THE ACCELERATIVE INTEGRATED METHOD:
A DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY

by
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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements of a
Qualifying Research Paper for the degree of Masters of Education
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ABSTRACT
This descriptive case study examines the Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM) in action during the beginning stages of French second language acquisition. Twelve observations of one Grade 3 core French class were conducted over a four-month period at the beginning of the academic year. The teacher and twelve students participated in two semi-structured interviews. Existing theory and research on second language education is also presented to support the theoretical elements and pedagogical approaches of the AIM program.

Results from the classroom observations and interviews suggest that teachers are an integral factor in the launch and ultimate success of the AIM program for beginning language learners. A dual focus on the teacher as facilitator and the learner as active and vocal participant emerged from the observation data. As well, the interviews offered explanations for observed student engagement and willingness to take risks with the target language in this learning environment. The implications of this study for core French pedagogy and future research are also discussed.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend sincere thanks to my faculty advisor, Dr. Sharon Lapkin, for her unfailing support and positive feedback throughout all processes of this research endeavour. I am most appreciative of her detailed insight, consistent availability and continued expertise in this field of study.

I would also like to thank Dr. Antoinette Gagné for being the second reader on this qualifying research paper, and Dr. James Cummins for taking the time to introduce this program to students in his classes, and for encouraging me to pursue this research inquiry.

I am indebted as well to the participant teacher in this study for welcoming me into her classroom, and for being so enthusiastic and accommodating during each stage of this study. Special thanks to Wendy Maxwell, the founder of the AIM program, for her input during the planning stages, and to the students who participated in the study, who truly made it all possible.

To my family and friends who gave me ideas and feedback while listening to me talk about my research project, and who have always supported me in my academic and professional endeavours.

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Overview of Research
1.1 Introduction
Over the last few years, a new systematic approach to the teaching of Core French has been garnering attention from language teachers and other pedagogical enthusiasts from all over the country. The program is called the *Accelerative Integrated Method*, otherwise known simply as AIM, and was developed and documented during the 90s by Wendy Maxwell, a former M.A. student who attended the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. Her ideas and innovations on how to improve the teaching of Core French from the grassroots level using drama and gestures were put to the test in her Masters Research Thesis entitled “*Evaluating the effectiveness of the Accelerative Integrated Method for teaching French as a second language*” (2000). Maxwell conducted diagnostic interviews in French with two groups of students – one AIM group and one control group – to assess and compare their relative fluency levels. Each interview contained a series of scaffolded questioning, beginning with formulaic-type questions and moving to simple more open-ended questions. Lastly, students were requested to demonstrate their ability for sustained speech when asked to select from a variety of puppets and spontaneously create a story with them (Maxwell, 2000). Maxwell’s results demonstrated that the AIM group displayed significantly higher fluency levels than those of the students in the control group, suggesting that perhaps the current core French program should be critically reassessed through the lens of this innovative methodology. Although the merits of the AIM approach are currently being promoted via advertisement for workshops (e.g., “Aim Language Learning”, the AIM program’s official website; Annual conference of the Ontario Modern Language Teacher’s Association, 2004 in Toronto), mainstream journalistic reviews (Hiller, S. - National Post, 2002; Gordon, J. - Ottawa Citizen, 2004) and word of mouth, to date no additional qualitative or quantitative evaluation has been performed on this program besides Maxwell’s own thesis study. While students presently using AIM are apparently achieving great success in terms of functional oral fluency and literacy skills, the program continues to lack the research support that is essential to prompting and legitimizing widespread implementation. From a research standpoint, it would be highly efficient to provide the field of second
language pedagogy with another evaluation of the AIM program, using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Although a more intensive quantitative study would better facilitate a comparative analysis between the AIM program and more traditional language teaching approaches, as well as yielding data that is considered to be more effective for making real changes in education (Hatch, 2002), I believe that it would be essential to precede this type of analysis with a detailed portrayal of how the AIM program unfolds through some of its stages, and how language learners of all levels and ages are reacting to this approach. Including qualitative data collected from interviews with the teacher(s), administrators, parents and students would also provide insights from the players involved in the program’s success. This qualitative research-oriented type of documentation would do well to inform and educate others about the AIM program, to shed some light on the nature of its strengths and weaknesses, and to set the stage for all subsequent quantitative research studies. For the purposes of this research project, it was therefore my intention to analyze the AIM program from this sort of qualitative standpoint.

The rationale for this study is based primarily on my own interest in examining this pedagogical approach from a qualitative perspective. However, it is also rooted in the consistent appeals by researchers that more core French studies need to be conducted where “different program structures or delivery models are examined” (Lapkin, Harley & Taylor, 1993, p.480), and more extensive data is attained concerning “the relative influence of teaching approach on student outcomes, as compared to other factors such as teachers’ L2 use and student input in curriculum decisions” (Turnbull, 1999, p.24).

1.2 Purpose
The purpose of this study is to get a clearer picture of the AIM program in action in a beginning core French classroom at the elementary level. In my opinion, it would be highly beneficial to provide the field of second language pedagogy with a detailed synopsis of how theory and practice come together in the beginning stages of this structured pedagogical approach. This qualitative analysis is aimed at gaining further insight into the reasons behind claims made by teachers who are implementing the AIM program that the quality of student proficiency they have witnessed will revolutionize the way core French is taught in the classroom (Hiller, 2002).

1.3 Research Design & Questions
For this study, I adopted a descriptive case study approach situated within a qualitative
research framework. This methodology allowed for a comprehensive description of teacher and student practices within the AIM classroom, and probed insights, opinions and attitudes that student and teacher participants attributed to their experience with the AIM program. Seven detailed research questions guided my fieldwork:

1) What does an AIM class look like?
(i.e. a basic description of the physical learning environment)

2) What are the characteristics of verbal/nonverbal teacher-student interaction in an AIM classroom?

3) What are the characteristics of verbal/nonverbal student-student interaction in an AIM classroom?

4) What is the teacher’s role in the initial stages of the program?

5) How does the teacher’s role change as the program progresses?

6) How do beginner elementary level students aged 7-8 years initially react to the AIM program in terms of:
   o the gestures?
   o the plays, stories, music and dance?
   o the compulsory use of L2?
   o general attitude towards the French language?

7) What are some of the challenges faced by teachers of the AIM program?

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C HAPTER #2

Pedagogical Framework

2.1 Introduction

The following is a review of the relevant second language theory and research structured around the unique features of the AIM program. While providing theoretical support for the AIM program, this literature review will also help to focus the qualitative inquiry being reported.

The AIM methodology consists of five primary elements. In order to maximize the benefits of this program, it is recommended that all five components be used collectively and not selectively (Maxwell, 2000, 2001, 2004).

2.2 Pared Down Language (PDL)

Vocabulary teaching is one of the most important aspects of second language teaching. Without vocabulary, students are extremely hard-pressed to use the target language at all. In thematically-based core French programs, nouns are the prominent category of vocabulary presented to beginning learners. Alternatively, central to the AIM approach is a functional and working lexicon containing verbs, nouns and expressions that Maxwell
believes is most essential in initial language acquisition. This essential vocabulary for beginning learners was developed using research on the high frequency vocabulary used by
native speakers of the French language (O’Connor DiVito, 1991; Clarke, 1985), and through Maxwell’s own action research on the linguistic needs of beginning L2 students (i.e. language required for classroom life and for interactions). This element of the AIM program works to satisfy what Krashen (1981) deems as the need to create second language learning environments that more closely approximate the conditions of first language acquisition. This approach to merging context and learner needs with the teaching of high-frequency vocabulary also coincides with Nation’s (2001) assertion that “learners should be

learning high frequency words before low-frequency words, except where personal need and interest give importance to what otherwise would be low-frequency words” (p.398).
According to Maxwell, incorporating commonly used verbs into the lexicon is vital to acquiring basic linguistic competence. This is different from the traditional approach to core French teaching, as there are some irregular verbs in the PDL lexicon which are normally not presented in the initial stages of the core French curriculum. The AIM program manages this irregularity by initially presenting all verbs using a “regularized stem” (Maxwell, 2000, p. 17). In this way, for instance, verb forms become phonetically consistent whether they are singular or plural (i.e. “nous” → on, “vous” → tout le monde).

This practical lexicon, in combination with the other components of the program, aims to give beginning language learners the tools to achieve the most basic of communicative skills as quickly and effortlessly as possible.
With repeated exposure to and use of a selected list of vocabulary and linguistic structures in conversation and in contextualized activities, students are constantly learning more about how the language works and how it needs to be assembled in order to make sense. This competence is what Maxwell calls the “critical level of fluency” (Maxwell, 2000, p.16), which she describes as being an awareness of how the language works, and an ability and readiness to learn more new words and grammatical structures of the target language.

2.3 Meaningful contextualization and integration of PDL
Learners of any language must have continuous opportunities to practice the vocabulary they have learned. This works to ensure that enough exposure occurs so that effective acquisition can take place. Stern (1982) addresses this need for meaningful use of the target language in the third syllabus of his multidimensional curriculum, called “communicative activities” (p.40), where the emphasis is on topics and information as
opposed to language only, and where “...the main teaching strategy is one of

communicative action rather than formal language study or rehearsal-type practice. Students become directly involved as participants in some worthwhile activities” (p.41). Besides having ample access to comprehensible input (Krashen, 1981, 1993), students must also feel that the contexts in which they are using the language are valuable and interesting to them. It is for this reason that the PDL described above is integrated into the AIM program through the use of drama, music, literature and dance. These kinds of teaching strategies create a learning environment where students are able to hear, read, speak and manipulate the language while using their imagination at the same time. This type of contextualization of language makes meaning the major focus of the language syllabus, with less emphasis on explicit language teaching. However, following suggestions made by Harley, Allen, Cummins, and Swain (1990), a dual focus on form and meaning emerges as the program progresses where grammar and linguistic elements of the target language are explicitly examined within the context of the literature or play under study. From a content-based instruction standpoint, “integrating language and content, therefore, is not just consistent with communicative language teaching; it is likely to promote the development of communicative competence” (Met, 1999, p.141). Along these lines, Savignon (2002) believes that it is necessary to include drama into a communicative curriculum because it can “provide learners with the tools they need to act – that is, to interpret, express and negotiate meaning in a new language” (p.15). From a sociological point of view, Cummins (1996) also argues that drama and role-playing are a “powerful means of enabling language learning through collaboration and cognitive apprenticeship,” (p.146) and is also highly likely to promote the affirmation of one’s identity. By making the element of dramatic involvement central to a second language methodology, students spontaneously become a part of the literary fiction and an active player in their own language learning. With concrete stories and plays, students are given the opportunity to actively explore alternative language functions and to contribute creatively to their language-learning experience. Booth (1994) describes how drama can empower students simply because “the initiative to communicate is in the hands of the children, and they have some decision-making power concerning what language is appropriate” (p.105). This makes it more likely that learners will be able to apply their language skills to other communicative contexts outside of the language classroom that are more authentic in nature, less context-dependent and more cognitively-demanding (Cummins, 1996). In this way, fostering oral language proficiency from the beginning
provides students with a superb context for cognitive engagement, with the confidence to expand their second language skill-set, and ultimately makes learners feel connected to what is happening in the second language classroom.

2.4 Scaffolded language manipulation activities
In order for students to learn the PDL vocabulary efficiently, it is important that the learner is encouraged to manipulate that vocabulary in many different ways. The AIM program predicts that students will feel fairly confident in their oral proficiency in the target language after only a few weeks (Maxwell, 2001). By this rationale, it is at this stage of the program that learners begin cultivating their literacy skills in the target language. Constant recurrence of high-frequency vocabulary, in this case the PDL, across the four strands of second language acquisition “provides opportunities for different conditions of learning to occur which will eventually result in a good depth of knowledge for each high-frequency word” (Nation, 2001, p.388). Solidifying this knowledge of the PDL also facilitates subsequent acquisition of detailed linguistic aspects of the target language. Ellis (cited in Schmitt, 2000) reaffirms that extended vocabulary exposure in context can also help grammar acquisition by reason of the fact that “knowing the words in a text or conversation permits learners to understand the meaning of the discourse, which in turn allows the grammatical patterning to become more transparent” (p.143).

The AIM methodology uses a three-tiered approach to solidify the structures and words that are fundamental to achieving a functional command of the target language. After becoming intimately familiar with a specific play or story containing the PDL, students are given the opportunity to use this knowledge to answer questions orally and in writing using full sentences. From the very beginning, students are encouraged to use the wording of the question to help them construct their answer. However, as time progresses, answers to the questions become less explicit, and students must tap into their own knowledge of the story in order to provide an answer. These questions function as preparatory work for the more challenging story re-telling activities and creative writing tasks that come at the end of the study of each play and story presented in the AIM program. The progressive nature of these scaffolded language manipulation activities helps students set and achieve realistic task-oriented goals, and also gets them one step closer to one day acquiring an independent
command of the target language. This individualized kind of mediated support and guidance also supports Cummins’ (1996) contention that “language and content will be acquired most successfully when students are challenged cognitively but provided with the contextual and linguistic supports required for successful task completion” (p.72). However, what makes this approach unique is that all of these activities are carried out with the expectation that the students and the teacher will be constantly producing orally the words and stories under study with the use of gestures.

2.5 The Gesture Approach

The final element of the AIM program is the Gesture Approach. In addition to the PDL lexicon, Maxwell has also invented her own semiotic system based on action research she performed in her own classroom. The gestures, most representative of the PDL, are designed to be used in partnership with simultaneous teacher and student oral pronunciation of the words and structures they represent. The gestures themselves are most times fairly straightforward. For example, the verb “manger” (to eat) is the motion of bringing food to one's mouth, and opening and closing your hand beside your mouth quickly means “dire” (to say).

This Gesture Approach is supported by much research that has been done on the dynamics of gestures as nonverbal agents and dominant features of oral language interaction (Beavin Bavelas, Chovil, Coates, & Roe, 1995; Beavin Bavelas & Chovil, 2000; McCafferty, 1998, 2000; McCafferty & Alhmed, 2000; McNeill, 1992) and the ability of gestures to carry a serious communicative load (Kendon, 1994), particularly when they are accompanied by a language that has not yet been acquired proficiently (Acredolo & Goodwyn, 1988; Brekinridge Church, Ayman-Nolley, Mahootian, 2004). The Gesture Approach also takes the teaching of gestures in the second language classroom to another level entirely, where “in its most extreme form, gesture can replace speech altogether” (Antes, 1996, p.440).

In 1983, Gardner described how kinesthetic intelligence can empower the acquisition of symbolic competence, describing that the “mastery of such symbolic functions as representation….and expression….provides individuals with the option of mobilizing bodily capacities in order to communicate diverse messages” (p.221). From a
neurolinguistic perspective, meaningful gesturing paired with language production also has
the capacity to concurrently stimulate both the right and left side of the brain, therefore
maximizing the potential to internalize meaning from the language (Asher, 1977). By
activating both hemispheres for language, the AIM program also has the potential to
maximize second language learning for both male and female students by addressing
research findings showing that, when compared with men, women more readily use the
right hemisphere or use both hemispheres in an integrated way for language processing,
as

The Gesture Approach ultimately gives learners ownership of the language on three
fronts - orally, visually and kinesthetically. The gestures themselves are initially taught in
isolation, but are quickly integrated into the stories, plays and activities presented in the
AIM program. This explicit approach to vocabulary teaching is especially important
when
teaching beginning language learners, as students at this level should be provided with
enough vocabulary to start making use of the words they know in diverse contexts
(Schmitt, 2000). In this way, introducing the use of gestures and simultaneous
pronunciation of the word each gesture represents into the language classroom in a
systematic fashion seeks to improve both verbal (intonation, language rhythm, etc.) and
nonverbal aspects of communication at the same time. McCafferty (2000, 2002)
inadvertently validates the benefits of this sort of Gesture Approach in his research
investigating the relationship of Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) to
gesture in a second language-learning context. As a result of his observations of a second
language learner who used his own gestures as a strategy to cope with his communication
difficulties, he concludes that:
The use of gestures that become lexical items repeated by both interactants is,
I think, a fine example of working within the ZPD, the interlocutors scaffolding
each other in their efforts to co-construct meaning. Clearly this is an important
means of enhancing communication and facilitating comprehension. It is also a
sound pedagogical practice. (2000, p.8)
Breckinridge-Church, Ayman-Nolley and Mahootian (2004) also performed research
on the role that gestures play when speech is not immediately accessible to the learner, as
is
commonly the case in the initial stages of second language acquisition. In their study,
they
compared how well Spanish L1 speakers acquiring L2 English learned compared to their
English L1 counterparts when instruction was provided in English without the use of

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gestures, and English with the use of gestures. Their results indicated that all students
benefited more from instruction with gesture than without, regardless of whether English was their first or second language. In line with the philosophy of the Gesture Approach, results from this study also suggest “representational gesture may be a very useful supplement to speech when teaching those who are first learning a language” (p.316).

2.6 L2 Production

The use of gestures as complementary to the written and spoken word illustrates the need for students to have multiple ways of producing comprehensible output during second language learning. As specified in the Output Hypothesis proposed by Swain (1995), in addition to enhancing fluency, negotiating meaning and producing the target language can also work to develop L2 accuracy in three ways – by promoting “noticing” of linguistic strengths and weaknesses, by exposing learner hypotheses about the target language, and by serving to increase meta-linguistic knowledge and control. The basic premise behind the AIM approach and its effectiveness rests on the belief that the more students produce the language, and the more avenues available to them in order to do so, the more likely they are to become fluent and accurate in their production of the target language. In this way, practice does make perfect – as long as an appropriate level of scaffolding for linguistic accuracy accompanies it.

In the AIM program, different modes of production are encouraged at different stages of development. One of the unique goals of this program is that functional oral skills be fostered prior to introducing any intensive reading or writing in the target language (Maxwell, 2000, 2001, 2004). Ensuring that students have functional oral fluency to facilitate subsequent consolidation and integration of all four language skills addresses the common concern that students lack the oral language skills that are expected of them under the traditional core French curriculum guidelines (Maxwell, 2000). MacIntyre, Baker, Clément and Donovan (2003) found that most non-immersion language learners are not very willing to communicate using the L2 and are therefore even less motivated to learn the language overall. In a core FSL context in particular, they suggest that this might be “related to their experience of learning about French as an L2, without the pragmatic use of the language for interaction in the classroom..” (p.602). For this reason, the AIM program emphasizes the development of functional oral production fluency in order to ultimately achieve overall communicative competence in the target language.
CHAPTER #3
Methodology
In this section, I describe the participants and the procedure for the study, including details about the methods and instruments used for data collection.

3.1 Participants
The scope and variety of my sample size for this research study ended up being somewhat limited due to the fact that the AIM program is not widely practiced in the Toronto area at this time. During the first four months of the program, beginner language students are progressively introduced to all components of the AIM program - the gestures, stories, plays, music and written activities. Therefore, in order to capture all of the components of the program in detail through observations and interviews, I chose to focus my qualitative inquiry on one class of beginner French language students who were partaking in the AIM program, and in French language learning, for the first time. Participation by the school, the teacher and the students in this research study was completely voluntary, and every participant was informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Pseudonyms were assigned to all consenting participants and to the school. The student participants were all Grade 3 students from an independent all-boys elementary school in the greater Toronto area. At this school, core French instruction began at the Grade 3 level, and there was no formal French language teaching prior to this time. However, because some students had entered the school from other institutions where French was introduced earlier in the curriculum, some of my participants had already experienced what turned out to be an average daily 30-minute period (maximum) of formal French language instruction during their second grade studies. I decided to include these participants in my qualitative study, as their thoughts and opinions would actually work to expand the scope of my inquiry into how all types of students reacted to the AIM program during the beginning stages of language acquisition. However, I made absolutely sure that none of the students participating in this study had experienced the AIM program before this year. I also
recruited the Lower School Core French teacher (referred to as “Mme Armand”) from this same independent all-boys elementary school to participate in the study. She had been teaching core French for a total of seven years, and had been implementing the full AIM program in her FSL classes since 2001.

3.2 Procedures
In September 2004, the principal and the teacher both signed their respective consent forms (Appendices A & B). At this time, I also visited one of the two beginner grade 3 French classes, and explained the dynamics of the research study to the 18 students in the class (Appendix C). At this time, I gave them consent forms to be signed by them and their parents if they wished to partake in the study (Appendices D & E). After the one-week deadline, I received twelve forms signed by students and parents, and the necessary consent forms from Mme Armand and the school administration were also submitted.

The study, which took place between October 2004 and January 2005, included the following qualitative research methodologies in an attempt to effectively address the research questions outlined above. A breakdown of the number of participants involved in this study, and a summary of the timeline for this project appears in Table 1.

3.2.1 Observation
For this study, I assumed the role of “observer as participant”, defined by Merriam (1990) as an occasion of observation where “the researcher’s observer activities are known to the group and are more or less publicly sponsored by the people in the situation being studied.” (p.93). This “public sponsorship” came in the form of permission and consent forms described above.

During each observation, I used an observation scheme (see Appendix F) to facilitate my recording of the developing features of the role of the teacher, and detailed characteristics of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROCEDURE</th>
<th>TIMEFRAME</th>
<th># OF STUDENTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OBSERVATION</td>
<td>October 2004-January 2005</td>
<td>(3 observations per month = 12 observations TOTAL)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ALL 18 students

Interview
Interview #1 = mid October 2004
Interview #2 = end of January 2005
12 consenting students
(6 pairs)
teacher-student and student-student interaction, and the use of gestures by all participants.
Some of the themes developed for this observational guide were inspired by categories
described in the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT) observation
scheme (Spada & Fröhlich, 1995), from Turnbull’s (1998) revision and expansion of the
COLT entitled the Multidimensional Orientation of Language Teaching (MOLT), and
from
other previous observational studies on core French classrooms that used their own
observation framework (e.g., Calman & Daniel, 1998). This observation scheme and
scheduling plan were also greatly influenced by other observation-oriented studies
conducted
in core French contexts (Allen, Carroll, Burtis & Gaudino, 1987; Calman & Daniel, 1998;
assessment of the instructional characteristics of a second language classroom, or of a
teacher’s pedagogical approach, “more time is required than Allen, Caroll, Burtis and
Gaudino (1987) and Calman and Daniel (1998) had included in their studies” (p.11),
which
involves four times over the school year, and once over the course of the large-scale
study
respectively. By this rationale, I scheduled a total of twelve observations of Mme
Armand
and the student participants over the course of the four-month project period. I visited the
class three times per month, with each observation period lasting the entire 40-minute
class.
I took anecdotal field-notes during and after each observation, and I audiotape recorded
Mme
Armand and her students during all observations. This technique was used to obtain more
detailed data, complementing my field-notes on the substance and characteristics of

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conversations with a complete verbatim reproduction of those verbal interactions for
subsequent analysis and reporting. I made a point of debriefing with Mme Armand after
every observation in order to reflect on any changes that needed to be made with respect
to
the logistics of the process, such as my positioning in the class or the time of the next
scheduled observation period or individual interview. It was important for me to conduct
one
observation before conducting any interviews, so that I could add more themes or
questions
to my interview design as I deemed necessary. However, no additions were made to the
interview themes or questions after the initial observation.
3.2.2 Interview

Using the interview technique for qualitative inquiry is necessary because sometimes, as researchers, “we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them.” (Merriam, 1990, p.72). To enhance observational studies, Turnbull (1999) also recommended that future research studies in core French contexts should include in-depth interviews with teachers to “help researchers understand what factors influence curriculum decisions.” (p.24). To complement the observational focus previously described, I conducted individual interviews with Mme Armand and all twelve consenting student participants. All informants were interviewed twice over the four-month duration of the research study. The first interview for all informants took place right after the second observation (mid-October), and the second interview took place after the last observation (end of January). After considering the size of my student sample, I decided to interview students in pairs (six pairs total). I randomly selected the pairs of students, and the pairings remained the same for both the first and second interviews. I also made sure to schedule the student interviews in the same sequential ordering so as to avoid any variance that could have arisen with respect to the duration in between the first and second interview. I used a semi-structured format for each interview, and all interviews were audiotape recorded and later transcribed for subsequent analysis. Unfortunately, after the second student interview, I realized that the microphone attached to the tape recording device had malfunctioned. As a result, I lost all taped interview data from the last three interviews with the six remaining participants. However, after much reflection on the data collected from the first interviews, I deemed that the first three pairs of students interviewed were reasonably representative of the whole sample of participants. In this way, I was able to include all data collected from the first interview, and feel confident in comparing it with the interview collected from the three pairs of participants during the second interview for the purposes of subsequent analysis and reporting. Table 2 outlines the themes that I addressed and questions that I asked in both interviews with Mme Armand. The questions in the first and second interviews were aimed at delving further into the changing role of the teacher in the initial stages of the program, to reveal some of the challenges faced by teachers who are using AIM, and to inquire into Mme Armand’s general opinion about the evolutionary aspects of the AIM program.
With the student interviews, I wanted to probe more into students’ general feelings about their first months of core French classes, to explore their initial reactions to the major components of AIM that they had experienced, and to get a sense of their developing attitude towards the French language in general. Table 3 summarizes the student interview themes and question ordering used in an attempt to elicit data from the students about their evolving experience as a beginning language learner in the AIM program. According to the pedagogically oriented literature pertaining to the AIM program (Maxwell, 2000, 2001, 2004; “AIM Language Learning” website), students pass through stages or levels in the program where some components dominate others. For instance, in the initial stages of the AIM program the PDL vocabulary is taught through gestures and is practiced during choral repetition of a play or story, and music.

Table 2: TEACHER Interview (Mme Armand)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERVIEW #1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tell me about how you came to employ this methodology into your teaching practice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of the Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In your opinion, has your role in the AIM program changed since the last interview?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of the Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What do you think is your primary role during these initial stages of the AIM program?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What are you finding challenging about using the AIM program at this stage of L2 acquisition, as compared with the last time we spoke?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Overall, based on your experience using the program, what are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>INTERVIEW #2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• As a teacher, what do you find challenging about using the AIM program at this stage of L2 acquisition?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Progression of the Program
• How is the AIM program going to change over the course of the school year for these students?

Student Reactions
• How do you think these students are reacting to the AIM program during these initial stages of L2 acquisition?

General
• In your opinion, why should all core FSL teachers incorporate this methodology into their teaching practice?
As time progresses, students learn more words through gestures and more activities focus on performing the plays orally and engaging in simple conversations using the language skills they've acquired in class. After a few weeks, formal literacy instruction is implemented using the plays, stories and other AIM literature that has already been investigated orally. Students are gradually introduced to producing the language in written form using the scaffolded language manipulation activities that get progressively more difficult as time progresses. Students move through these activities at their own pace while still participating in the group analysis and performance of the same story or play that the whole class is engaged in at that time. However, Maxwell (2000, 2001) stresses that although all students will be exposed to the gestures and the stories and plays within the first few classes, all students will progress at their own pace through the program. For this reason, I had to change the questions pertaining to the “AIM components” theme from the first interview to the second. I adjusted these questions, and added others, based solely on which specific components the students had been exposed to at the time of each interview.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: STUDENT Interview</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTERVIEW</td>
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<td>#1</td>
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<td>INTERVIEW</td>
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<tr>
<td>#2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Initial Reactions to AIM</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What did you first think about the way you were learning French?</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIM Components</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What do you think about the gestures used in class now?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What do you think about the stories and plays now?</td>
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<td>• What do you think about the music now?</td>
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<td>• What do you think about the dances you have learned?</td>
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<td>• What do you think about the written activities?</td>
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<td>AIM Components</td>
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<td>• What do you think about the gestures used in class?</td>
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<td>• What do you think about the stories and plays?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What do you think about the music?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitude Towards French</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What do you think about the French language?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19
• How do you feel about having to speak French all of the time during French class?

Language Use
• How do you feel now about having to speak French all of the time in French class?

Improvement in L2 Skills
• How do you feel about your skills in French after only four months of French class with Mme?

Student Preference
• What is your most favourite part about French class?

Student Preference
• What are your most favourite parts of French class? Why?
• What are your least favourite parts of French class? Why?

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4.1 Introduction
In this section, I will report on the results of the research in sub-sections that are founded on categories defined in the observation schema (Appendix F), and on themes that emerged from the research questions and analysis of the data. In this way, the research questions posed earlier can be addressed, and relevant data from the classroom observations and interviews can be methodically and appropriately presented and discussed.

4.2 Lesson Design
The following is a brief delineation of the activity patterns that developed out of my observational analysis of the Mme Armand’s day-to-day lesson design. Table 4 presents a general summary of the activities that I observed in each class in relation to where the students were located at the time of each activity (see Appendix G for a diagram of the classroom) as this seemed to relate directly to Mme Armand’s lesson design. This is meant to familiarize the reader with the terminology that I will be using to refer to activities of relevance in subsequent sections. The frequency with which each activity was repeated in any location during the observational period is not indicated, as this characteristic of the lesson design was not relevant to my overall inquiry.

4.3 AIM Classroom
Over the course of the observation period, the layout of the physical learning
environment never changed. Students were always in one of three places: the hallway, at the round tables in their groups, or on the carpet sitting in front of the teacher. This gave students consistent visual access to her face and gesturing at any time during the lesson. In our first interview, when prompted to comment on her role during the initial stages of language acquisition in the AIM program, Mme Armand stated “the first year of this program is very teacher-centred because you have a lot of vocabulary to teach the students”.

In order for this teacher-centred approach to work, Mme Armand was positioned in front of the whole group at all times in her classroom. Upon analysis of the observation data comparing lesson design and student placement, it was evident that each of the three locations described earlier corresponded significantly to specific teacher-led activities.

Table 4: Lesson design relative to student location in classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>ACTIVITIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Hallway</td>
<td>Teacher-Led Self-Expression (small-talk prompted by teacher gesture)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Round Tables (student groups)</td>
<td>Teacher-Led Self-Expression (date, weather, salutations, small-talk)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Carpet</td>
<td>Teacher-Led Self-Expression (relevant to play and gestures being practiced)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Entry Speech / Routine
- Allocation of Group Points (awarded for bringing in agendas, reading #s)
- Review of Numbers (group or individual students read off #s in L2)
- Partial Questions (fill-in-the-blank; about play; answered orally)
- Gesture Tests (preparation/practice test)
- Gesture Tests (official test)
- Play Practice - Les Trois Petits Cochons (orally; with puppets; with book)
- Targeted Gesture/Vocabulary Review (with DVD; list of words; teacher-led)
- Targeted Vocabulary Review (flashcards)
- Song Practice (with CD; visual aid with words)
- Dance Practice (with DVD; teacher modeling dance moves)
introduced by Mme Armand over the course of the four-month period. As my observations progressed, it became more and more obvious that students were distinctly aware of this ‘location - activity – expectation’ relationship. This was explicitly demonstrated during Observation #8 when Mme Armand indicated with voice and gestures that the class was going to practice the gestures for their upcoming test. Before completing this sentence in choral repetition with the class, the whole group at the front of the room had moved from their seats to the carpet where this is always carried out, and students from the back were getting out of their seats to follow their peers. By establishing these relationships between activities and locations in the classroom, students were quickly conditioned into the routine of Mme Armand’s AIM classroom. The importance of establishing a routine in the AIM classroom will be elaborated on in the next section.

In addition to using printed and electronic visual materials produced by AIM Incorporated, Mme Armand had also produced a wide range of visual aids that were hanging on the walls of her classroom. These aids included many largely printed cards with French vocabulary words and expressions selected from the PDL printed at the top, and their English translation printed below. Students had constant visual access to these vocabulary words from all locations in the classroom. I observed that Mme Armand would sometimes point to, and orally repeat some of these words in French if students were having difficulty pronouncing or retrieving a vocabulary word that was relevant to the discussion. When expressing ideas in the target language during large group oral language activities, students would also refer visually to cards on the wall for assistance without being prompted by the teacher. Taking into account the gestures used by the teacher at all times, students in this AIM classroom therefore had at least one visual retrieval cue for vocabulary recall when expressing themselves orally in the L2. However, as opposed to the conceptual links provided by the gestures, these cards were more explicitly linked to the students’ L1 (English). Nevertheless, it could be said that this approach to facilitating vocabulary intake is a reasonable use of students’ first language. According to Turnbull (2001), using students’ first language as a resource to clarify vocabulary makes it more probable that the same vocabulary input they receive from other resources in the classroom will more readily become intake. In this way, the meaningful contextualized interactions with Mme Armand...
and the stories and plays, paired with these structured opportunities to refer to one’s L1 for vocabulary confirmation can work positively towards fostering student proficiency in the target language. Observational data that is relevant to the use of L1 in this classroom and to the teacher as facilitator of vocabulary acquisition will be elaborated on in the next section.

4.4 Role of the Teacher

4.4.1 Introduction

The statements documented earlier by Mme Armand about the teacher-centred nature of the AIM program during the initial stages of language acquisition are certainly reflected in my research data. However, the role of the teacher is by no means one-dimensional. As I analyzed this data for reporting, the pivotal role of the teacher during the initial stages of the AIM program became abundantly clear. With this in mind, I decided it would be more effective to describe the verbal and nonverbal characteristics of the teacher’s role, the verbal and nonverbal reactions of student participants to the teacher, and other data addressing my remaining research questions by structuring this presentation of data within the framework provided below. In this section I will report on the observational and interview research results under the general category of “Role of the Teacher” using six distinct subcategories that represent the predominant roles that Mme Armand played during the observation period. By focusing on these responsibilities, I feel that I am able to provide a more representative depiction of those teacher roles that are specific to this stage of language acquisition in particular. These subcategories work to describe the multifaceted expectations of an AIM teacher who is using this program with beginner-level students. It also aims to relate it to our present theoretical understanding of the characteristics of effective second language teaching in a core French context.

4.4.2 Communicate Student Expectations

During the initial stages of the AIM program, students are expected to gesture and/or speak with the teacher when he/she is gesturing to them individually or as a class. Maxwell identifies this as “choral language work” (2000, 2001, 2004; “AIM Language Learning”). In the literature, shadowing the teacher’s voice and gesturing could also be
referred to as “complete shadowing”, defined by Murphey (2001) as a conversation where “listeners shadow everything speakers say” (p.129). During my observations, the teacher and the students gestured and spoke together during the greater part of every lesson. Mme Armand would make it clear to students that they were expected to follow her by gesturing and/or orally repeating phrases like “Tout le monde avec Mme…..” or “Est-ce que tout le monde parle avec Mme aujourd’hui?”, and by simply gesturing practically everything she said to the class. These reminders became less frequent as time progressed, and students began consistently demonstrating that they understood what was expected of them in terms of gesturing and repeating with the teacher at all times. According to Maxwell (2004), this type of choral language work “maximizes participation of all students, and ensures practice of vocabulary (isolated and within a context-embedded activity)”(p.28). When asked how she thought the student participants were reacting to the program in our first interview, Mme Armand responded by saying that: “Yeah. This class..(pause)..I’m actually really impressed with this class. It’s amazing the difference from the first week and to what they can do now. The first week, they really didn’t know what they were supposed to do. They didn’t know they were supposed to talk when I was gesturing. And a few caught on, but they were still pretty quiet because students aren’t used to doing that. They’re not used to teachers wanting them to talk together. It’s something that they have to get used to doing. It’s almost like a choirmaster conducting a choir, so they’re used to doing it when they’re singing, but they’re not used to doing it when they’re talking……So, it takes a while for the students to get used to that. But this class has really caught on well, and I’m really really thrilled with their progress.” (Teacher Interview #1)

With consistent modeling and encouragement coming directly from the teacher, these students were able to meet the oral and gesture expectations that Maxwell deems as fundamental to student success in the initial stages of the AIM program. The teacher’s role in this respect is further amplified by the fact that choral repetition and gesturing in a French class is not something that most students would be used to doing. Students expressed this very point when prompted during their first interview to comment on their first impressions of the AIM program, and what they thought about the gestures used in French class.
Students had varying first impressions of how they were learning French, with opinions ranging from “cool” to “different” to “scary”. When asked to comment on the gestures used in class, student responses from the first interview were all positive. During the first student interview, two students spoke to their initial confusion about what the gestures meant, but how things got easier as they began to understand the meaning behind the gestures:

Interviewer: What did you think about the actions that are used in class?
Matthew: They were hard to understand at first, but then we got to use them a lot, then we got used to what they all meant.
Interviewer: And what about you? (question directed at Phillip)
Phillip: Well, it was sort of confusing on the first day when we had to learn all the signs and stuff like that……now it’s pretty fun, and it’s kinda easier.

During the second set of interviews, when prompted to answer the same question, it was obvious that the students felt more confident in their knowledge of the gestures, saying things like “they’re easier to understand” and “we know more so it’s a lot easier”. Comparing student responses from the first interview to the second showed that students understood that in order for things to get easier in French class, they needed to pay attention to the teacher and learn the gestures she was doing. An interesting example of this from the data was during Observation #5 when Mme Armand was leading students in a practice gesture test. During this practice test, the teacher would gesture a particular vocabulary word, and students had to find the word that corresponded to that gesture on their page.

At the beginning of the test, students were blurting out the corresponding word as the teacher was gesturing it. It was obvious that they were so used to speaking aloud when the teacher was gesturing, as is done during choral language activities. It was noticeably difficult for the students not to speak orally with the teacher when she was gesturing. This went on for the first half of the practice test, even after the teacher had decided to take off ten points from one group’s total score because a member of their group said a gesture aloud.

This observational data is a clear demonstration that the teacher had successfully communicated to her students that they were expected to watch her and chorally produce the words associated with the gestures as she gestured, and that it was difficult for students to stop this instinctive reaction once they had been conditioned to do it. Another responsibility related to establishing student expectations that rested on the shoulders of the teacher was enforcing the L2-only rule. Before every observed class, students were expected to line up in the hallway, and Mme Armand would go out to greet
them. In the hallway the teacher would initiate small-talk using choral repetition, inquiring into such things as the date, the weather, student moods, upcoming holidays and characteristics of people passing by in the hallway. Maxwell refers to this in the literature as “teacher-led self-expression” (2004). Students were welcomed to respond orally to the questions as best they could using the vocabulary they had learned. Oftentimes, Mme Armand would recast student responses into full sentences in French, encouraging the students to repeat the full sentence chorally with her. Right before entering the classroom, Mme Armand would lead the students in a routine pledge to only use French in the classroom. Although the words of the speech changed periodically, everyone would declare with the teacher that French class is starting and that everything they were to do from now on was to be “en français”. Students would participate in a ceremonious removal of English from their brains, and a crossing of “La Ligne Magique” (the Magic Line) representing their official entrance into their French-only environment. After crossing this line, whenever Mme Armand heard a student speaking in English to another student, they were instructed to exit the class and cross “La Ligne Magique” again. Over the duration of the observation period, only ten students were asked to exit and re-enter the classroom. During teacher-led activities, although the teacher consistently interacted with the students in French, she also allowed students to express their ideas in English. Most instances of L1-use by students occurred during the hallway part of class, when teacher-led self-expression topics were more random than when the students crossed “La Ligne Magique” into the more structured part of the lesson. However, anytime a student spoke to the teacher in English, Mme Armand would immediately either gesture and repeat the utterance in French with the student, with the whole class, or ask the students to decipher the French words for the utterance if the vocabulary involved had already been introduced. In one instance a student corrected a peer who used English when the French equivalent had already been given during an earlier teacher-initiated French recast. With every correction, students seemed to be more motivated to try using the words they knew in French to contribute to large group discussions. These observations strongly support the contention that if use of the target language is maximized by establishing this type of L2-only context right from the onset of second language acquisition, students are more likely to become motivated to learn the language due to the fact that it is directly beneficial for them to do so (MacDonald, 1993).
In addition to this type of intrinsic motivation, Mme Armand had also implemented a ticket system, where students are provided with the opportunity to accept and sign their name on a “billet” at the end of class representing their dedication to the L2-only rule. Mme Armand had established a routine with students where the choral repetition of the phrase “J’ai parlé seulement en français aujourd’hui” signaled the beginning of a ritual of handing out the tickets to students who felt they had tried their best at only using French during class. At the end of each month, students counted up their individual tickets, and then put them all into a bin where tickets would be drawn for small prizes. These sorts of linguistic routines proved to be the key to firmly establishing the L2-only expectation in the AIM class I observed. In their Self-determination Theory, Deci and Ryan (1985) argue that it is important for second language students to be made aware that they are accountable for their development of autonomy in the target language, as these perceptions support feelings of intrinsic motivation that are central to sustained effort at the learning task. Establishing the L2-only rule from the first day of the AIM program is argued to be a direct determinant of the speed at which fluency will occur (Maxwell, 2004). By cultivating an intrinsic motivation in students to try speaking French as much as possible, and introducing this kind of self-monitored extrinsic incentive, Mme Armand succeeded in establishing the exclusive use of the L2 as a clear expectation of student participants in this AIM classroom. Students were asked what they thought of the L2-only rule in French during the first and second interviews. At the beginning of the observation period, during the first interview, most informants said that they found this expectation to be either “hard” or “weird”. One informant named Zachary said “it’s hard until it gets in my mind”. Two students demonstrated clear understanding of the rule, and when asked to speak about their thoughts on the L2-only rule, Matthew expressed that “if I don’t really know the answer to something in French, I kind of
just don’t say it. And if I do know the answer in French, then I’ll raise my hand”, and another student named Connor insisted that “if I need to go to the bathroom, and I don’t know how to say it, I usually try and hold it until the French class is over”. During the second interview at the end of the observation period, most students expressed that the L2-only rule was still challenging to cope with. Only two informants claimed that things had gotten easier, with Larry declaring that “I’m sort of….I really am a lot used to it now,” and Yoni asserting that “it’s easier now cause’ we know more words.” This data clearly shows that although some students feel frustrated and limited in their ability to express themselves in French, most are able to at least cope with the challenges of an L2-only learning environment, especially with the help of Mme Armand.

It is obvious that establishing certain routines and expectations at the onset of the AIM program is a key characteristic of the multidimensional role of an AIM teacher. However, it was made abundantly clear that much more is required of teachers as the program progresses.

4.4.3 L2 Modeling : Consistent and Constructive
In the previous section, research data was presented concerning the teacher’s role in communicating clear expectations and establishing consistent routines with students in the AIM program. In order for students to become fully accustomed to these sorts of expectations and routines, teachers should be expected to also adhere to the expectations and guidelines of the routines that they enforce in their classrooms. Turnbull (2001) believes that “official guidelines that encourage teachers to use the TL (target language) create positive pressures for teachers, encouraging them to speak as much TL as possible” (p.537). By this rationale, applying an L2-only rule for students in a second language classroom creates a situation where an AIM teacher would be a complete hypocrite for not maximizing his/her own use of French as well. As a result, Maxwell stresses that if AIM teachers do not strive to be consistent models of the second language for their students, and hence do not firmly uphold this rule in their classroom, “student success will be greatly undermined, and fluency will never develop to its full potential through this program” (2004, p.60). In this respect,
Maxwell would agree that all AIM teachers should be maximizing their own use of the target language at all times. In the context of this research, every oral interaction between Mme Armand and her students took place in French during the entire span of the project. The only time that the teacher ever used the L1 was to provide students with one-word translations when required for specific vocabulary words and expressions that were contextualized within the activity or discussion taking place. (The strategic use of translations employed by Mme Armand will be elaborated on further in subsequent sections.) Besides these brief utterances in the L1, Mme Armand never uttered a full sentence in English to her students during the whole observation period. All discipline, procedural instructions, and overall classroom management were conducted in French. Although some researchers contend that it may be much easier to use the target language with younger students as compared to older learners (Macaro, 1997), it takes a lot of effort and patience on the part of an AIM teacher to be a consistent L2-model for their students, especially during the beginning stages of language acquisition. When asked about what she finds challenging about using the AIM program with beginner-level students, Mme Armand spoke about teachers enforcing the L2-only rule and being an active model of the target language: “The next biggest challenge, but not for me again ‘cause I’ve been doing it for years, but…is to…um…initiate the “pas d’anglais” rule in the core French classroom, because that’s virtually unheard of in the core French classrooms. So that’s always a challenge. You have to stop yourself from speaking English first of all, then secondly you have to stop your students from speaking English to each other and teachers find that really hard.” (Teacher Interview #1) Stopping her students from speaking in English to each other was not very hard for Mme Armand. Interestingly, students rarely interacted with each other at all during class time throughout the observation period. Upon reflection, I feel that this low occurrence of student-student interaction was due in large part to the amount of choral language work that the teacher facilitated during the observation period. The consistent choral language work forced students to pay attention to the teacher and participate actively as a group, giving them less time to stray off-task and converse with their peers. Even though there was not a lot of documented student-student interaction, what I did observe was that students varied in their reasoning for communicating with peers in the L1.
versus in the L2. Although Mme Armand was consistently modeling the target language for her students, this did not stop them from using their L1 when interacting with each other. As stated earlier, only ten instances occurred where students were asked by Mme Armand to exit and cross “La Ligne Magique” again. I observed that these utterances took place when students were noticeably off-task. Documented use of the L1 by students when they were on-task consisted of verifications of procedural instructions (ex. Observation #3: “Where do we write it?”), on-task social interactions (ex. Observation #8: “Sorry!” for bumping another

31 student while gesturing), peer corrections (Observation #5: “No! That means ‘maintenant’!” during gesture test), and group play practice (Observation #7: “It’s your turn”). Students were not made to leave the class for these L1 utterances, but on many occasions Mme Armand would either ask if students knew how to say the utterance in French, or would immediately provide the French translation for them and get the class to repeat it orally as a group. Mme Armand’s constructive response to student-use of English in this case coincides with the opinion of some researchers that allowing student access to the L1 during collaborative activities can enable them to accomplish their tasks more successfully, and can in this way be considered as an invaluable cognitive tool (Swain & Lapkin, 2000). Alternatively students were on-task whenever they interacted with their peers using French. What is more, most of their interactions demonstrated that they were engaged in the activity in question, and were learning that using gestures to communicate in French can be fun. There were always some gestures that made students laugh, and consequently initiated these brief interactions. Whenever a student or the teacher was acting silly, students really liked to tell each other that they were “fou” or to tell the teacher that she was “folle” (both meaning crazy) by saying “Tu es fou/folle” (using the correct masculine or feminine form of the adjective), and performing the gesture simultaneously towards the other person. (The gesture for “fou/folle” is putting both index fingers beside the temples and making circles with the fingers while tilting the head from side to side). They also enjoyed responding to the teacher question “Est-ce que Mme est vieux ou vieille?” which was asked to clarify the
feminine form of the adjective “old”. Any time this question was asked, students enjoyed doing the gesture for “old” (using a pretend cane and bending forward slightly) while looking at each other and laughing, and saying “Oui oui – vieille”. Students would also use phrases that were chronically repeated in French by the teacher in classroom discussions if they felt it was appropriate to say the same thing to a peer (ex. Observation #7: student leaving early on a Friday, students say “À lundi!” to him as he departs, before the teacher says it).

In my opinion, the student-student interactions described above substantiate the teacher-centred nature of the AIM program. Without Mme Armand’s effective modeling of the L2 and monitoring of students’ use of the L2, I really believe that students would not have been able to develop such restraint in communicating with their peers in English, even though, as Cook describes, “like nature, the L1 creeps back in, however many times you throw it out with a pitchfork” (2001, p.405). When students interacted with each other using French, they used vocabulary they had learned directly from teacher-led language activities, and from the play that they were practicing, all conducted exclusively in French. Although Mme Armand was a successful L2-model with her oral use of the French language, her dynamic use of the gestures that are representative of the L2 vocabulary is another noteworthy feature of the teacher’s role in the AIM program.

4.4.4 Scaffolding Using Gestures
The concept of scaffolding supports the idea that children learn best through assisted discovery, and varied quality and quantity of support provided by the teacher (Wood et.al., 1976). In the AIM program, gestures are used in conjunction with the spoken word to help students internalize the meaning of the PDL vocabulary kinesthetically, auditorily and visually (Maxwell, 2004). As stated earlier, I observed that Mme Armand would initiate a lot of choral language work with her students by gesturing and speaking simultaneously. The observational data collected for this project showed that by using this unique kind of assistance, the teacher worked to maximize student participation, ensure extended practice of the vocabulary being learned, and develop students’ L2 oral pronunciation. What is more,
over the course of the observation period, I detected patterns in the teacher’s gesturing and voice cueing. At the very beginning, Mme Armand consistently accompanied her gesturing with full oral cueing of the corresponding words when speaking to her class as a group, or to individual students. However, I noticed that she would also provide students with the first syllable of the first word in an utterance and continue gesturing for students to speak, without speaking or mouthing the words herself. Mme Armand used this “initial sound cueing” (Maxwell, 2000, 2001, 2004) when eliciting sentences or questions that she repeated very frequently. For example, during each observed class, Mme Armand would lead the class in a choral repetition of a question asking each group how many total points they had after adding the fifteen points that was allotted for bringing in their agendas that day (i.e. “Combien de points est-ce que groupe numéro ___ a maintenant?”). When the question was prompted the first time about the first group’s score, Mme Armand would provide full oral cueing and gestures for the students. However she would always only use initial sound cueing when prompting students to ask the same question again to the next group. By the time she got around to asking the last group, the teacher would only gesture without speaking. This pattern surfaced many times over the course of the observational period, especially during these types of procedure-oriented questioning sequences that were repeated during every single class (like when class was over, and students would have to proclaim that they had tried using the L2 in French class by saying “J’ai parlé seulement en français aujourd’hui, pas en anglais. L’anglais va dans la poubelle” in order to receive a ticket for the subsequent prize draw). In addition, as students experienced repeated teacher-led oral play recitation as a class, the same gesturing pattern was observed, and students were able to perform the play with less and less gestural scaffolding. Although, towards the end of the observation period, Mme Armand was gesturing alone and limiting her use of the initial sound cue for those questions and sentences that were repeated during every class, Maxwell still contends that: “the goal toward which teachers should be aiming is to be able to gesture, in silence, without needing to provide any cues at all for the students. However, due to the fact that throughout the entire three-year program, the teacher is constantly introducing new
gestured vocabulary, students may need assistance with those less familiar gestures, and therefore this technique may be used at any time.” (2004, p.33)

Following Maxwell’s rationale, Mme Armand’s pattern of gesturing and oral cueing recurred as new vocabulary and gestures were introduced. I also observed that she stopped gesturing certain vocabulary and expressions when students had demonstrated an ability to recognize and use it independently in an oral capacity. However, one instance in particular demonstrated how the exclusive use of a gesture functions as an effective retrieval cue for temporarily forgotten vocabulary. In this case, a student was having trouble remembering how to ask to go to the washroom after this phrase had been repeated chorally at the teacher’s initiation several times in French during that same class. Mme Armand only had to provide him with the “Est-ce que je peux” (“Can I”) gesture sequence for him to remember the rest independently. This is called “gestural mirroring,” (Maxwell, 2004, p.32) and involves the teacher “mirroring, with a gesture, the words that the students wishes to say in French.” In this example, the teacher not only used the gestures as a scaffold for student vocabulary acquisition, but also modeled that they could be used as an effective vocabulary retrieval cue as well. Vygotsky (1978) elaborates on the notion of structured scaffolding in the learning process, claiming that teachers also need to ensure that the scaffolding they are providing is keeping learners in their zone of proximal development, which is altered as they develop capabilities. Results from research conducted by McCafferty (2000, 2002) show that gestures can be used in the second language learning environment to help students stay within their ZPD and acquire the necessary vocabulary to express themselves in the L2. The teacher interview data from this research project, paired with the observational data described above, shows that Mme Armand was very aware of how her gesturing was working to scaffold student movement through their zone of proximal development. When asked how she perceived her role had changed since the first interview, Mme Armand stated that:

“…(the students are) able to produce words on their own now without my constant helping them with gestures. So, I guess you could say it’s becoming a little less teacher-
centred because they’re….um…they’ve internalized a lot of the vocabulary now, and so they’re able to communicate more easily using French.” (Teacher Interview #2)

The observational data described above also confirms earlier research concluding that in the absence of speech that is understood by the students, gestures can play a significant role in communication (Acredolo & Goodwyn, 1988; Breckinridge et.al., 2004; McCafferty, 1998, 2000). This data also corroborates other research results on the role of shadowing in L2 learning demonstrating that concrete shadowing “may have its uses in the beginning stages (of language acquisition) for people learning shadowing and also to get speakers to chunk (L2 speech)” (Murphey, 2001, p.136). This being said, the role of the teacher as the main source of gestural input in the AIM program becomes vital to students’ potential success in acquiring the gestures, and ultimately acquiring the PDL vocabulary that is considered to be essential to the achievement of L2 oral proficiency (Maxwell, 2000, 2001, 2004). The role of the teacher in this respect will be elaborated on further in the next subsection.

4.4.5 Facilitator of Vocabulary Acquisition

It is generally understood in formal second language education that vocabulary acquisition does not occur incidentally. Second language educators are trained and expected to create a learning environment where the teacher directly facilitates vocabulary input. Schmitt (2000) reiterates the need for a structured and explicit approach to teaching vocabulary to beginner-level students in particular by saying that “with rank beginners, it is probably necessary to explicitly teach all words until students have enough vocabulary to start making use of the unknown words they meet in context” (p.145). In this respect, in the classroom that I observed the teacher used gestures as a way to make explicit reference to the target vocabulary that students were expected to learn and produce. According to McNeill (1992), this enables learners to form direct links between the vocabulary word representing the concept, the gestural representation of the concept, and the mental image elicited by the representational gesture itself. Breckinridge-Church, Ayman-Nolle and Mahootian (2004) insist that the use of gestures as lexical representations in a bilingual education context can
facilitate a second language learner’s access to their L1 lexicon, which “provides a bootstrap for learning the new concept that would have otherwise been completely inaccessible” (p.314). Following this rationale, Mme Armand would always use gestures to accompany her oral speech, and focused explicitly on teaching the gestures and gestured vocabulary to her students. In our second interview, she characterized the AIM program as “top-heavy” in this regard, saying that teaching the plays and the gestures at once is a real balancing act in the first year of the program as “most of the essential gestures that the students need to communicate to each other are learned at this time”. She also incorporated explicit gesture teaching into her lesson design, and administered gesture tests every two weeks. Based on her previous experience, she says in the same interview that she started testing “because I found that with my boys, their focus tended to stray when I was doing the gestures until I introduced the tests”, and that once the tests were introduced, students “focused more on teaching the gestures because they knew there was going to be a test on them”. During my observations, it was obvious that students were collectively more attentive to the teacher during targeted gesture review activities. And, when asked what they thought about the gestures and their overall L2 skills, student answers were predominantly based on how well they felt they knew the gestures, and how they performed on the gesture test evaluations. Students had gone from describing the gestures as “different” (Yoni), “good” (Jeremy) and “odd” (Henry) in the first interview to claiming that they were now “easier to understand” (George) and “we know more so it’s a lot easier” (Yoni) during the second student interview. Although none of the students ever said that they did not like the gestures at any time during the interviews, during the second student interview one student did say that “there’s a lot more, so it’s harder” (Larry). When asked how they felt about their skills in French, a lot of students said they were getting better, with one student exclaiming that “I get all my French tests and everything perfect” (Yoni). When facilitating vocabulary acquisition, Schmitt (2000) claims that “if a teacher thinks vocabulary is important, then it is worth including a vocabulary component in an assessment scheme to build positive attitudes toward vocabulary
study” (p.163). Although I have no quantitative data to determine whether Mme Armand’s intensive gesture teaching and testing had any direct effect on students’ acquisition of L2 vocabulary, it is clear from the observation and interview data described above that students developed a positive attitude towards the gestures, were aware of their gesture knowledge, and that some actually measured their L2-skill ability relative to their performance on the gesture tests. At the very least, this data demonstrates that the AIM program offers students a different way of learning, strengthening and gauging their knowledge of L2 vocabulary in the core French classroom.

Traditionally in core French classrooms, vocabulary is introduced thematically to students. In the class that I observed, Mme Armand structured her lesson design very differently. As stated earlier, there was a lot of variety in the lesson design and each activity had a physical location in the classroom associated with its occurrence (see Table 4). Mme Armand also made it clear during her first interview that her main role during the beginning stages of language acquisition was to introduce students to vocabulary they could use to communicate with. With this in mind, many instances were noted where activities in her lesson design involved vocabulary being introduced in context and out of context.

According to Maxwell (2004), a comprehensible context can be as small as introducing verbs using relevant verb-noun associations (ex./ using the verbs “mettre” and “enlever” with clothing nouns), and as large as play or song practice. Context-embedded activities observed in this research project included play recitation, song practice, allocation of group points, review of numbers, partial questioning about the play and all teacher-led self-expression activities involving questioning and discussions related to students’ lives and the classroom that were initiated and scaffolded by the teacher. According to Maxwell (2004), putting the target vocabulary and gestures in these types of comprehensible contexts is “essential for the development of word concept, and is key to the success of the program” (p.29). In this respect, Mme Armand never directly introduced a new vocabulary word or gesture out of context from what was being done in class at the time. However, she did practice gestures and vocabulary with students out of context on numerous occasions, predominantly during targeted gesture teaching activities. She also occasionally used AIM materials to introduce
gestures to students in a decontextualized manner. For example, AIM teachers who use “Histoires en Action” (2004) are provided with a set of DVDs that show, amongst other things, Wendy Maxwell performing all of the gestures in the PDL. The gestures themselves are divided up into sections. In this class, the order of the sections of gestures on the DVD corresponded directly to Mme Armand’s chronological ordering of her gesture tests, with ‘Section A’ containing all of the gestures that were to be learned for the first gesture test, and so on. During any one lesson, targeted gesture rehearsal for upcoming gesture tests and assessment of gesture comprehension by the teacher involved at least one of four activities: students gesturing along with Maxwell on the DVD; students gesturing corresponding vocabulary words from a list created by Mme Armand; students orally providing the appropriate vocabulary word for gestures performed by Mme Armand; and simple practice tests administered by Mme Armand. According to Read’s three dimensions of vocabulary assessment (cited in Schmitt, 2000), all of these activities would tend towards the extreme ends of three continua - the discrete side of the discrete/embedded continuum (vocabulary knowledge or use as an independent construct), the selective side of the selective/comprehensive continuum (focus on specific vocabulary items), and the context-independent side of the context-independent/dependent continuum (vocabulary item provided with no reference to any context). As well, these types of activities, along with the gesture tests themselves, could only work to improve vocabulary knowledge that is independent of other language skills (Nation, 2001). However, analysis of my observational data suggests that Mme Armand never spent more than 10 minutes of every 40-minute class on these activities. The other 30 minutes was spent on facilitating context-embedded vocabulary acquisition and use. Even though they were not allocated much time in Mme Armand’s lesson design, Maxwell (2004) maintains that these types of targeted gesture teaching activities still allow teachers to successfully isolate target vocabulary for in-depth practice. Moreover, Mme Armand’s allocation of time for context-embedded and decontextualized activities targeting vocabulary acquisition is concurrent with Nation’s (2001) claim that “opportunities for indirect vocabulary learning should occupy much more time in a language learning course than direct vocabulary learning activities” (p.388). Therefore the teacher’s
role in facilitating vocabulary acquisition in this respect is very important. Besides gesture testing, Mme Armand also frequently used Asher’s “Total Physical Response (TPR)” method (1977) to enhance and assess student comprehension of specific vocabulary or expressions. The AIM program supports the idea that verbs are to be taught in association to one another or to relevant objects as much as possible (Maxwell, 2000, 2001, 2004). Mme Armand prompted these associations by performing the action herself, or by prompting the students do so with gestures. She also tended to use TPR as a comprehension check during targeted gesture practice. For instance, when learning the gestures for “chercher” and “trouver” for an upcoming gesture test during Observation #8, Mme Armand stopped the DVD after Maxwell had gestured both words and said that she was looking for her keys (gesturing and voicing “Mes amis, où sont mes clés?”). She then gestured and told students to go and find her keys (gesturing and voicing “Cherche mes clés!”). Students immediately started looking around the room, and some got up off the carpet and wandered over to her desk where one student eventually spotted them and rushed back to give them to Mme Armand. At this point, the teacher chorally initiated the phrase “Zachary a trouvé mes clés!”. The frequent use of TPR by Mme Armand during these typically decontextualized activities demonstrates the teacher’s unique role in determining how effective indirect and direct vocabulary learning is with their respective students. In this case, and in accordance with the overall objectives of the AIM program, Mme Armand obviously deemed it beneficial for her students to have more contact with language in use whenever possible, as demonstrated with her use of the TPR. When analyzing the observational and interview data, I also noticed that Mme Armand would sometimes check student comprehension of a specific vocabulary term or expression by prompting students to provide the English translation for the term. As mentioned earlier in the reporting of these results, the only time that Mme Armand would use English, or encourage the use of English by her students, was when she prompted such translations for specific vocabulary terms. After an analysis of all fifty occurrences of translations that were prompted by the teacher, a consistent pattern emerged. However, there was no consistent pattern shown in the data that could explain what specifically prompted the teacher to use this technique in particular, although Maxwell (2004) claims that translation can be used by the teacher “on rare occasions, if the teacher feels the gesture is not understood by the
students, despite attempts to teach it within a context-embedded situation” (p.36). In this case, the teacher would always start off by asking students for the translation of a word, and would not simply provide it for them. Often the students were able to orally provide the teacher with the English translation, upon which Mme Armand would immediately have them repeat the word in French again and perform the gesture for the word when applicable.

If students could not immediately provide the translation of the word, the teacher would say

the target word in French, provide the English translation, then immediately say the word in French while performing the gesture for the word when applicable as she would if the students provided the translation. After the data collection process, I found that Maxwell in fact had coined a term for this, calling it the “sandwiching technique” (2004, p.36). This has also been referred to as “code-switching” (Coste, 1997), which has been defined as “alternating rapidly between two languages in either oral or written expression” (Turnbull & Arnett, 2002). In defining this technique, Maxwell stresses the importance of a second vocalization of the target word in French after the English word is given. She deems that this techniques works especially well for “words that are not a natural sign” (p.36). This was reflected in the observational data that I collected on the words that were translated by Mme Armand over the course of the observational period. The most frequently translated words that I noted were “déjà” (meaning “already”) and “mot” (meaning “word”), each having been translated a total of three times over the course of the observational period.

Although gestures exist for both of these words in Maxwell’s semiotic system of gestures, in my opinion it seemed difficult for students to ascertain the exact meaning of these words simply by seeing the gesture in use in a meaning-oriented sentence.

Translation in the L2 classroom is considered by some to be helpful to students and to the teacher during second language acquisition. After examining the use of the L1 by four university-level professors teaching introductory French courses, Rolin-Ianziti and Brownlie (2002) concluded that “clarifying unknown vocabulary” was one of the two primary purposes of participant teachers’ use of the L1. The authors also proposed that strategic translation has
the potential to improve the linguistic input that students receive, ultimately increasing the likelihood of vocabulary uptake, and enhancing overall student L2 proficiency. Coste (1997) proposes that this is due primarily to the fact that students are able to use their L1 as a reference point. However, teachers are advised to be deliberate in their use of translation (Castelloni & Moore, 1997), and that they should never let the L1 be granted the same status and role as the target language in the classroom (Coste, 1997). By this rationale, Mme Armand’s conscious and deliberate use of translation in this respect, and all of the other strategic decisions she made in terms of lesson design and gesture use throughout the research period, reaffirm that her actions and decisions played an important role in facilitating vocabulary acquisition for the student participants. The results presented throughout this whole subsection represent the pivotal role that the teacher plays in ensuring eventual uptake and acquisition of the lexical tools that Maxwell deems are essential for achieving the level of critical level of fluency and developing strong communicative skills in the L2.

4.4.6 Correct Student Errors and Prompt L2 Language Refinement

Although the participant students in this study did not have a lot of opportunity to interact orally with each other, they did have ample opportunity to interact orally with the teacher. Students interacted as a whole class with the teacher during teacher-led choral language work, as previously described. However, students were also often motivated to take risks with the target language individually. As the observation period progressed, more and more students raised their hands to answer questions posed by the teacher on anything from questions about the plot of the play, to what club they were a part of at school. However, when responding to teacher questioning and during spontaneous speech, students rarely used complete sentences and never used more than five words to express their ideas individually without teacher assistance. In this respect, I observed that Mme Armand always corrected student errors made during choral language activities. Approximately 80% of these errors turned out to be meaning-related errors made when misidentifying or mispronouncing a word being gestured by the teacher, or a word they were trying to retrieve when expressing themselves individually.
When this kind of error occurred, the teacher would often correct the error with the class by

43 prompting individual student recall of the word related to the gesture in question, or by asking the whole class to chorally clarify how the word is pronounced. Also, Mme Armand never explicitly corrected a student utterance without recasting the entire thought into a full sentence for the individual or the whole class to repeat chorally. The techniques used by Mme Armand coincide with those recommended by Maxwell (2004) for correcting student oral language use during teacher led-activities. She stresses that teachers should “always correct every single error made by one or more students in these choral activities” as choral language work is considered to be “guided, modeled speech and the model must be correct to transfer properly to spontaneous application” (p.103). As Mme Armand used choral repetition so frequently during these initial stages of acquisition, it should not be surprising that these are the dominant types of errors that students made during the observational period. However, her approach to error correction, and Maxwell’s explicit promotion of this sort of approach, initially reminded me of the old audiolingual approach to error correction. More specifically, in a set of guidelines by Jack M. Stein in a 1966 training guide for language teachers (in Mathier, 1966), one of the principal elements of the audiolingual approach to error correction stresses that “if you get a wrong answer from a student, or if he is unable to give any, you give or get the correct answer fast, and have it repeated by others individually or chorally” (p.90). This element seems relevant to Mme Armand’s approach to error correction based on the fact that the philosophy of the audiolingual approach is strikingly similar to my observational data collected on teacher-student interaction, both demonstrating teacher expectations that students “recite the target language in flawless fashion” (Mings, 1993, p.171). The important difference between the audiolingual approach and the AIM program in this respect is that the AIM program only expects this during the initial stages of second language acquisition when choral
repetition is a prominent part of the program (Maxwell, 2004). In addition, error correction made by the teacher should be selective during these initial stages of acquisition. Maxwell explains this by reiterating that: “In the first year, any student who has been able to communicate with meaning in the second language has made a great leap from a non-speaker to speaker in the language. If the error made is not a concept that you have taught, and the child is just beginning to be able to express him/herself in complete thoughts, try to avoid correcting extensively.” (2004, p.105)

In this case, the kind of oral clarification prompting that Mme Armand employed to signal to learners that what they said was not understood may increase the likelihood that students will work on rectifying the error (Lyster & Ranta, 1997), and that they will modify their existing hypotheses on what works and what does not in the L2 (Swain, 1995). Although students sometimes committed form-related errors, the most common language refinement that Mme Armand made explicit reference to was the use of masculine or feminine form of definite articles and adjectives. However, although these references were always related to the context under discussion, they were rarely ever prompted by any actual error committed by a student. Throughout the observation period, Mme Armand consistently used questions and provided answer choices to focus students’ attention on the differences between the masculine, feminine and plural forms of definite articles and specific adjectives and nouns they had learned thus far in the AIM program. For example, in the hallway during Observation #4, after using gestures and her voice to ask students who didn’t have their agendas, Mme Armand took one of the student’s agendas and held it up to ask (with gestures and voice) “Est-ce que ça c’est un journal ou une journal?” In response, most students exclaimed “journal!”, and Mme Armand then initiated choral gesturing of “Oui, ça c’est un journal”. Then, she took another student’s agenda, held the both of them up and asked “Est-ce que ce sont des journaux ou des journaux?”. Students again replied by saying “journaux!”, at which time the teacher initiated choral gesturing of “Oui, ce sont des journaux, et ça c’est un journal” while holding up both and then one agenda respectively.
Another frequently asked questions referring to these forms of the French language included “Est-ce que Madame est fou ou folle?” contrasted with either a masculine teacher in the halls or a student being either ‘fou’ or ‘folle’ to compare the masculine and the feminine form of the adjective. This sort of questioning occurred many times over the course of the observational period, and each time the teacher tended to follow the same pattern of guided language refinement questioning and correct form choice provision described above. This approach to refining students’ language production, even during the initial stages of acquisition, coincides with Long’s well-known argument that teachers should incorporate attention to language form into meaning-focused activities in the second language classroom (1991). This approach could also be considered as a more proactive version of Long’s (1991) original “focus on form” theory, adhering more closely to another up-to-date attempted definition of focus on form provided by Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen (2001). This definition states that focus on form “occurs in discourse that is primarily meaning-centred, is observable (ie. occurs interactionally), and is incidental (ie. is not pre-planned)” (p.411). Mme Armand’s approach to refining language during the initial stages of the AIM program also follows earlier research findings suggesting that accuracy, fluency, and overall communication skills are probably best developed through instruction that is primarily meaning-based, but in which guidance is provided through timely form-focused activities and correction in context (Lightbown & Spada, 1990).

Ultimately, in line with the research results and theory presented above, this observational research demonstrates that both error correction and language refinement can be strategically initiated by the teacher during any stage of language acquisition, and that, in the AIM program specifically, this is indeed done using the second language to “negotiate about form” (Swain, 1995, p.133).

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4.4.7 Create Positive Atmosphere and Cultivate Positive Attitudes Towards L2

It has been said that Canadian Core French students are treated like “captive clientele” (Wesche in Lapkin, Harley & Taylor, 1993) in that it is compulsory for every student in the public education system to be enrolled in formal instruction in French at some point over the
course of their educational career. In the 1970s, it was also found that “core French appears to engender less favourable language attitudes than bilingual or immersion programs (Cziko, Holobow, Lambert & Tucker, in Lapkin, Harley & Taylor, 1993). Other formal and informal research indicates that, although positive student attitudes to French often peak around age ten or eleven, attitudes do become increasingly negative after this point, and students effectively start becoming less motivated to learn French as a result (Smith & Massey, 1987). In my own informal data collecting over the course of my education experience in schools and in tutoring situations thus far in my teaching career, I have encountered many students who have expressed to me that they do not understand why they are being forced to continue taking French in school, and demonstrate a perpetual insecurity about their overall linguistic abilities in French, even after years of formal second language instruction. For this reason, during the second student interview, students were prompted to discuss what their interpretations were of their own L2 abilities, and what they thought about the French language on the whole. As with earlier results, when most students were asked how they felt about their skills in French, some students talked about their abilities in relation to their performance and success on summative evaluation tests. However other students simply indicated that they felt their skills were improving in one way or another, like Henry who said that his L2-skills were “a little bit better” and Phillip who replied, “I think they’re getting better.” During Teacher Interview #1, when Mme Armand was asked about her perceived role during the initial stages of acquisition, she said that her role is also “to get them to enjoy French, and to establish a positive atmosphere in the class, make sure it’s fun and make sure everyone is having fun.” It was clear that Mme Armand was very energetic in her attempts to successfully abide by this perspective. Students were visibly energized when reciting and practicing the play entitled Les Trois Petits Cochons (The Three Little Pigs), and when they
were given the option of choosing their own preferred method of participation during teacher-led activities (i.e., the teacher accepted the use of gestures alone, voice repetition alone, or gesture and voice together unless she specified one of the three to be used at any time). During our second interview, Mme Armand said that students were always asking her “Est-ce qu’on peut pratiquer la pièce aujourd’hui?” (Can we practice the play today?), and that beginner-level students in her class rarely have enough time to practice the play as much as they want because of her focus on teaching the gestures and vocabulary during the initial stages of the program. Students also demonstrated how much they were enjoying the program and French class in general through their actions. I once heard students leaving class singing the song and doing the dance related to the play in the hallway immediately after class, and during play practice many students were having fun with their character’s dialogue simply by switching the tone of their voice, speaking in French the whole time. Students also really enjoyed when the teacher would use the Total Physical Response method to practice verbs and other language elements by saying “Tout le monde ____” and using the verb under study at that time. When asked about their favorite parts about French class during both student interviews, participant responses changed slightly. During the first student interview, two of the most popular responses were winning prizes and watching the targeted gesture practice and other French movies because they got to watch TV – both fairly extrinsically satisfying parts of the AIM program. Student Interview #2 responses were a little more intrinsic in nature, with the majority of students still enjoying the points and the prizes, but with many others saying that they enjoyed the play as well. When prompted to talk to their least favorite parts about French class in the second interview, the majority of student responses centred around the fact that they had to speak out loud a lot during French class, and that they would often get tired when they had to
“do the signs” all the time as well. At the end of the observation period, students were just being introduced to independent written work activities involving answering questions based on the play. During the last two observations, students were noticeably energized and curious about this new aspect of French class where they were left to do something on their own. They were visibly on-task, and during my final observation when students were completing some independent written work during class right before lunch time, they were so concentrated on their work that they didn’t even notice that it was time to go. This contrasted student behaviour that I observed during previous observation periods that were scheduled right before the lunch period. At the end of these periods, most students would be looking at the clock near the end of class and would even sometimes tell Mme Armand that it was time to go. Mme Armand spoke about student reactions to the written work in the context of it being challenging to juggle student interest in certain activities with what she deemed important to cover over the course of these important few months of the program. Besides student interest in practicing the play, she said: “Students also love written work. Like little Jordan, all he wants to do is do his written work. Same thing – because we’re focusing on learning the gestures and getting ready for the test, this consumes a lot of class time.” (Teacher Interview #2)

Students were also given the opportunity to voice their overall opinions about the French language during our second interview. All responses were quite brief, and after looking at each participant’s response to what they thought about their own L2-skills, each student responded similarly, if not exactly the same way, to both questions. Responses ranged from “pretty easy” (Yoni), to “OK” (George), to “it’s confusing, especially with the gestures, except that they help you remember what the words are” (Phillip). Besides working towards having students achieve an optimal level of fluency in French, Maxwell (2000, 2001, 2004) stresses that students need to first feel confident and competent in the language in order for them to develop a high degree of motivation to continue to improve. By correcting errors made by individual students with the whole class, Mme Armand created an environment where students did not feel stupid for making mistakes, and where they felt supported and welcomed to take risks with French. In order for students to
develop confidence in the second language, Maxwell (2004) insists that teachers must work
to create an environment where students feel secure that they can approach the teacher and
try expressing themselves freely without the threat of persistent correction. In this case, the
observational data described throughout this report prove that, in this class, students indeed
felt confident enough to do just that.
The data reported here shows that students were both extrinsically and intrinsically
motivated to learn French in the AIM program over the course of this research project. Both the observation and interview data are clear in their suggestion that students in this AIM
classroom were also fairly confident and positive when asked to speak about their overall language skills and general attitudes towards the French language. Based on earlier data supporting the contention that the AIM program is very teacher-centred at the onset of language acquisition, it became clear to me that students probably would not have developed
such positively-oriented attitudes and clear meta-linguistic awareness and confidence in their abilities without Mme Armand’s consistent scaffolding, positive attitude, and energetic teaching style. As Savignon (2002) suggests, “attitude is without a doubt the single most important factor in a learner’s success” (p.12). This assertion, and the data presented therefore beg the question that if students are not made to feel confident in taking risks and in their L2 abilities, and are not provided with a structured communicatively-oriented core French program with an energetic role model like Mme Armand, will the types of negative attitudes that I referred to earlier persist and ultimately affect student success in core French for years to come?

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C H A P T E R
#5
Final Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Introduction
While reporting on the results of this research endeavour in the preceding section, I decided to discuss how specific results related to recent theory and research results focusing on how core French instruction should unfold in today’s classrooms. For the purposes of this
final discussion section, I wish to relate all of my results to some of the more groundbreaking theoretical and research findings that have emerged in the last few years regarding overall second language education methodology for today’s learner population at large.

5.2 Summary & Interpretation of Findings

The classroom observations and interview results described above suggest that teachers are an integral factor in the launch and ultimate success of the AIM program for beginning language learners. However, my interpretation of the findings would lead me to propose that the defining difference between the participant class and other traditional core French classes is the overwhelming oral involvement of the learners and their willingness to take risks with the language during those initial stages. Using the play, and topics of discussion that were relevant to her learners, Mme Armand created a communicatively focused learning environment that was accessible to students via the gestures, visual aids, and meaning-oriented contexts that they were familiar with. The data presented above shows that students responded positively to this learning environment in keeping with research showing that “even beginners respond well to activities that let them focus on meaning as opposed to formal features” (Savignon, 2002, p.3). When analyzing the research results, a dual focus on the teacher as facilitator and the learner as active and vocal participant emerged.

What was also striking was the teacher’s ability to implement all five of Savignon’s (2002) components of a communicative curriculum (see Table 5), even after only four months of second language instruction. Mme Armand catered to the “Language Arts” component by focusing on forms of the language predominantly during meaning-oriented and context-embedded activities. The teacher’s exclusive use of the L2, and consistent use of French for the purposes of communicating with students about themes and subject matter that were relevant to them and their age group suited the needs of the “Language for Purpose” component of a communicative curriculum, especially since French is not a language that participants needed for day-to-day living. The negotiation of relevant meaning between students and teacher in this respect is also immediately applicable to the “Personal Second Language Use” category, especially in terms of how Mme Armand respected her learners as they were using their new language for self-expression, and how the overall objective of the AIM program coincided with the communicative syllabus’ goal of “involving learners
psychologically as well as intellectually in the language learning process” (Savignon, 2002, p.12). The importance of role-playing in the language learning process is reflected simultaneously in both the “You Be…., I’ll Be…Theatre Arts” component of a communicative curriculum, and in Mme Armand’s devotion to the AIM program philosophy that “in order to develop both literacy and thinking skills, there cannot be a better vehicle than the use of story, theatre, drama and music” (Maxwell, 2004, p.129). Although elements of the fifth component, “Language Use Beyond the Classroom” were not directly observed during this project, data collected from informal conversations with Mme Armand demonstrate that when required, participant students in the AIM program felt confident in expressing themselves in French outside of the classroom with other nonnative and native speakers of the language. She spoke directly about e-mail correspondence with parents who had taken Mme Armand’s beginner students away to French-speaking regions of the world, raving that their children

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**Table 5 : SUMMARY: Savignon’s Five Components of a Communicative Curriculum (2002, p.11-16)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Language Arts</td>
<td>Also known as “language analysis”, this involves a focus on “forms of the language, including syntax, morphology and phonology” (p.11). Some examples of this are grammar tests, dictations, and interactive activities and games.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Language for a Purpose</td>
<td>Also known as “language experience”, this component involves providing students with a dual focus on form and meaning while catering to the specific communicative needs of the learners. Teachers are encouraged to use the second language as much as possible so that students can develop strategic competence in the L2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My Language Is Me: Personal Second Language Use</td>
<td>In a communicative syllabus, teachers should encourage students to take risks with the language. Respecting learners as they use the L2 to express themselves will work to cultivate their emerging identity in the new language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. You Be…., I’ll Be…: Theatre Arts</td>
<td>Using role-play to facilitate the acquisition process of interpretation, expression and negotiation of meaning in a new language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Language Use Beyond the Classroom</td>
<td>This component involves preparing students to “expand the range of domains in which they learn to function in the second language”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
so that they feel confident using the L2 in the world beyond. Some examples include class trips, authentic communication with native speakers of the L2 and foreign exchange programs.

were able to speak with people in French, and in one instance even tried acting as the translator for their parents who could not speak the language to their children’s ability. These results speak very clearly to the potential of this program to fulfill the expectations of a truly communicative curriculum. Put simply by Mme Armand in our final interview when asked why she thought core French teachers should incorporate this methodology into their teaching practice, “the teacher gets to marvel at their achievements……and it creates a win-win situation for everybody, students, teachers, parents and administration”.

5.3 Shortcomings & Limitations

This section is divided into two subsections in order to summarize the limitations of the specific research project, and the shortcomings of the AIM program in relation to theoretical and research-based expectations of a present-day second language curriculum.

5.3.1 Case Study

The study itself had some limitations that should be noted at this time. Firstly, the participant sample consisted of only one class and one teacher in one school in Canada, and therefore was too small to make any significant generalizations to all classes of the same grade level and gender make-up. As well, in this respect, all of the participants in this sample were male. For this reason, I am also limited in making any concrete comparisons about how a co-ed class or a class of all-girls might react to the AIM program based on these results. In addition, the sample for this project was taken from an independent school context in which administrations are traditionally known to have more available funds for resources, and to be more acceptable and positive towards implementing new programs into their school curriculum than a public system has been known to be. In this way, my ability to generalize the conclusions of this project to a wider audience could be compromised. Secondly, the malfunction of my data collection equipment presents the possibility that those students who were interviewed during the first interview, but whose taped data from their second interview was lost, could have skewed the results in some way. However, according to all of my interviewer comments, I am confident that the remaining six students who were interviewed twice, and whose data was used to draw conclusions about student reactions to the program were reasonably representative of the entire original sample. Thirdly, the inclusion of audio-video equipment would have enhanced my inquiry into the characteristics of student-student interaction in that it could have captured interactions that I may have missed. However, the limitations of such equipment to fully capture all student-student interactions supports my original contention that the use of audio-visual equipment was not necessary in order to document the characteristics of these interactions, and that my own observation notes would suffice. Also, the ultimate infrequency of student-student
interaction seen during my observations supports my decision to only use my observation notes and audiotapes in this respect. Upon reflection, there is a chance that the limitations of my participant sample and the data collection instruments could have had implications for the final results of this study. However, I also believe that pedagogical researchers are always constrained by the fact that we work in real classrooms. We can try to control for variability as much as possible, but at the end of the day, we are not in an experimental laboratory where things can be manipulated and where consistency can be more easily achieved. In the end, based on the fact that limitations emerged even though I tried to control for everything, perfection in research remains just as elusive as we originally assumed.

5.3.2 AIM Program

In 1982, Stern proposed a multidimensional curriculum model for second language and foreign language teaching that included four syllabuses – communicative activities, language, culture, and general language education (see Table 6). On the heels of this proposal came the National Core French Study (LeBlanc, 1990; Tremblay et al., 1990) which was conducted to analyze the development and expansion of the implementation of Stern’s proposed curriculum in core French classrooms across Canada. Since then, efforts to improve the quality of programming and linguistic competence among student in core French classes in Canada have centred around Stern’s multidimensional curriculum suggestions (Lapkin, Harley & Taylor, 1993). Based on the analysis of observational data for this project, and descriptions provided by Stern (1982) of each proposed syllabus, it would seem that the AIM program is implementing all but one of the syllabuses – the culture syllabus. Stern describes this proposed syllabus as being one that would “orient the French course openly and consciously towards one or several French communities” (p.40). Although Mme Armand was successful in facilitating discovery and information sharing procedures which Stern deemed central to this


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SYLLABUS</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Language Syllabus</td>
<td>This syllabus involves a focus on the teaching of vocabulary, grammar, semantics, discourse analysis and sociolinguistics.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Culture Syllabus</td>
<td>Using information sharing and discovery procedures, learners should be experiencing French culture as much as possible. Teachers should also “orient the French course openly and consciously towards one or several French communities” (p.40).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Communicative Activities Syllabus</td>
<td>Teachers should expose and engage learners in as much authentic, unrehearsed language use as possible. As Stern states, “the key concepts for this syllabus are contact, communication and authentic experience” (p.41).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 4. General Language Education Syllabus | This syllabus involves the facilitation of metalinguistic,
awareness and language learner autonomy by “relating the
target language to what we know and learn about language,
language learning, and people in general” (p.42). I did not observe any explicit teaching in this respect, or encounter any AIM literature which related specifically to the advocacy of intensive study of French-speaking cultures within Canada or abroad. Similarly, the “Language Use Beyond the Classroom” component of Savignon’s (2002) communicative curriculum (see Table 5) is not built into the AIM program, since students do not experience the language and the culture at a more personal level, and not just within the classroom space. In a subsequent analysis of second language pedagogy, Stern (1992) reiterates the need for a cultural syllabus, saying that “it is not possible to teach a language without culture, and that culture is the necessary context for language use” (p.205). Stern also makes a strong case for teachers doing the bare minimum to introduce the L2 culture into the classroom like exhibiting posters and newspaper cuttings from French-speaking regions, of which there were virtually none in the participant classroom. He also contends that teaching about culture is especially important in situations where students are physically and psychologically removed from the reality of life in the target speech community. In my opinion, it would seem that implementing the teaching of culture in the AIM program would in fact be feasible during the initial stages of language acquisition. This is especially true with Stern’s specific approaches to bringing culture to the language class including the use of dramatization, role-playing and Total Physical Response, which are central to the AIM program, to “encourage the learner to put himself into the position of being a member of the target culture….thus becoming a training in empathic behaviour” (Stern, 1992, p.227).

5.4 Implications & Future Research

After reviewing the theoretical framework of this program and performing this qualitative inquiry, it is my opinion that the AIM program has great potential to change the way that core French is now being taught in elementary schools. One of the most unique aspects of this program is the importance placed on the development of functional oral fluency right from the outset. As an observer, it is clear that students in this program are excited to speak French. It offers core FSL teachers the possibility of a standardized language program with
the potential to target all types of beginning learners of French. These research results also warrant recognition of the contribution this program could make towards transforming the negative affect associated with teaching core French at higher levels in education. At the very least, empowering students with a functional command of the language when they are younger could supply them with the essential skills to survive the continued mandatory core French experience that awaits them. In this way, a remarkable implication of this research is the potential it presents to core French teachers to change student attitudes towards core French. In all of the classes I observed, the atmosphere was highly animated and students were energized and eager to use their new language in a fun and meaningful way with Mme Armand’s guidance and support. The interview data also demonstrated that students in this program did not hate French class or the language in general. The observational and interview data combined also reveal the promise that this program has of rendering students more confident in their language abilities both inside and outside of the language classroom. Guiding students across that linguistic boundary where they feel confident enough to take risks and use their second language outside of the classroom is a challenge that every second language teacher faces. This crossing is highly relevant in today’s borderless world where people from all walks of life are coming together and feeling the pressure to be able to communicate in the dominant language. It is in this way that I see the AIM program potentially having its most dramatic effects. The implications of developing a universal approach to beginner level language teaching, and demonstrating that it is successful in its objectives, are significant in such a climate where one’s survival depends on attaining a functional proficiency in the majority language as fast as possible. Most exciting is the current piloting of the AIM program in Spanish, Italian and English L2 classes in Canada, Australia and the United States by teachers who feel empowered to forge new paths and revolutionize language pedagogy on a global scale. Considering all of the research and qualitative data that has been presented, one would be hard-pressed not to want to delve a little further into whether students in this program are in fact outperforming those in traditional core French programs across Canada. The goals of this research project were to provide the second language education community with a detailed qualitative perspective on how the AIM program is conducted during the initial stages of acquisition situated within current theories and research results on core French
education. However, the opportunities for more specific research directions into the dimensions of this approach to teaching a second language are virtually endless, due to the fact that there is no existing research on this program specifically. One cannot ignore this qualitative data and the documented anecdotal documentation showing that core French students in this program are enjoying core French instruction and are becoming confident, competent speakers of our nation’s second language. In this respect, more qualitative and quantitative research needs to be conducted in order to ascertain why this program seems to be working in relation to the current teaching techniques that are being used. A quantitative test measuring and comparing the linguistic skills of AIM students and non-AIM students in identical learning contexts would certainly work to determine whether AIM students are outperforming their non-AIM peers, and to facilitate speculation on reasons behind any differences in the performance of both groups in terms of oral, reading, listening and written L2 skills. In their proposal of future research directions for core French in Canada, Lapkin, Harley and Taylor (1993) stressed that future research in core French needs to address “what kinds of classroom activities are most liable to promote extended interaction in French and develop students’ oral skills……given the nationwide emphasis in core French curriculum guidelines on communicative goals” (p.498). Research into the oral fluency of AIM students versus non-AIM students, and an examination of differences in communicative activities used in both contexts, would surely contribute to our understanding of effective core French programs. Specific elements of the AIM program also need to be analyzed separately in order to determine how they contribute to its overall documented success with beginning language learners. For example, examining how students perform orally using the L2 with teacher support and without teacher support would shed light on the implications of the teacher-centred nature of this program. Further research into the effectiveness of the Gesture Approach in the context of the AIM program could also work to reveal more about the potential role of premeditated gestures in bilingual education, and their potential for facilitating vocabulary acquisition and oral competency in a second language learning context. The research opportunities in this respect are virtually endless.
It would surely be in the interest of second language education for researchers to look upon the AIM program not as a “foolproof recipe for instant success, but as a direction to be explored” (Stern, 1982, p. 43). I consider this research project to be the second language education community’s second research-based glimpse into the workings of the AIM program, and into why this program has instigated such positive publicity over the last couple of years. Exploring the AIM program through research inquiry in this way would be the first step towards providing policy makers and curriculum leaders with the kind of information that is needed for them to consider widespread implementation. Any positive academic research support would certainly expose the AIM approach to a wider audience, and launch further investigation into its potential as a workable alternative to the more traditionally thematic approaches to core FSL teaching. Consequently, the AIM program can go through the academic evaluation and scrutiny that all proposed approaches to second language pedagogy must undergo

5.5 Concluding Remarks

The most refreshing aspect of this qualitative research analysis was to learn that fellow core French educators are indeed “serving as catalysts for change and innovation” (Stoller, 1997, p.33) in order to invigorate core French programs and improve teaching and learning in this context. It is also interesting to note how much existing theory and research on second language education firmly support the theoretical elements and pedagogical approaches of the AIM program. I think that this research project will show the academic community that this approach to core French teaching needs to be taken seriously, and merits further research. In this way, with further research on the AIM program, and the persistence of those teachers who firmly believe that this program help students achieve success, perhaps, as Stern states, “Cinderella (core French) may yet go to the ball” (Stern in Lapkin et.al., 1993, p. 477).

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