Susan Ballinger et Heather Phipps mènent une recherche sous la direction de Dr. Roy Lyster au cours de laquelle Mme X et Mme Y lieront à haute voix à leurs élèves des extraits de livres illustrés et de récits aussi bien en français (dans le cours de français) et en anglais (dans le cours d’anglais). Par ailleurs, on enseignera aux élèves des stratégies d’apprentissage qu’ils pourront utiliser pour améliorer leur apprentissage des langues en collaboration avec d’autres élèves dans le cours d’activités centrées sur le contenu et les aspects linguistiques. Cette étude a été subventionnée par Le Fonds québécois de recherche sur la société et la culture, subvention qui couvrira le coût des livres et du matériel pédagogique que l’école devra se procurer pour participer à la recherche.

La lecture à haute voix, l’enseignement des stratégies d’apprentissage et les activités collaboratives utilisées dans la recherche sont considérés comme faisant partie du programme régulier des élèves et ont été conçus de telle manière que les élèves les trouveront à la fois agréables et instructifs. Durant le projet, certains enfants seront enregistrés au magnétophone au cours de leurs activités portant sur le contenu et la langue.

Cette lettre a pour objet de vous demander la permission que votre enfant soit enregistré au magnétophone à l’occasion de ces activités. Seuls les chercheurs et les élèves enregistrés écouteront ces enregistrements. Ces enregistrements seront transcrits et des extraits, de même que les travaux effectués par votre enfant au cours du projet, peuvent être utilisés à des fins de recherche et d’enseignement (par exemple, dans un article ou un cours, pour illustrer les capacités des élèves à utiliser des stratégies d’apprentissage des langues). Ces enregistrements ne seront ni écoutés ni lus par les enseignants et ne seront pas utilisés pour évaluer votre enfant.

Si votre enfant devait être choisi pour être enregistré au magnétophone et que vous donnez votre consentement pour ce faire, les chercheurs voudraient également obtenir votre permission pour enregistrer une brève entrevue de votre enfant à la fin du projet pour recueillir ses impressions sur la lecture bilingue, l’enseignement des stratégies d’apprentissage et les activités collaboratives. De plus, ils voudraient vous interviewer, vous ou un autre parent ou tuteur, sur l’historique de l’apprentissage linguistique de votre enfant et les langues parlées à la maison. Enregistrée au magnétophone, cette brève entrevue sera faite au téléphone.

Comme cela est le cas dans des études de ce genre, ni le nom des élèves ni même celui de l’école ne seront mentionnés dans les rapports de recherche. En outre, le rendement de votre enfant ne fera l’objet d’aucune évaluation et ne sera pas noté. Enfin, même si vous acceptez que votre enfant participe, vous ou votre enfant pouvez décider à n’importe quel moment de ne plus participer ni aux enregistrements ni aux entrevues.

Pour de plus amples informations, veuillez communiquer avec Susan Ballinger au __________, Heather Phipps au __________ ou avec Roy Lyster au __________.

Cordialement,

xxxx, Directeur

Veuillez retourner à Mme xxxx avant le xxxx.

Je consens à ce que __________________________________

- soit enregistré durant les activités en classe. Oui_____/Non_____
- participe à des entrevues enregistrées. Oui_____/Non_____

Signature du parent ou tuteur :