Obstacles and Opportunities for Literacy Teaching: A Case Study of Primary Core French in Ontario

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Abstract

Increasingly, Canadian educators are being told that literacy development can occur across subject areas of the curriculum. Few studies have focused on whether this applies to core French as a second language (CF). This article reports on a mixed method case study investigating the literacy teaching practices and accompanying influential factors of one Ontario primary core French teacher whose activities, strategies and perspectives demonstrate the potential for CF instruction to echo literacy principles taught in homeroom English (L1) classrooms, and for both languages to benefit. Context-specific factors that can encourage and/or hinder literacy teaching in the CF context will also be discussed.

Introduction

In recent years, Canadian educators have become increasingly aware of the potential for language and literacy development to occur across subject areas of the curriculum (e.g., Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network, 2009). In second language (L2) learning contexts in particular, the interdependence hypothesis (Cummins, 1979, 2001) claims that cognitive and academic aspects of language learning are interdependent; literacy skills (i.e., reading and writing skills) learned through one language may be transferred and used while learning another, ultimately benefitting both skill sets. The reported success of Canadian French as a second language (FSL) programs like French Immersion[1] (FI) (e.g., Wesche, 2002) and Intensive French[2] (IF) (e.g., MacFarlane, 2005) have been due in part to this skill transfer. Support for this concept comes from studies showing that learners' first (L1) and L2 language skills can be enhanced as a result of the cross-linguistic transfer experienced in both of these contexts (Carr, 2007; Germain, Netten & Movassat, 2004; Turnbull, Hart & Lapkin, 2000).

When considering the significance of interdependence and transfer in the context of the Canadian core French[3] (CF) program–a program where French is taught as a subject for one period each day or a few times a week, beginning at various elementary grade levels across Canada (see Turnbull, 2000)–it is important to take into account the relevant threshold hypothesis (Cummins, 1979), which suggests that transfer across languages is most likely to occur when literacy skills are well established in one language. Research in CF contexts has shown this principle to apply particularly well to English language learners who entered CF with developed literacy skills in their L1 performing equally well (Calman & Daniel, 1998) or better (Mady, 2006, 2007; Taaffe,

Maguire, & Pringle, 1996) than their Canadian-born counterparts on tests of French proficiency.

As suggested above, and as we will demonstrate throughout this paper by drawing on Cummins' (1979, 2001) interdependence and threshold hypotheses, literacy-based instruction in FSL classrooms should not be viewed as being exclusive to IF or FI programs. Although CF might not have been originally designed based on the same principles (e.g., immersion is a content-based program), the data presented here will show how there is potential for instruction in CF to echo the literacy principles that students have been taught in their respective mainstream classroom, and for both languages to benefit (i.e., students' L1 and L2). If we consider the benefits experienced by FI and IF students, these become important to investigate in other FSL learning environments, including the unique and often overlooked CF context.

Rationale

This study is based on the argument that by Grade 3, the majority of elementary school children born in Ontario are literate in their L1 (i.e., English) (EQAO, 2008).[4] In 2008-2009, 61% of Ontario students who took the Grade 3 standardized reading test met or exceeded the provincial standard for achievement, and 66% did so for writing. Although CF is mandated to start in Grade 4 in the context of this study (i.e., Ontario), the school boards represented by the teacher participant in this study chose to commence CF prior to Grade 4 as permitted by the Ontario Ministry of Education. Considering Cummins' (1979) interdependent and threshold hypotheses, it would make sense that instruction in early CF (i.e., in the primary grades) could reaffirm literacy principles that are being taught in the mainstream classroom--English, in this case--and for both languages to benefit. According to the Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network (2009), this type of cross-curricular focus on literacy skill instruction has also been identified as a useful strategy for improving Canadian students' overall literacy development.

With this in mind, this exploratory case study aimed to (a) observe current literacy teaching practices in an elementary CF class environment, and (b) identify factors that might influence those practices. In this article, we begin by providing a detailed report of the data related to one teacher--referred to using the pseudonym "Christine"--whose diverse practices and perspectives highlighted the possibilities for literacy-based instruction in the CF context. When considering Christine's practices and beliefs, it became clear that multiple contextual factors were influencing possibilities for her literacy teaching. For this reason, as Borg (2003) and Johnson (1996) recommend, we continue the article by describing some factors unique to Christine's context that encouraged her ability to adopt such a range of literacy teaching practices. Borg (2003) emphasizes the utility of drawing from as much contextual data as possible when analysing teacher practices and beliefs, as "greater understandings of the contextual factors–institutional, social, instructional, physical–which shape what language teachers do are central to deeper insights into relationships between cognition and practice" (p.106).

Core French in Canada

At present, approximately 85% of Canadian students enrolled in FSL programs are learning French in a CF context (Canadian Parents for French, 2008). While beginning grades and instructional time available for CF vary across Canadian provinces and school boards, general characterizations of the program remain consistent–in CF, students learn French as a subject, with a focus on basic communication skills, language knowledge and an appreciation of Francophone culture practiced in Canada and around the world (see Turnbull, 2000 for summary).

Despite the differences in CF program organization across the country, research has consistently identified factors affecting the delivery of the program. According to Lapkin, Mady and Arnott (2006), results from studies investigating the working conditions of CF teachers in Canada have shown that little has changed over the last twenty years. For example, findings from recent national (Lapkin, MacFarlane, & Vandergrift, 2006) and provincial (Carr 2007; Mollica, Philips & Smith, 2005) surveys of FSL teachers corroborate the pattern of perpetual marginalization of CF teachers in their schools (Richards, 2002) and local communities (Marshall, 2002), and inadequate professional development opportunities related to language maintenance and methodological training (Carr, 1999, 2007; Evaluation Plus, 2002; Salvatori, 2007). Given this type of isolating work environment, it is not surprising that almost half of the CF teachers surveyed by Lapkin et al. (2006) had considered leaving the FSL teaching profession for good.

In spite of the reappearance of these types of issues on Canadian FSL research agendas (e.g., Lapkin, Harley, & Taylor, 1993; Lapkin, Mady & Arnott, 2009), efforts continue to be made to make the program more effective. Over the last fifteen years, researchers have focused primarily on the effectiveness of CF innovations that vary the scheduling of classes (see Mady, 2008), investigating such delivery models as compact core French (Hays, 1998; Hilmer, 1999; Lapkin, Harley & Hart, 1995a, 1995b; Lapkin, Hart & Harley, 1998; Marshall, 2011) and the aforementioned IF program (see MacFarlane, 2005, for a summary). While this research has led some provinces to pilot and/or mandate these delivery models for CF (see Mady, 2008), Canadian school boards have often been unwilling to manipulate scheduling for CF, particularly when doing so would take time away from English programming (Evaluation Plus, 2002). Given these factors, what CF teachers are doing with the time and working conditions available to them becomes that much more significant.

Instructional practices in core French

Studies that included observations of CF teacher practice within these traditional timelines have suggested that the pedagogical orientation of CF classrooms are often more analytical than communicative (Allen, Swain, Harley, & Cummins, 1990) with teacher-centred, drill type activities dominating class time (Calman & Daniel, 1998). While maximized target language use has generally been identified as a desirable teaching strategy, particularly in Canada where learners' exposure to French is frequently limited outside of the classroom context (Lapkin et.al, 1993; Turnbull, 2001; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002), studies have shown that CF teachers and students use a great deal of English for classroom communication (Calman & Daniel, 1998), and that teachers find it difficult to maintain French as the language of instruction in the CF context (Howard,

2006; Salvatori, 2007). Other studies (see Lapkin, Mady & Arnott, 2009 for a summary) investigating the effectiveness of teaching methods and strategies used in CF contexts, pointed to the potential for existing CF approaches, methods and strategies to facilitate peer collaboration and develop learners' oral and written production skills in this context. The present study was intended to expand on these existing studies and investigate the extent to which literacy-based teaching strategies that have been observed in other second/foreign language contexts (including FSL in Canada) were also being implemented in the Ontario elementary CF context.

Relevant Literature on L2 Literacy Teaching

Literacy Teaching in Second and Foreign Language Contexts

Over the past twenty years, research has shown that the teaching of literacy skills[5] has often been a neglected aspect of elementary-level L2 and foreign language (FL) teaching and curriculum design (August & Shanahan, 2006; Borg, 2003; Kern, 2001). Despite research findings suggesting that L2/FL students with years of prior formal learning bring a wealth of literacy-related knowledge and expertise to their learning environment (Altwerger & Ivener, 1994) and that literacy instruction in L1 and L2/FL learning environments can promote the development of linguistic skills that transcend languages (e.g., Myers, 1996) and improve students' overall academic achievement (e.g., Devine, 1994), teaching target language structures in isolation from social context remains the most common characteristic of these learning contexts (Curtain & Pesola, 1994; Lipton, 1998). Kern (2001) acknowledged that while literacy is not a term that is commonly used in the context of FL teaching, L2/FL programs need to begin teaching literacy skills in order to prepare students to communicate in multiple cultural contexts. The extent to which literacy-based teaching is being implemented, and if so, how it is affecting student achievement, is still up for debate. Following their meta-analysis of studies investigating the effects of literacy-related interventions on English language learners' achievement in reading, writing and spelling, Shanahan and Beck (2006) suggested that the lack of clear conclusions about how such interventions benefit L2 learners is attributable to the small corpus of studies to draw from, and the lack of detail related to how teachers modify basic literacy teaching strategies that are used in monolingual contexts to suit their L2 context.

Literacy Teaching in FSL Contexts in Canada

To date, only a limited amount of research has focused specifically on aspects of literacy teaching in Canadian FSL classrooms, and most has been based in the FI context. Lyster, Collins and Ballinger (2009) observed primary FI teachers implementing a bilingual reading-aloud project where English and French teachers read chapters of the same book, alternating between a chapter in English--in the English language arts class--and the next chapter in French--in the French portion of the day--and so on. While the project was positively received by the teachers, it proved successful only in "initiating cross-linguistic collaboration" (p. 379), as teachers were limited in the extent to which they were able to collaborate on language- or content-based objectives of the project. In terms of writing, Cormier and Turnbull (2009) found that when a literacy-based teaching approach was implemented in a Grade 7 science FI class, students performed better on

measures of their French writing and understanding of the scientific concepts under study than their peers who were not exposed to the literacy-based intervention. Kristmanson, Dicks, Bouthillier, and Bourgoin (2008) collaborated with elementary FI teachers to create a model for teaching writing called ÉCRI (Écriture Cohérente et Raisonnée en Immersion) [Reasoned and Coherent Writing in Immersion]. Teachers reported to their professional learning communities (PLCs) as well as the researchers that, after implementing this model, they observed a significant increase in the quality of students' written work and overall motivation to write in French. In a similar project, Robichaud (1998) found that the process writing technique enabled her Grade 4 FI students to progressively rely less on their L1 (English) to draft written work in French. Similar to Kristmanson et al. (2008), Robichaud (1998) observed an increase in her students' motivation to read and write in French as a result of her pedagogical intervention.

In terms of teacher beliefs and practices, Ewart (1996) conducted a case study examining two early FI teachers and their beliefs and practices related to English and French literacy skill development. Findings showed that structured instructional scaffolding and emphasis on the role that literacy plays in the development of oral skills emerged as key elements in participating teachers' ideas and practices of what effective literacy instruction entails. Moore and Sabatier (2010) also investigated how three primary FI teachers conceptualized literacy instruction in their classrooms. The range of observed student modalities and instructional strategies led the authors to suggest that teachers' practices were greatly influenced by their belief in the interdependence of day-to-day literacy skills. Similarly, in the IF program, L2 learning is viewed as an ideal complement to the development of overall literacy skills. Collins, Stead and Woolfrey (2004) identified "developing literacy skills" as one of the eight teaching strategies inherent to IF instruction. They advocated that IF teachers should encourage students to draw on literacy skills and strategies they have acquired in their L1, while also highlighting the interconnectedness of the four skills, particularly in the early stages of IF when literacy activities are supposed to relate directly to students' oral competence. The authors also observed that "[L2] reading and writing skills were being re-taught in the second language in the same manner in which they had been taught in the first language" (p. 357).

While these studies illustrate the importance placed on literacy skill development in FI and IF programs, it is not clear whether literacy-based instruction is as prevalent in the CF context. A recent study by Early and Yeung (2009) explored the use of an alternative literacy-based multimodal project in the secondary CF context and examined how it affected students' language awareness and French literacy skills. After composing, illustrating, adapting and dramatizing their own children's book, Grade 9 students reported perceived growth in their metalinguistic knowledge and understanding of the narrative genre, and almost all agreed that this literacy-based project increased their willingness to continue learning French beyond the obligatory grades. In another drama-focused study, Ziltener (2011) examined her use of a drama-based approach to teach French literacy skills to Grade 5 and 6 CF students in British Columbia. Both the teacher and her students reacted positively to this CF instruction and its influence on students' French literacy skill development (e.g., students reported having learned and remembered basic French words, phrases, and general language skills that facilitated their reading and writing in French). Although this study certainly helps to paint a clearer portrait of

learning literacy skills in the CF context, researchers have yet to examine the extent to which CF teachers view literacy instruction and literacy skill transfer as a resource by facilitating it through their teaching. If, as this lone study suggests, it is possible for literacy-based teaching to increase student motivation to continue in CF programs and ultimately make CF programs more effective within the time constraints described earlier, then the present study is certainly warranted in its focus on teacher implementation and beliefs related to literacy teaching practices in the CF context.

Methodology

An exploratory case study approach was used to (a) observe current literacy teaching practices in one elementary CF classroom environment, and (b) identify factors that might influence those practices. According to Merriam (1998), a case study is defined as an intense, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon. Further, Stake (1995, 2006) states that investigating individual cases in this detail is also ideal when studying the experiences of real people operating in real situations like classrooms and schools. In order to gather as much relevant data as possible and optimize the complementary strengths of the qualitative and quantitative methods employed, this case study followed a mixed-methods approach (Caracelli & Greene, 1997; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006), where multiple methods were used to collect and analyze data. More specifically, the interview data complemented, and often helped us explain and interpret the quantitative data obtained through the observation scheme, adding what Greene (2006) calls a 'complementarity mixed-methods purpose' to this inquiry. At the same time, as Greene advocated, we were open to the possibility of discovering contradicting findings between data sets, and welcomed the opportunity to explain such divergence. As we describe later in this section, there were more qualitative methods employed than quantitative.

Focal Teacher

At the time of our study, our focal teacher (i.e., Christine)[6] was teaching in a rural Ontario school board that offered CF at the Grade 3 level for 40 minutes per day.[7] Table 1 presents key characteristics of Christine, her school, and her split Grade 3/4 class (i.e., twelve Grade 3 students and eighteen Grade 4 students).[8] As Table 1 shows, at the time of our study, Christine had been teaching for 15 years, four of which were in CF, and she had her own classroom. The Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM)[9] was mandated for use at the Grade 3 level in her board, and like AIM teachers from other studies (e.g., Arnott, 2005, 2011; Mady, Arnott & Lapkin, 2009), Christine was observed implementing and adapting AIM activities. In addition to her CF experience, Christine had taught in elementary English homeroom settings, and instructed additional subjects other than CF (e.g., science, art) to her primary and junior level CF classes.

Data collection

Christine was observed on five occasions over the course of the six week study (February-March). Each observation was guided by the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT) observation scheme (Spada & Fröhlich, 1995), as modified for this project to describe classroom activities, organizations, and instructional practices and procedures. As per the parameters of the COLT, each lesson was coded in real time

and on each occasion two researchers also kept detailed field notes in addition to using the scheme. We considered the COLT to be the most appropriate instrument for documenting the classroom context of the teacher participants as it has been validated in a number of different instructional settings (e.g., English as a Second Language in

Table 1

Case description (schools, class, teacher)

		Christine
School	CF start level	JK
	Grade 3 CF periods	40 minutes
	FSL classroom?	Yes
Class	Level	3/4 split
	Class size	12 Grade 3s
Teacher	Teaching experience	15 years
	CF teaching experience	4 years
	Current CF teaching	K to Grade 8
	Qualifications	FSL Part 1
		M.Ed. (Second Language Ed)

Canada; FSL in Canada; English as a Foreign Language in Japan and Greece) and has been specifically used and modified in many CF research investigations (Arnott, 2005; Harley, Allen, Cummins & Swain, 1990; Mady, Arnott & Lapkin, 2009; Turnbull, 1998, 1999; Vandergrift, 1992). Since it was originally developed to examine the degree to which a second language classroom is communicative, and not for literacy-related teaching practices exclusively, we combined original categories from the COLT (i.e., Participant Organization; Content Control; Student Modality; and Materials), and added nine categories (see Table 2) representing those features deemed important to effective literacy instruction (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003; Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Allington, Block, Morrow, & Tracey, 2001; Taylor & Pearson, 2000; Taylor, Pearson, Clark & Walpole, 2000) and that were consistent with current thinking about early literacy education in L2/foreign language classroom contexts (Anderson, Carr, Lewis, Salvatori, & Turnbull, 2008; August & Erikson, 2006; Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004). During each observation, the beginning time of each activity was noted and the

corresponding content descriptor(s) checked off. As per the COLT manual, percentages from the original categories were calculated in relation to the total time observed.[10]

Four separate interviews were arranged with Christine. Christine was asked about her perspectives on the nature of teaching and learning literacy and her perceptions of her own practices. The first interview elicited information on her experiences teaching literacy; the second focused on beliefs and approaches to teaching reading in Grade 3 CF; the third related to beliefs and approaches to teaching writing within the same context; and the fourth had Christine reflect on the literacy practices she had implemented in the observed lesson of her choice. In Ontario, homeroom teachers–who are often responsible for literacy teaching in English–do not generally teach their students CF. If, in principle, the FSL teacher can help in the development of L1 literacy skills (as noted in Lyster et al., 2009), we also deemed it important to ask Christine if and how she collaborated with homeroom teachers as well and if she had taken part in any literacy-related professional development opportunities and if so, to describe them.

Data analysis

Following a mixed methods approach, we began analyzing the data sets in isolation from each other, and then integrated the themes and patterns generated from the observations and interviews, looking for convergence and/or divergence of findings across the different method types. This kind of data consolidation (Caracelli & Greene, 1993) enabled us to gain insights that might not have otherwise been possible without these iterative techniques.

Percentages for the literacy teaching practices section of the scheme were calculated in one of two ways: (1) as a proportion of the total time observed for the categories of language use, teacher support and production (Analysis Procedure A); or (2) as a proportion of their main feature for the remaining literacy teaching practices (Analysis Procedure B).[11] According to Spada and Fröhlich (1995), this type of decision about coding and/or analysis is permitted depending on the research purpose. Following the observations, the research team also noted no instances of media literacy or the initiation of meta-cognitive talk during the observations (as defined in Table 2). Therefore, no analyses were conducted on these categories. However, our detailed field notes revealed instances of metalinguistic talk (Richards & Schmidt, 2010) where the teacher initiated comparisons of English and French to note their similarities and differences, which we will describe in more detail in the findings section. Transcriptions of the audio recorded interviews were analyzed for emerging themes. While each interview question was intentionally linked to a theme, we welcomed the possibility that additional themes would emerge.

Limitations

Certainly, the presence of researchers in the classroom risked influencing how Christine conducted her classes and responded to interview questions. As well, although it was not our objective to generalize our findings beyond this case, our observations cannot be considered to be representative of Christine's habitual classroom teaching.

Findings

In this section, we link the perspectives and practices of our focal teacher, Christine, by providing a detailed profile of her literacy teaching philosophy, general CF classroom practices, and literacy-related practices using data yielded from observations, interviews and field notes. We then introduce two noteworthy activities that Christine introduced in her class which we feel exemplify the possibilities for literacy teaching in the CF context. In the last section entitled "Contextual Factors", we use additional data and existing FSL research to identify factors inherent to the CF context that could hinder and/or encourage literacy teaching.

Table 2

Additional Literacy-Related Observation Categories (based on Spada & Fröhlich, 1995)

Category	Description
Meta-cognitive talk	Indicates when the teacher prompts the students to reflect on their own understanding of a text/story, or on a strategy they use to facilitate L2 comprehension, similar to a think-aloud.
Teacher support	Literacy-related support corresponding to the degree of scaffolding provided by the teacher; options include modeled, shared, guided, independent, and other (includes non-verbal cues, using a pointer, etc.)
Activating prior knowledge	Refers to instances when the teacher links what is being done in an activity/episode to: prior school experience, lived experience, the students' L1 and/or general knowledge.
Vocabulary	Includes teacher references to L2 vocabulary in terms of spelling, word meaning, word recognition, cognates, and/or words in the same family. Teacher translations of vocabulary from English to French or French to English were also included in this section.
Questioning	Distinguishes between basic comprehension questions and higher order questions (e.g. compare; synthesize, evaluate) posed by the teacher.
Teaching of literacy strategies	Refers to instances when the teacher prompts students to identify sound/symbol relationships in the L2 (i.e. phonemic

	awareness), predict, visualize, and/or monitor or repair their L2 comprehension.
Media literacy	Indicates when the teacher introduces media sources for students to consult or to use for the completion of an activity/episode (e.g. Internet, word processing, blog, etc.).
Production	Distinguishes between different types of literacy-related L2 oral and/or written production prompted by the teacher (copying, outlining/brainstorming and drafting).
Feedback	Instances of teacher or peer reaction to students' L2 output (i.e. corrective and general feedback) were noted.

Literacy Teaching Philosophy

Over the course of the study, Christine defined herself both as an FSL teacher and as a literacy teacher. She frequently cited her homeroom English L1 teaching experience as informing both her expectations about the literacy skills her students should have when they come to her Grade 3 CF class, and the strategies she used to teach L2 literacy skills. For instance, when asked how she determined the expectations for writing in CF in Grade 3, she said:

> I don't expect them to be able to [write] in French…I kind of look at it and think what they can do in Grade 1 English curriculum, because that's probably where they're at as far as a time frame goes for how much [writing] instruction they've had by Grade 3. *(Interview #3)*

In terms of literacy teaching in particular, Christine stated that she preferred to draw on the existing reading and writing strategies that students had learned while acquiring English/L1. She attributed this tendency to her experience as a homeroom teacher, saying:

> I know what kind of strategies they use to teach reading and writing because I taught that five years ago in this board as a homeroom teacher so I always make reference to 'do you look at the pictures when you read in English' and they're like 'yeah' so 'okay you need to do that in French' so I always draw those connections about what you do when you read in English. *(Interview #1)*

As per her board-developed curricular guidelines for primary CF, Christine highlighted the importance of oral language development in her literacy-related programming. She felt that oral language should develop before reading and writing, saying that "pretty much everything they're going to write we've done the routine of saying it orally ahead of time" *(Interview #3).* While promoting oral skills remained her first priority, Christine also saw reading and writing as being complementary skills. She estimated that "about 10

minutes out of every 30-minute period is writing"; however, she went on to clarify that "obviously, it's reading and writing because *they're never in isolation* [italics added]...students may have to read something in order to respond by writing." *(Interview #3)*

General Teaching Practices

As Table 3 demonstrates, Christine's classes were mainly teacher-centred. She spent the majority of the observations either speaking directly to the class (49%) or generating choral repetition of what she was saying (44%). Students were given the opportunity to collaborate in selecting the content of the activities during 23% of the time observed.

In terms of student modality, analyses of the observation data revealed the multi-modal nature of Christine's CF classes (i.e., use of more than one language skill at a time). While students spent the majority of the time exclusively listening (44%), they were also observed participating in guided writing activities where they were writing, speaking and listening at the same time (16%). Shared reading was a fairly frequent activity, with 11% of observed class time being devoted to students reading, speaking and listening at the same time. Christine used extended level materials (i.e., texts with one or more connected sentences) as her main source of text matter.

Literacy-related Practices

Tables 4 and 5 present data related to literacy-related practices, with each table reporting data based on the particular analysis performed. In terms of language use, Christine was observed using French during 95% of the class time. She mentioned in her interviews that she made connections between French and English fairly often in her Grade 3 CF classes, even though our data showed that she only used English 5% of the time observed. She explained that "it's not so much drawing on their first language as drawing on their experience", acknowledging that "that's a process they do all the time, especially when doing literacy-related tasks." *(Interview #3)*

While the majority of occasions that Christine activated students' prior knowledge related to school or a prior lesson (i.e., 62%), she also made links to their general knowledge (22%) and to English/L1 (14%). Christine questioned the utility of drawing Grade 3 students' attention to cognates because of her oral-language focus at this level, saying in her last interview that she believes cognates are more obvious in written form.

Of all the instances of teaching literacy strategies noted during the observations, almost half were related to phonemic awareness (47%) and the other half were visualizing (47%) (i.e., visualizing is the creation of images or words in print in the mind as a learner prepares to read, reads, and/or processes/recalls what has been read). However, when asked how she helped students improve their L2 reading and comprehension skills, Christine made reference to all categories in the scheme related to teaching literacy strategies. She offered examples of each, saying that she (a) points out sound/symbol relationships in French, like how French has silent letters (phonemic awareness), (b) prompts students to guess what's coming next in a story (predicting), (c) stops the class and gets them to close their eyes and sing a song in their heads to get them to the spot where a particular vocabulary word is (visualizing), and (d) periodically stops an audio

recording of the play to get students to check their tracking through the script of the play visually (monitoring and/or repairing).

Further analysis of our data revealed that Christine initiated shared reading and guided writing activities routinely during two specific activities: one that she presented during every class (i.e., the daily message) and another that progressed over the course of the observation period (i.e., song writing activity). As we will show in the next sections, we believe these activities illustrate how "planning for transfer" and "gradual release of responsibility" should be considered as viable and valuable literacy-focused activities that can be used in the core French context.

Table 3

Christine's General Teaching Practices: Percentage of Time Observed

Feature	Percentage of time observed
Participant organization	
Whole class – Teacher-led	**49**
Whole class – Choral	**44**
Individual	**7**
Content control	
Teacher-topic control	**77**
Teacher/text/student topic control	**23**
Student modality	
Listening	**44**
Writing + speaking + listening (i.e., guided writing)	**16**
Reading + speaking + listening (i.e., shared reading)	**11**
Reading + writing	**7**
Reading	**3**
Writing	**2**
Materials*	
Type	
Extended text (i.e., one or more connected sentences)	**47**
Minimal text (i.e., one or more words in isolation)	**9**
Sentence text	**3**
Visual	**39**
Audio	**6**
Source	
Teacher-made	**38**
Textbook (i.e., AIM and non-AIM materials)	**21**
Teacher-made + textbook	**11**

*These percentages do not add up to 100 because materials were not used all the time or were used in combination.

Table 4

Christine's Literacy Teaching Practices: Percentage of Time Observed (Analysis A)

Literacy teaching practices feature	Percentage of observed time
Language use	
L2-dominant	95
L1-dominant	3
L1/L2 mix	2
Teacher support	
Other (gesture, pointer, etc.)	33
Shared	24
Guided	15
Modeled	11
Independent	11
Production	
Copying	21
Outlining / brainstorming	14
Drafting	7

*Percentages represent a proportion of the total time observed (i.e., Analysis Procedure "A")

Table 5

Christine's Literacy Teaching Practices: Percentage of Main Feature (Analysis B)

Literacy teaching practices feature	Percentage of observed time
Activating prior knowledge	
School/prior lesson	62
General knowledge	22
Link to L1/English	14
Lived experience	3
Vocabulary	
Word meaning	47
Spelling	32
Translation (Fr → Eng)	11
Word recognition	7
Translation (Eng → Fr)	3
Questioning	
Knowledge and comprehension	90
Higher order	10
Teaching literacy strategies	
Phonemic awareness	47
Visualizing	47
Monitoring and/or repairing	7
Feedback	
Teacher feedback (Other – e.g., general support)	64
Teacher feedback (Corrective)	18
Peer feedback	18

*Percentages represent a proportion of the main feature (i.e., Analysis Procedure "B")

Literacy activity #1 - Daily message.

At the beginning of each observation, the Grade 3 students worked with the following type of daily message written by Christine:

Salut mes amis.
Aujourd'hui c'est lundi. Est-ce que tout le monde a passé un bon weekend?
Je suis allée dehors et j'ai beaucoup _____." ~De [Christine]
[Hello friends, Today is Monday. Did everyone have a nice weekend? I went outside and did a lot of _____. ~From {Christine}]

Christine always introduced the message in the same way: she began by prompting students to read the message silently, following her as she pointed at each word. Then, she would get the class to read it aloud together. Even though she did not formally assess students' reading until Grade 4, Christine reported that she initiated this shared reading to get students speaking in full sentences, in the hopes that their developing oral skills would eventually "transfer over to the reading and writing." *(Interview #2)*

At this point, Christine would ask in French whether anyone had an idea of what the missing word might be. This often led to a class brainstorm about words that could fit based on syntax and/or meaning. She always concluded this routine with a word activity: for instance, getting students to approach the board and circle specific words in the message (e.g., verbs, synonyms, etc.) or correct a deliberate mistake that she had inserted into the message.

During the fourth observation, one word activity led to a noteworthy instance of literacy teaching where Christine modeled a think-aloud reflection on the structure and workings of French. After introducing the sample message described earlier, Christine asked students to locate and underline the day of the week. Then, she pretended that she had made a mistake in how she had written "lundi" [Monday], saying "Je pense que j'ai fait une erreur; est-ce que j'ai besoin d'un 'l' majuscule ici?" [I think I made an error; do I need a capital 'l' here ?]. The students replied "oui" [yes], and she then asked whether days of the week are capitalized in French like they are in English. The students replied "oui" [yes], causing Christine to launch into a comparison of the days of the week in French and English. She wrote the word "Monday" on the board, without capitalizing the "m" at the beginning and asked "Est-ce qu'on écrit lundi comme ça en anglais?" [Do we write monday like this in English?] The students said "non" [no], and then she said that that is the way that days of the week are written in French.

Based on this example, not only was the daily message used as a literacy teaching strategy in the CF classroom, but it was also used to model and initiate metalinguistic talk about how French and English are similar and different. During her interview, Christine said that she also used the daily message to build on students' rote learning and to offer repetitive opportunities for them to read familiar vocabulary in different contexts:

I build on the fact that they memorize stories to give them confidence to help them to read…that's [also] why I do the daily message now in Grade 3 to start giving them little chunks of reading as much as possible…so that gets them to read over and over and over again but it has to come after they are familiar with the vocabulary and the oral context. Sometimes I'll make - even make up my own

little passages or cartoons with the same vocabulary that they know orally because I want them then to use that base to build the reading as much as possible. *(Interview #2)*

Christine introduced another activity that helped her to gradually release the amount of literacy-related support she provided to her students.

Literacy activity #2 – Song writing activity.

Over the course of the five observations, Christine introduced an activity where she scaffolded her students through each of the teacher support categories of our observation scheme. Further analysis revealed that her progression corresponded to the "Gradual Release of Responsibility" model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) described by Buehl (2009, p. 9) (see Table 6).

Table 6

Song Writing Activity – Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (based on Buehl, 2009)

Observation Data		Buehl (2009) Categories	
Observation #1	Modeled Reading (singing)		
	Think-Aloud		
	Modeled Writing		*I Do – You Watch*
	Shared Writing	Teacher Regulated	
Observation #2	Modeled Reading (singing)	Supported Practice	
	Guided Writing	(Scaffolding)	*I Do – You Help*
Observation #3	Shared Reading (singing)		
	Guided Writing		
Observation #4	Shared Reading (singing)		*You Do – I Help*
	Independent Writing	Student Regulated	
Observation #5	Independent Writing		*You Do – I Watch*

In the first observation, Christine modeled how to read the lyrics of a song they had been singing in class, and then informed the class that they were going to change the lyrics to create their own "chanson bizarre" [strange song]. She began by modeling a think-aloud reflection on the possible words that could be included in the new song. Then, she displayed a graphic organizer she had created, with words missing from the original song lyrics. She began a shared writing activity, copying words that students suggested could go in the blank spaces on the graphic organizer. In the second observation, Christine modeled how to sing the song using the new words that were supplied in the last class. She advanced to a guided writing activity by having students choose and copy words they had brainstormed as a class onto their own copy of the graphic organizer. Intermittently, she would model how to sing the song using the additional suggestions from that day's class. This pattern continued into the third observation, when Christine initiated shared reading/singing of the new song without modeling. By the fourth observation, students were generating their own songs by choosing words from the graphic organizer they had created as a class, and transferring them to a separate piece of paper. Students began working with a partner, and then by the fifth observation they were working independently at their desks.

Contextual Factors

Considering some significant aspects of Christine's context, and existing research (e.g., Lapkin et al., 2006; Mollica et al., 2005) identifying specific challenges that CF teachers face in their unique working conditions, we suggest that the implementation of literacy practices in the observed Grade 3 classroom were encouraged by three specific factors: (i) teaching multiple grades at once; (ii) having one's own classroom; and (iii) the length of the primary CF classes.

Teaching multiple grades.

First, Christine was an itinerant teacher, delivering CF to multiple groups of students in the school throughout each day. While the challenge of working with multiple groups of students could explain the highly structured and teacher-centred practices observed, Christine alluded to the advantage of having foresight about what students needed to know beyond the grade she was teaching, saying "I look ahead to the Grade 4 [expectations] and I see where they're going, so I start them with what's going to be expected in Grade 4." *(Interview #3)* Clearly, itinerant CF teachers have a unique vantage point in assessing and planning for student development over time, and as in Christine's case, can have a context-specific, experiential understanding of—and influence on—students' French programming over a relatively long period of time.

Classroom vs. à la cart.

The second factor influencing literacy-based instruction in this CF class was having a classroom versus teaching "à la cart". According to Lapkin, MacFarlane and Vandergrift (2006), the majority of CF teachers in Canada (i.e., approximately 65%) do not have a classroom dedicated to the teaching of French, making Christine's situation an exception to the norm. Teachers who must travel from class to class in order to teach in the classroom of their students rarely have any space to call their own, limiting their ability to organize the types of large group literacy activities implemented by Christine.

Duration of primary CF classes.

Lastly, perhaps the most salient contextual factor that emerged from our data was the duration of Christine's CF class. In her 40-minute class, she had sufficient time to scaffold students through extensive text material (beyond the word and sentence level), make content choices available to students, and help students to brainstorm and create their own songs. Research has shown that having longer CF classes enables teachers to implement more of the types of complex communicative activities and collaborative tasks that Christine used in her CF class (Marshall, 2011). One could deduce from these data that limited time, combined with travel time required between CF classes, may prevent the type of significant negotiation of content with students seen in Christine's class.

Discussion

Noteworthy literacy-related strategies observed in Christine's Grade 3 CF classroom included (a) modeling and eliciting metalinguistic talk about French; (b) shared oral and written language practice; and (c) guided written production beyond just copying to include outlining/brainstorming and drafting. In view of the literature, these practices would generally be considered to represent common L2 literacy-based teaching strategies. For example, using visual organizers, actively building and clarifying student input in the creation of a shared product, and promoting the use of extended discourse are also attributes of Christine's observed CF teaching practices that have been associated with effective L2 literacy-based instruction in other L2 learning contexts (Gersten & Jimenez, 1994; Jimenez & Gersten, 1999; Short, 1994). Christine's observed practices also support students' development of meaning negotiation skills (Allen et. al, 1990) and learner strategy training (Buehl, 2009). While these findings indicate that literacy teaching is indeed possible in the CF context--an important finding given that previous studies revealed the predominantly analytical-orientation to CF teaching--they do not simply confer a straightforward advantage to learners. Shanahan and Beck (2006) would agree, while literacy-based interventions can enhance L2 learners' literacy development, it is difficult to pinpoint how they translate into a specific "avenue" (p.447) to better L2 achievement. Certainly, more research into how such practices impact CF students' French literacy skills–and perhaps also their English/L1 literacy skills–would help to provide insight into the efficacy of these strategies being used in the CF context. Conducting student interviews following such literacy-based teaching, similar to Early and Yeung (2009) would also yield further insight into whether such teaching can help retain students in the CF program beyond the time when it is no longer mandatory.

In keeping with a transfer of experiential knowledge between subjects, but in addition to the careful choice of activities mentioned above, Christine scaffolded her teaching of literacy skills. She viewed speaking as a foundation for reading and writing, and selected strategies based on this belief. For instance, she chose not to draw attention to cognates while focusing on speaking and chose to emphasize phonemic awareness. Such skill scaffolding is supported by Ontario English literacy documents and recent research investigating the effectiveness of literacy teaching with English language learners from the United States. For example, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2004) recognizes talk as the foundation of literacy and encourages teachers to provide students with time to talk and to model talking that facilitates learning (p. 55). Such modeling was

evident in Christine's observed instances of metalinguistic talk. Findings from the National Reading Panel on minority English language learners also emphasized that teaching oral L2 proficiency is necessary for literacy skill development (Geva, 2006) and highlighted that teaching literacy and oral L2 skills simultaneously enables students to use the literacy tools being taught to their maximum advantage (Shanahan & Beck, 2006). It is evident from this data that Christine followed the same rationale when teaching French literacy skills, focusing on the development of a strong oral base and applying those skills while learning how to read and write in French.

Findings showed that Christine's literacy teaching practices, and the main activities in which they were embedded (i.e., daily message, scaffolded writing activity), reflected her teaching philosophy that approaches and activities which proved successful during her homeroom English L1 literacy teaching experiences were useful in the CF instructional context. Existing research and comparison of English language arts and CF curriculum documents suggest that the strategies observed here highlight the potential for reciprocity of support for the development of literacy skills across subject-specific classrooms. Like the teachers in Moore and Sabatier's (2010) study, Christine's observed practices seemed to be greatly influenced by her belief in the interdependence of day-to-day literacy skills (as supported by Cummins, 1979, 2001). She acknowledged that her students were coming into her CF class with existing L1 literacy skills, and findings demonstrated that she explicitly attempted to capitalize on this in her CF teaching. Carr (2007) also suggested that a literacy focus in the FSL classroom could be mutually beneficial for students' development of English literacy skills. Current curriculum documents for English L1 language arts in Ontario (see Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003, 2004) advocate for the introduction of texts like the daily message and the modeling of metalinguistic talk that was observed. Based on these documents, it is likely that Grade 3 students would have experienced reading daily messages in their English class, and could hone their literacy skills to understand a different language in a familiar context. Considering the data presented here and the amount of extended text, it is clear that Christine was depending on students' abilities to transfer these developing literacy-related skills to her CF classroom. We would also suggest that such a transfer of skills was facilitated by Christine's specific knowledge of the students' experiences and their exposure to reading and writing strategies. Christine drew heavily from her previous homeroom teaching experience in this respect, and used and adjusted beneficial strategies. Recent research has suggested that such adjustments being made to generic literacy teaching strategies from monolingual contexts are useful in second language learning classrooms (August & Erikson, 2006; Shanahan & Beck, 2006). Perhaps, as these findings demonstrate, not only can students possess L1 literacy skills that are useful to their L2 literacy skill development, but teachers can also transfer and modify their literacy teaching strategies across homeroom (English) and CF contexts.

Given the advantages of having FSL teachers remain as FSL language specialists (Carr, 1999), these findings suggest that it would be advantageous for FSL teachers to participate in professional development and/or have initial preparation programs that highlight the means to develop strong literacy skills, similar to the types of opportunities offered to homeroom L1 literacy teachers (Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network, 2009). Based on these findings, we would add that such opportunities would translate more efficiently into enhanced literacy-based teaching when certain school-

based factors were considered. For example, it would seem that having her own classroom space and longer CF periods (i.e., 40 minutes) may have helped Christine implement the wide range of literacy teaching practices observed. Additional opportunities for activating students' prior knowledge and collaborating with the homeroom teacher (seen as an important and effective literacy teaching strategies by Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004; Lyster et al., 2009) run the risk of being missed due to minimal CF teaching time. Although other research findings point to the pedagogical advantages of longer CF periods (Marshall, 2011) and disadvantages of the itinerant model commonly associated with CF teaching (e.g., Calman & Daniel, 1998), these are difficult aspects of CF programming to change, especially when doing so infringes on time for English programming.

Conclusion

This study aimed to (a) observe current literacy teaching practices in CF, and (b) identify factors that might influence those practices. Overall, based on our observations and interviews focusing on one CF teacher's literacy-based instruction, we believe these findings endorse the notion that CF teachers are literacy teachers. While our findings show that it is indeed possible to incorporate a literacy-based approach in the CF context, the focal teacher in this study was able to do so mainly because of her previous training and experience teaching English (L1) literacy skills at the same primary grade levels. Factors inherent to her particular teaching context (i.e., longer teaching periods; access to her own CF classroom) were also deemed to have enabled her to implement such a literacy-based approach. Based on these findings, at the very least we would advocate that CF teachers could benefit from receiving professional development training as to how they can effectively incorporate literacy-based practices in their classrooms, regardless of their contextual constraints related to time and classroom space. In this way, CF programming could become part of the "literacy across the curriculum" movement, and be seen as a viable means by which this objective can be realized.

Endnotes

[1] French immersion is a program in which at least 50% of the instruction is provided through the second language.

[2] Intensive French: An FSL program delivery format that offers learners a concentrated exposure to French which involves an increase in the allocated hours, usually from a half to a full day exposure to French over one semester usually in Grade 5 or 6.

[3] Core French is also known as "Basic French" in Manitoba and simply "FSL" in British Columbia and Alberta.

[4] http://www.eqao.com/results/results.aspx?grade=36&year=2007&Lang=E&submit=View+Results

[5] For the purposes of this article, the term "literacy" will refer to the skills involved in reading and writing. Although this definition has been referred to as "narrow" (Williams, 2004) or "common sense" (Warriner, 2011), we reject the notion that orality and literacy are dichotomous, or that one is more important than the other (see Ong, 1982). Our study did not examine the social dimensions of literacy in detail (e.g, Street, 1984, 2000) and focused instead on the classroom-based teaching of reading and writing skills.

[6] The focal teacher's name has been replaced with a pseudonym.

[7] Board selection was limited by the availability of boards that offered core French at the Grade 3 level and by the resources as provided by the Ontario Ministry of Education, who commissioned this project. The

focal teacher was one of three Grade 3 core French teachers selected by the boards for inclusion in this study. Teachers were selected by the chosen boards in consultation with the French consultant, and were included based on whether they were qualified in FSL, taught multiple grades and had more than ten years of teaching experience.

[9] AIM is a language-teaching methodology that combines target-language use with gestures, high-frequency vocabulary and drama to accelerate the development of fluency from the onset of classroom instruction.

[10] The Language Use category was taken from Part B of the COLT. While this data is usually gathered and coded using audio recordings of each observation, for the present study we coded this category in real time. Instances of exclusive or dominant L1 or L2 use were calculated as a percentage of time observed.

[11] Categories that typically presented themselves as momentary occurrences during an activity/episode (e.g. Knowledge & Comprehension questions and/or Higher-Order questions) could be calculated as proportions of the main feature (e.g. Questioning), rather than as proportions of the entire duration of the class. This approach is similar to that recommended for analyzing Part B of the COLT, which codes categories as instances taking place during a conversational turn, as opposed to during the entire activity/episode. Without audiotape recordings of language use, we also chose to code the category "Language Use" in real time and to analyze it as a proportion of the total time observed.

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