

**FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION
WHEN SHOULD IT BEGIN?**

**KERRY LYNN JORDAN
HONORS THESIS, FALL 2003**

**Dr. Anne E. Campbell
Department of Teaching and Learning
Washington State University**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the French teachers at Western Washington Middle School and British Columbia Middle School for welcoming me into their classrooms and sharing their experiences teaching the French language. Your insights into teaching, particularly the French language, are invaluable to me as a pre-service teacher.

PRÉCIS

“Should foreign language instruction begin in elementary school?” guides the literature review, case studies, and analysis herein. My interests in education and foreign languages, especially French, found an opportunity to unite through my Honors Thesis. I grew up in Canada and began education in French language upon entering Kindergarten. As a result, I am fairly fluent in French. When I moved to the United States and discovered that American students wait until high school to begin foreign language study or elect not to pursue it at all, I was astonished. In my college courses, I read literature about theories of second language acquisition, communicative language teaching, and the lack of foreign language study in the United States. These readings provided a basis for my examination the question above. Foreign languages are one of the few areas in education for which there is no national policy in the United States. The issue of foreign language education in the United States is increasingly pertinent in our global society.

The question of when to begin foreign language instruction has had a varied history in the United States. Foreign Language in the Elementary School (FLES) programs were begun in the early 1960s as a response to Sputnik. By the late 1970s, however, funding decreased and many FLES programs disappeared. Foreign language study became a high school subject. Today, with the rise in political conflicts, the globalization of international trade, and the need for effective cross-cultural communication and scholarship, the importance of foreign language competence has become an important issue. While English is a required foreign language in most countries beginning in elementary school, foreign language is still a high school subject in most U.S. school districts.

The purpose of this study was to explore the question of when foreign language instruction should begin. It began with a review of the literature. Based on the review, a case study was selected as the methodology for the project. The method of case study is common in education for on-site qualitative studies. Case study allows for an in-depth description of observations in a specific context. Two sixth grade French classes were selected: one in western Washington and one in western Canada. Each case study involved a one-week, daily observation of one middle school French class. A running record was taken during each class session. Additionally, the textbook and curriculum used in each program was reviewed. Observations were followed by interviews with the teachers and journal entries were made in the evenings following each observation. Additional classes taught by each teacher were also observed.

The literature review and the case studies support the need for foreign language instruction to begin in elementary school. These findings align with those in the field of education, especially foreign language educators. Furthermore, the case studies demonstrated the necessity of communicative language teaching to develop communicative competence in a second language. As a pre-service teacher I will work in education and have a role in decisions to implement foreign language instruction at the elementary school level. Policy-makers need to take action to ensure that foreign language instruction begins in American elementary schools and leads to bilingual or multilingual adults.

My knowledge of the reasons foreign language instruction is meaningful has expanded through this research. An understanding of the impact foreign language instruction in elementary school has on second language acquisition was furthered by personal observation. Future research could involve longitudinal studies or additional case studies. Expansion of the research to include other countries and languages would provide a more thorough sample.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	6
Research Question and Approach.....	7
Literature Review.....	8
Methodology.....	14
Case Study: Western Washington Middle School.....	18
Case Study: British Columbia Middle School.....	25
Analysis.....	33
Target Language Use by the Teachers.....	34
Variety of Activities.....	35
Researcher’s Perceptions of Students’ Comprehension.....	37
Textbooks and Curriculum.....	38
Teachers’ Perceptions of Programs.....	40
Conclusions and Implications.....	42
Bibliography.....	47
Appendix A: Western Washington Middle School Journal.....	49
Appendix B: British Columbia Middle School Journal.....	55
Appendix C: Verbal Consent Script.....	60
Appendix D: Interview Questions/Topics.....	61

INTRODUCTION

I grew up in Sidney, British Columbia, Canada and began my education in the French language upon entering Kindergarten. When I moved to Bothell, Washington, during high school, I was fairly fluent in French. I was astounded by the fact that students had waited to begin foreign language study in high school and that many chose not to pursue such study at all. These experiences strengthened my belief that more foreign language instruction should begin in elementary school.

As a pre-service teacher with a primary endorsement in K-8 multi-subject education and a supporting endorsement in French, the topic of foreign language instruction at the elementary school level is of great interest to me. Research by Patsy M. Lightbown and Nina Spada (2001) examined the Critical Period Hypothesis and implications of the innatist position of language acquisition taken by Noam Chomsky. Such theories suggest that to become fluent in a foreign language, children need to be offered opportunities to pursue a foreign language at an early age. These researchers and others have contributed to our understanding of the need for foreign language instruction to begin in elementary school. Although many of the theories have been around for decades, implementation of foreign language in the elementary school in the United States has been minimal. Most students still wait to begin their foreign language study in high school, and few become fluent speakers of a second language. Given the importance of learning languages in our increasingly interdependent world, the purpose of this project is to research the necessity of beginning foreign language instruction at the elementary school level (K-8).

RESEARCH QUESTION AND APPROACH

The research question that this project explored is “Should foreign language instruction begin in elementary school?” To examine this question, I began with a review of the research on second language acquisition. The review included studies related to communicative language teaching and foreign language in the elementary school programs (Lee & VanPatten, 1995). I also identified the kinds of foreign language in the elementary school programs that are implemented in the United States and Canada and examined the research related to the various models and their effectiveness (Curtain & Pesola, 1988). The purpose of this review was to provide me with a theoretical framework for the second phase of the project.

In the second phase, I conducted field observations and completed case studies of an American and a Canadian French language program at the same grade level. I chose French because I speak it well and was able to understand the classroom instruction that I observed. I was also able to read and understand the curriculum guides and materials used in the programs. Field site schools were chosen based on location: western Washington and either the Victoria or Vancouver area of British Columbia. I obtained approval from the Human Subjects Review Board prior to entering the schools in order to meet WSU research standards.

The case studies were completed using a variety of data collection techniques. I spent a week in each school and wrote in-class observations and descriptions of the classroom instruction. Analysis of these field observations occurred nightly in order to add details and complete a daily journal entry. I paid particular attention during the observations to the teaching methods used—such as, audio-lingual versus communicative language teaching--and the level of the learners’ comprehension and background in the language as indicated by their oral and written language in the classrooms. I examined curriculum guides and instructional materials in

order to understand the philosophy underlying each program. Formal and informal interviews were conducted with teachers.

Once the field observations were completed, I began the analysis of the data. The research that I reviewed at the beginning of the study provided the theoretical framework from which I developed categories for the analysis. I used information from that review and my own research data to answer the question of whether or not foreign language instruction should begin in the elementary school. Implications of the study with respect to high school language study are also discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Second language acquisition researchers apply first language acquisition theories to study the ways in which people can best acquire additional languages. These theories are primarily based in behavioral and cognitive psychology, linguistics, and learning theory. Studies based on these disciplines have documented that a complex variety of factors contribute to a student's acquisition of a second language. The age of acquisition is one factor in deciding when schooling instruction in a second language should begin. Foreign language in the elementary school is addressed in multiple sources, although it has not been widely implemented in the United States. Other factors that affect language learning are the instructional method and learning styles of the students. In language teaching the most common methods are grammar translation, the audio-lingual method, and a variety of approaches based on communicative language teaching. Each one emphasizes techniques and activities that support different learning styles. To address the question, "Should foreign language instruction begin in elementary school?" a critical look at second language acquisition and teaching methods is essential.

Finally, given the need for effective cross-cultural communication in today's global society, the arguments for foreign language instruction in the United States should be considered.

Theorists with differing viewpoints explain second language acquisition, usually according to one of the following theoretical frameworks: behaviorism, innatism, cognitive psychology, and a variety of interactionist and communicative theories. Behaviorism in learning involves imitation, practice, reinforcement, and habit formation, but has largely been discounted as an effective theory for language acquisition. Noam Chomsky's innatism and Universal Grammar hold that all children acquire the language of their environment during a critical period (Lightbown & Spada, 2001, 36). Stephen Krashen's 'monitor model' based on communicative language and innatist perspectives postulates five hypotheses that address second language acquisition: 1) the acquisition-learning hypothesis, 2) the natural order hypothesis, 3) the monitor hypothesis, 4) the input hypothesis, 5) the affective filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1982).

Psychological theories include information processing and connectionism. Conversational interaction as a means of second language acquisition is the basis of interactionist theory. These theories all have value in learning about second language acquisition; however, Krashen's 'monitor model' supports communicative language teaching and is intuitively appealing.

Each of Krashen's hypotheses is critical in understanding how the 'monitor model' supports second language acquisition.

Language acquisition is very similar to the process children use in acquiring first and second languages. It requires meaningful interaction in the target language-natural communication-in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding (Krashen, 1981, 1).

In the acquisition-learning hypothesis there is a subtle distinction between acquiring a language versus learning a language. Acquisition results from use of the language for communication,

while learning is a conscious process of gaining knowledge of a language. Predictable sequences for grammatical structures in language acquisition are the basis of the natural order hypothesis; in other words, learners must acquire certain grammatical structures before they can acquire the next one. The monitor hypothesis states that there is an internal editor for language production with the conditions of time, focus on form, and know the rule (Krashen, 1981, 3; Krashen, 1982, 16). The need for comprehensible input is the crux of the input hypothesis; “We acquire by understanding language that contains structure a bit beyond our current level of competence” (Krashen, 1982, 21). Finally, the affective filter hypothesis arches over the other four by addressing the potential personal barriers to language acquisition, involving motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety (Krashen, 1982, 31). Krashen lays forth a convincing array of factors involved in second language acquisition.

Studies on the age of acquisition have examined the difference between learning a language at a young age versus as an adult. For children, “the Critical Period Hypothesis suggests that there is a time in human development when the brain is predisposed for success in language learning” (Lightbown & Spada, 2001, 60). During the critical period innate biological structures are said to be used in language acquisition rather than just learning abilities used by adult speakers of the language. Adults are identified as outperforming children “in the initial stages of learning, [however,] in terms of long-term outcomes, generally speaking, the earlier exposure to the target language begins the better” (Singleton & Lengyel, 1995, 2). Multiple researchers have explored the principle of the earlier the better. Krashen, Scarcella, and Long identify three underlying generalizations about the relationship of age, rate, and eventual attainment in second language acquisition: 1) adults go through the early stages of development more quickly than children, 2) older children acquire faster than younger children, 3) natural

exposure to a second language during childhood usually results in higher second language proficiency than beginning as an adult (1982, 161). Second language acquisition is reliant upon many factors; age is often studied in second language research because of its ramifications for study and schooling.

The audio-lingual methodology (ALM) and communicative language teaching (CLT) encompass second language acquisition in the classroom. ALM aligns with behaviorist theory. The teacher is the core of instruction, errors are avoided at all costs, memorization, and pattern practice and substitution are the essential teaching and learning techniques, and differences between the first and second language are highlighted and drilled to avoid first language interference (Lee & VanPatten, 1995). Learning as habit formation, summarizes ALM in a single sentence. Second language acquisition research undermined ALM; errors were seen as a device for learning, acquisition orders are not altered through instruction, stages of development remain constant, formulaic speech is irrelevant concerning comprehension, and interference errors were not so widespread (Lee & VanPatten, 1995). This research has initiated a movement toward using communicative language teaching.

In describing CLT, Sauvignon states, “The focus has been the elaboration and implementation of programs and methodologies that promote the development of functional language ability through learners’ participation in communicative events” (2002, 4). This move to CLT encourages students to use the target language in meaningful interactions, providing a context for the language. CLT holds to the premise that, “one learns to communicate by practicing communication” (Lee & VanPatten, 1995, 34). This practice of communication would materialize in a CLT classroom in the form of teacher-student and student-student dialogue. Topics of discussion would be relevant to the students’ lives. For beginning second

language learners, context will aid in their acquisition. Freeman and Freeman suggest the technique of preview in learners' first language, view in the target language, and review in the learners' first language to maximize engagement in a lesson (2001, 152). Comprehensible input is a key element of CLT for students to acquire the target language. Teachers need to be trained in and/or familiar with CLT to maximize the communicative nature of their classrooms and lessons.

Instruction in a second language at the elementary school is approached in multiple resources coupled with the study of second language acquisition. Curtain and Pesola (1988) address not only the need for foreign language instruction in the elementary school, but also methods for developing a program in a second language. Detailed chapters on many aspects of teaching a foreign language to elementary students provide teachers with the information to implement a CLT approach in their classrooms. They advocate content-based instruction since, "In content-based classroom settings, like immersion, the context within which communication takes place is well established" (Curtain & Pesola, 1988, 119). The use of communication in context draws directly from second language acquisition theory. Lee and VanPatten (1995) help teachers to use CLT in their lessons by addressing different areas of instruction like grammar, spoken language, reading and writing. Theory and practice are incorporated by Ruiz-Funes (2002) to yield reasons for each method used in classroom instruction. The FLES (Foreign Language in the Elementary School) programs of the mid-twentieth century are well documented, but almost entirely dissipated by the beginning of the twenty-first century. Finocchiaro (1964), Eriksson, Forest, and Mulhauser (1964), and Andersson (1969) advocate and document FLES programs, which were rooted in audio-lingual methodology. Even with these

works from almost forty years ago, the need for foreign language instruction at the elementary school level has not been addressed.

The issue of beginning foreign language instruction in the elementary school continually resurfaces, while little is done in the United States to implement it on a national level. In his 1980 book, *The Tongue-tied American: Confronting the Foreign Language Crisis*, Paul Simon leveled an attack on the United States for its lack of foreign language skills. More than twenty years later, little has been done to change the paucity of foreign languages taught in American schools or the small numbers of American students who actually attain fluency in a foreign language. Simon's fifth chapter, "The Bad News from Our Elementary and High Schools" lists all of the seventy-six countries that responded to his request for information about their foreign language programs, along with their information (1980, 77-90). Scanning this list, the United States is alarmingly far behind other countries worldwide in foreign language instruction. Concluding with "Follow-Through" Simon gives advice about what needs to happen for a change to occur (1980, 179). Reading his directions is disappointing since many have not been met over twenty years later. McGroarty addresses the problems with American language policy in the late 1990's and similar issues to those presented by Simon arise (Eggington & Wren, 1997). The fact that "No state requires specified levels of foreign language proficiency to graduate from high school," sets a disappointing tone for the value of foreign language instruction (Eggington & Wren, 1997, 81). The United States is lacking in implementation of foreign language instruction and must make substantial changes to begin foreign language in the elementary school or any other level of education.

METHODOLOGY

Case study was selected as the methodology for this project since it allows for in-depth descriptions of observations for a specific context. The case studies of American and Canadian French classes required multiple elements to implement a consistent methodology. Consistency began with the selection of classes; it was essential to observe French classes for the same grade level with the same grades offered at the school. Furthermore, the teachers needed to primarily teach French as a second language and have a substantial background in the French language. Additionally, the areas where each school was located needed to be comparable. Once the sites and teachers were determined, congruity extended to the method of observation used in each case study. Roughly the same time of day and similar length of class periods helped to limit the variation of outside factors related to each case study. A replicable technique was to be used in the observations and methodology followed parameters set forth by the Human Subjects Review Board. Approval from the Washington State University Office of Grant and Research Development preceded all other actions taken by the researcher. By adhering to the methodology set forth, these case studies can be repeated using other classes.

Prior to observation in classrooms and interactions with teachers to be used in research, an application to the Human Subjects Review Board was completed and approved. An application from the Washington State University Office of Grant and Research Development was obtained from their website. This application was completed and accompanied by a copy of the Honors Thesis Proposal when turned into the office. Approval was obtained on May 12, 2003 for this project under the Exempt category.

Selection of sites to observe sixth grade French as a second language classrooms was aided by personal contacts. There are teachers I am acquainted with at Western Washington

Middle School who facilitated my communication with the French teacher, ultimately resulting in the opportunity to observe her classes for a week. Contacting friends of my family in British Columbia yielded the email address for British Columbia Middle School's principal. Through email correspondence and a phone call, he and I arranged a week for my observation of one of his French teachers. Both of these middle schools offer sixth through eighth grade classes. The teachers selected for observation possess substantial background in the French language and teaching, each exceeding ten years of French instruction. The teachers teach mostly French as a second language classes for sixth, seventh and eighth grade students. Observations I made in the areas feeding each of the middle schools indicated a similarity in socio-economic class. Both are well-off suburban areas. Once the French teachers at each middle school agreed to allow observations for my thesis, the structure of observation was considered.

Observations focused on one sixth grade French class at each middle school. The sixth grade French class in the United States was primarily the students' first exposure to the language. In Canada the sixth grade students have been taking French classes since at least fourth grade and most began in Kindergarten. Classes at both middle schools were offered in the morning prior to lunch and were almost the same length. Western Washington Middle School offers their students French five days per week during the same period. British Columbia Middle School offers French three days per week with the period offered subject to variation; the class observed had French twice a week during the same period and once during the period immediately before, so roughly the same time of day for all three periods. During these periods a detailed running record of class proceedings, especially dialogue between the teacher and students, was recorded. The running record included as many verbatim quotes as possible. The researcher was careful to note additional observations such as what was written/drawn on the whiteboard/blackboard

and/or overhead projector. The running record included the abbreviation “T:” for words spoken by the teacher and “S:” for those spoken by a student or the class. Regular printing including upper and lower case recorded dialogue. All upper case printing indicated actions occurring in the classroom. Cursive writing denoted text written by the teacher for students to see. By sitting in the rear of both classes the researcher went more or less unnoticed by students. Interactions with the students during these periods when a running record was being completed were minimal; meaning that the researcher only responded when addressed directly. As soon as possible after the running record was completed the researcher reviewed it and added any memories not recorded during the observation to the right hand side of the page. Additional French classes were observed to add context to the sixth grade French classes.

Attending other sixth grade French classes, and some seventh and eighth grade French classes, all taught by the same two teachers, developed additional insight into the French experiences and programs at each school. The broader context of multiple French classes allowed the researcher to view class dynamics and future coursework for the sixth grade French students. By selecting classes taught by the same French teacher at each school to observe, a more substantial connection with the teacher was forged. In these other French classes the researcher interacted with the students as directed by the teacher. Opportunities to speak with students one-on-one regarding their work were available. The experience of participating in the French classes, rather than just observing as a researcher removed from the class, enriched my understanding of the students’ comprehension and emerging ability in the language.

Outside of classroom observations and participation the researcher met with the teacher being observed and reviewed textbooks and curriculum guides. These meetings were mostly informal opportunities to ask questions about each day’s lessons and clarify why certain actions

were taken. Toward the end of the weeklong observation the researcher scheduled time to meet with the teacher for an interview using questions, found in Appendix D, approved by the Human Subjects Review Board to complement the classroom observations. During this interview the teacher was given the opportunity to ask any additional questions of the researcher. Prior to the interview the researcher perused the textbooks and curriculum guides in use so that any related questions could be asked of the teacher. Criteria from Lee and VanPatten (1995) were used to assess the materials in use. The interview and review of textbooks and curriculum supplied a comprehensive picture of French instruction at each of the schools tinted with the teacher's personal opinions and experiences.

Each evening the researcher used the running record from that day to write a comprehensive journal entry about the day's occurrences. These entries supplied a summary of the class proceedings from the running record as well as the evolving perspective of the researcher regarding the French classes. Questions for the following day were decided upon after completing the journal entry. These journals are included in the Appendix A and Appendix B for review.

Repetition of these case studies with additional French classes is possible by following the researcher's methodology. Adhering to the guidelines set forth by the Human Subjects Review Board is vital to ensuring the well being of subjects involved in the case studies. Selection of French classes needs to follow the method used by the researcher and adhere to a substantial degree of similarity between schools and teachers. The method of observation, especially the running record should be consistent. Attendance and participation in additional classes is key to developing a complete picture of the French experience at each school. Teacher interviews should use the same questions located in Appendix D. Textbooks and curriculum

need to be assessed using Lee and VanPatten's (1995) criteria. Journals should accompany the daily observations to summarize and reflect on each day's events. Methodology is the main ingredient of reproducible findings in case studies.

CASE STUDY: WESTERN WASHINGTON MIDDLE SCHOOL

Western Washington Middle School was the first of the two case studies toward the end of the 2002-2003 school year. As with most American schools, demographics are readily available through multiple sources. A description of the school and surrounding area provides the setting for the case study. The research collected through the observation of a sixth grade French class, participation in other French classes at the school, review of textbooks and curriculum guides, and interview with the teacher illuminates the question: "Should foreign language instruction begin in elementary school?" Consideration of the methods used by the teacher should be taken into account for later comparison. The case study of Western Washington Middle School includes a journal in Appendix A.

For the 2001-2002 school year Western Washington Middle School had a total enrollment of 815 students. Of this total, 74.0% were Caucasian, 16.4% Asian, 3.0% Hispanic, 3.0% Multi-Ethnic, 2.3% African American, and 0.5% Native American. Enrollment in World Languages, including French and other languages offered at the school, includes 524 students or 64.3% of the student population. World Languages are not a required part of the students' curriculum at Western Washington Middle School.

Located in a suburban area of western Washington State, Western Washington Middle School draws students from predominantly middle and upper-middle class families. The school consists of multiple buildings with covered walkways between them. Classrooms are primarily

accessed from indoor hallways stemming from a locker area at the entrance of each building. Windows and a door outside span one wall of the classroom, another wall is dedicated to whiteboards, a third to bulletin boards, and the final at the back of most classrooms is an assortment of posters, bulletin boards and storage cupboards. Desks are modular and the teacher arranges them as she or he chooses. The French classroom at Western Washington Middle School has desks in rows facing the whiteboards with two walkways breaking each row into three sections. Bulletin boards on one wall are covered in previous class work and French theme posters. The rear of the classroom is an assortment of supplies for student projects, some posters on the wall, and the teacher's desk. Visitors to the French classroom are inundated with a positive, warm, inviting environment filled with activity.

A week's worth of attendance at Western Washington Middle School, in a French 1A class being observed using a running record, and various other middle school French classes, provides insight into commencing language instruction at the sixth grade level. The teacher made a substantial effort to communicate content using French. An initial impression based on one day of observation concluded that the teacher appeared to almost exclusively use French. Subsequent days revealed that use of French was dominant in exchanges related to class work, but not as prevalent in reprimands. Encouragement and comments on success were given in French associating positive experiences with the language. Translation of key instructions, such as homework assignments, occurred fairly regularly. This translation devalues the French to some extent, while serving to secure a higher likelihood that students will complete the task as required. Most high frequency instructions such as the beginning and end of class were given exclusively in French as part of the students' routine. Teaching of new vocabulary incorporated visual aids so that students make a meaningful connection of the French word to the actual object

not just a translation to the English. Listening activities utilize a recording of native French speakers helping the students acquire an ear for the language beyond the way their teacher speaks. On the part of the teacher, French was used to a great extent for first year learners with little or no previous exposure to the language.

Students' activities in class varied during my observation, however, the textbook was used to supply a theme for each unit of study. Students accumulated participation points during various parts of each day for speaking in French. A student helper would hand out slips of paper during the activity and the teacher would collect them for points at the end of class. Listening comprehension activities were given using supplemental materials from the textbook, *Bon voyage! Glencoe French 1A* (Schmitt, 2002). The first activity I observed was a listening comprehension task about family for Chapter 4; the teacher did an excellent job of encouraging the students to listen and giving them a second chance to check their answers or fill in any they missed. The same day, new vocabulary for Chapter 5 involving food was introduced. An overhead with images of different foods was used as the teacher played recordings of French speakers saying each word and pointed to the corresponding image.

More vocabulary was practiced the next day by completing a chart of the feminine and masculine forms of various adjectives to be used in the "Ma famille" (My family) project. It is an independent project that provides an opportunity for students to build on what they had learned in the text about family. In class time was given to work on the "Ma famille" project, since being able to obtain assistance with French homework is unlikely. Students are responsible for creating a family tree (real or imaginary) in French, with pictures and a few short descriptive sentences about each family member. The entirety of class time was not devoted to working on

their projects, rather students received a lesson and then were given time to work, effectively breaking the class time into manageable chunks for sixth grade attention spans.

On my third day of observation the teacher returned students' "cahiers" (workbooks) and gave a detailed explanation of her grading process; once questions were answered about "cahiers" the students resumed work on their "Ma famille" projects. Vocabulary notecards were due in class and while the students worked and asked questions, the teacher circulated to check off their notecards.

Students acquired more vocabulary words on the fourth day of my observation with the use of flashcards for animals. The time spent working with the flashcards to learn vocabulary for animals had the additional benefit of students sharing personal stories about each animal. This exercise assisted students with the inclusion of family pets in their "Ma famille" projects. The remainder of class time was given to work on the students' "Ma famille" projects.

My final day observing occurred a little over a week later due to the teacher's illness on my planned last day, and my weeklong observation at British Columbia Middle School, which had already been arranged. Substitute teachers in French, as with most foreign languages, are difficult to find, especially on short notice; so students usually have to work independently during their regular foreign language time. Resuming observation a little over a week later, the students were working on a poster assignment; the poster involved food vocabulary that they had begun on my first day of observation and completed notecards for on my third day. After showing an example of the poster and answering questions other activities completed the class. The teacher gave two listening activities related to the chapter about food. Students matched pictures to phrases and checked them on the overhead with the teacher. Activities for each day of class, which I observed, varied so the students remained engaged. Listening comprehension,

vocabulary building, independent work on projects with teacher assistance readily available, and explanations of assignments dominated the class activities.

Carefully attending to the students' level of comprehension occurred in all observations. Listening comprehension activities were usually given twice to allow students an opportunity to check their answers. The native French speakers on the recording are clear and speak more slowly to provide comprehensible input to the students. When completing vocabulary building activities the students appear to be making the connection between the images and French words. During independent work time many conversations between the teacher and individual students occurred. For these the teacher used French to a great extent, however, she had to repeat and clarify many of her sentences for the students to fully understand. Using visual aids and gestures aided in conveying the meaning of the teacher's French words. Classroom explanations about assignments were conducted in a mixture of French and English. It can be inferred that the use of English was to insure that students would be prepared for class the next day or correctly complete assignments. Students' basic understanding of French is developing with a significant need for clues when the vocabulary in use eludes them.

Bon voyage! Glencoe French IA is an acceptable text, but not ideal. "Standards for Foreign Language Learning" in the teacher's edition are exemplary with the areas of communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities being addressed. However, these standards are not always reflected in the text. The introductory lessons are useful communicative skills, but include some overly grammatical elements. The text is dominated by traditional format with each chapter divided into the following sections: Vocabulaire (Vocabulary), Structure (Structure), Conversation (Conversation), Prononciation (Pronunciation), Lectures culturelles (Cultural Lessons), Connexions (Connections), C'est a vous

(It's Your Turn), Assessment (Assessment), and Technotour (Technology) (Schmitt, 2002). Using Chapter 4 as an example, each section can be described. All objectives are stated in English rather than French, even though the title is in French "Objectifs". Vocabulaire provides pictures linked to new words, but then activities with instructions in French followed by an English translation or exclusively in English. Structure or grammar is explained in English with activities using instructions like those in the vocabulary section. French and English instructions for Conversation are given with a box about Pronunciation. French descriptions are given in Lectures culturelles, but the activities follow the same format as the other sections, asking basic comprehension questions. The Connexions section has an English introduction to a French paragraph followed by activities like those in Lectures culturelles. English instructions are again used in C'est a vous with French titles and key phrases. Assessment serves as a chapter summary with division into the main areas of the chapter and activities in the same style. Corresponding videos and online resources are provided in Technotour. Multiple supplemental materials are provided to the teacher for use with *Bon voyage! Glencoe French 1A*, the teacher did not seem to use many of them. The audio recordings and listening activities received ample use while I observed. Prepared lesson plans, writing activities, quizzes, and tests appear to receive limited use. Transparencies for the text were used in teaching vocabulary. The students' "cahiers" (workbooks) correspond to the text and ask them to complete simple vocabulary and grammar exercises with the occasional written task of a few sentences response. As a whole the text is heavily reliant upon English translations and the traditional format of information followed by basic activities. The teacher does much to supplement the material from her multiple years teaching French.

Interviewing the teacher at Western Washington Middle School supplied insight into the French instruction. Her students have been studying French for less than one year and do not have a substantial background in the language. According to her their learning depends upon ability level and study habits, affecting whether they have an easy journey or are clueless. There is trouble with a lack of studying. Curriculum for the class is adapted in multiple ways. The teacher adds projects using application, worksheets and practical application because it is lacking in the text. Her personal experiences are shared through slide shows. Learning games engage the students. Flashcards help them to practice their vocabulary when studying for tests. Cultural elements such as videos, songs, dances, and cooking supplement the basic content. Inclusion of a teacher created extra unit on the French speaking world, where the students pretend to be a tourist occurs. For all of these tasks the teacher uses a method of language teaching which she asserts, “evolved over time to meet the ACTFL guidelines”. Her method aims to achieve communicative competency for her students. District goals, texts selected by the district, preparation for high school French, and coverage of a list of elements are the driving force behind selecting the method of language teaching. The teacher has been teaching French for twenty-five of her twenty-six years as a teacher. She possesses a BA in French plus one hundred thirty-five credits hours. When asked what else she would like to share about French teaching or her class the response was, “Every class makes the experience of teaching different through interactions” and that she loves seeing their development.

Western Washington Middle School is fortunate to have a dedicated French teacher with much experience. Location is a factor in the availability of foreign language instruction before high school. The target language is used in most educative classroom interactions on the part of the teacher, while administrative tasks may rely on English. Activities emphasize the acquisition

of vocabulary, the ability to comprehend listening activities, and production of projects using the language learned. Students' comprehension is limited to the vocabulary they have acquired this year, and pictures or gestures often accompany French language. The textbook in use follows very traditional methods of language teaching although it purports to be communicative. Experience and passion dominate the teacher's remarks during the interview, with the underlying message that she wants all of her students to succeed. Students elect to take French in sixth grade, thus the effort and energy expended is linked to personal interest or academic goals.

CASE STUDY: BRITISH COLUMBIA MIDDLE SCHOOL

Near the end of the 2002-2003 school year, British Columbia Middle School was visited to complete a second case study of a sixth grade French class. Demographics for Canadian schools are minimal. The setting of the case study can be characterized through a description of the school and surrounding area. Adhering to the same methodology used for the Western Washington Middle School case study involved observing a sixth grade French class, participating in other French classes at the school taught by the same teacher, reviewing the textbooks and curriculum guides, and interviewing the teacher. The question "Should foreign language instruction begin in elementary school?" is addressed since most British Columbia Middle School students began studying French in Kindergarten and the few who had not began by at least the fourth grade. The methods used by the teacher accentuate the difference between first year French students and those who began in Kindergarten. The case study of British Columbia Middle School includes a journal in Appendix B.

Canadian schools do not publish demographics like their American counterparts. Inquiring at the main office of British Columbia Middle School, I was informed that the total

population was 706 students for the 2002-2003 school year. The population breaks down into 221 sixth graders, 235 seventh graders, 249 eighth graders and 1 home school. Only one racial/ethnic group is accounted for in Canadian schools and that is only because there is separate funding for First Nations' students. British Columbia Middle School has 10 First Nations students, making up about 1.4% of the student population. Beyond this information there is no formal record-keeping available.

British Columbia Middle School is located in a suburban area of western British Columbia mainly drawing students of middle and upper-middle class families. The school building is older with three main hallways. The hallways are each dominated by classrooms for a different grade level. Stairs and ramps divide hallways since the building was not all built on the same level. The teachers arrange desks and chairs in the classroom. In the French classroom observed, windows line one wall opposite the blackboard which all of the desks face in individual rows. Posters and bulletin boards are on the other two walls. Two doors enter the classroom from the hallway at either end of the room on the same wall as the blackboard. Underneath the windows, built in bookshelves house a variety of materials. The teacher's desk is in the back corner of the room, along with file cabinets. Overall the classroom is organized and cheerfully decorated, however the desks and chairs are a random mishmash and other classroom resources are old. The British Columbia Middle School building is currently under review for a potential remodel or complete rebuild.

Although students at British Columbia Middle School only receive French as a Second Language instruction three times per week, a week of observation led to substantial findings about the French instruction. Use of the target language occurred with students both formally and informally. Each day the teacher greeted students individually in French as they entered and

students easily responded in French. These greetings primarily included “Bonjour” (Hello) and “Ca va?” (How’s it going?). English surfaced in some administrative tasks, while French dominated content. The teacher seamlessly switched between the two languages, easily interchanging as necessary. Congratulatory remarks were made in French, supporting its value and connecting positive experiences to the language. Translation was minimal and usually fit into the lesson for those expressions which are difficult to illustrate or relevant to know in English. The teacher could have used more French in her instruction, however the materials used and the content exemplified proper use of the target language. For students with six years of French language experience, additional opportunities to hear the language could be used. However, sixth grade French is the first year of middle school French and students are transitioning from elementary school.

The students’ text, *Visages 2: Savoir Faire*, provided the subject matter for the unit being taught while I observed (Mas, 1994). Activities focused on the theme of endangered animals. At the start of each day, two students undertook the responsibility of recording participation points on clipboards for students every time they spoke in a complete French sentence (at least three words). Students began the week by completing a chart of “Les animaux domestiques” (pets) and “Les animaux sauvages” (wild animals) with the teacher recording their suggestions on the board. Once the chart was filled with a variety of related French vocabulary words, the teacher switched to using the overhead to show the students pictures of fourteen different animals with corresponding French vocabulary. From the overhead the students recorded the names of the animals in French and wrote their own English translation if they thought they would need it. Partner discussions about which animals were endangered and which were not

ensued. After the discussion time, predictions were shared with the class, prior to using the textbooks to find out which animals were endangered.

Review of the first day's lesson occurred on the second day as an introduction to the song "Sauvons les animaux" (Let's save the animals). The class discussed the meaning of the title in English, helping the students to identify the grammatical structure of the verb "sauver" (to save) for the pronoun "nous" (we or us). Each verse of the song describes a different animal; the teacher read them aloud with corresponding actions and had the students guess which animal was being described. With the aid of a recording by a native French speaker the class sang "Sauvons les animaux" a few times before commencing some textbook work. The pages the students turned to included pictures and descriptions, entirely in French, of the endangered animals. While circulating through the classroom the teacher asked the students to point to various animals as she read the description. By looking around during this task the teacher is able to check the students' comprehension. After a few of these description readings, the teacher asked the students to generate a list of what kind of information each paragraph includes. The students generated a variety of ideas, and the teacher modified their suggestions by pointing out that she was looking for general topics, not specifics. Once the students had produced their ideas, the teacher summarized what the topics were using the students' ideas. The general categories included where it lives, what colors it is, what size it is, and what it eats. Reading another description, the teacher identified and explained that all pronouns in French have a gender, either masculine or feminine. In partners, the students continued reading the descriptions for a few minutes; the teacher checked in afterwards regarding comprehension using thumbs up or down to indicate if it was easy or difficult to understand what they read. The last activity for the second day used a world map in the textbook to have students identify where the animals being studied

live. When the students began struggling to use complete sentences in their responses the teacher asked if they just wanted to sing the song one more time. The class ended with another rendition of “Sauvons les animaux”.

The last class of the week began with the teacher pointing to animals on the overhead and having students name them in French. When the teacher asked a more complex question regarding whether or not one of the animals was endangered she helped the class formulate a full sentence answer on the board. A pronoun was used in this sentence focusing the students’ attention on whether the noun was masculine or feminine. This example was used throughout the activity to help students respond using a complete sentence. Following this activity the students participated in another rendition of “Sauvons les animaux” with the teacher only showing one line at a time so the students could read the words while they sang. Two students were then asked to distribute textbooks for an activity where the teacher read paragraphs about the animals and the students put a finger on the corresponding picture. In partners again the students discussed the four topics used in each paragraph and shared them as a class. Again the students turned to the world map in their text and the teacher read each name aloud with the students repeating after her practicing pronunciation. Worksheets were passed out as the textbooks were put away, for students to work in partners to name the animals and the continent they come from. As a class responses were shared after the partners had completed their worksheets. The final activity for the week involved singing the song “Sauvons les animaux” a cappella. By singing without the recording a greater emphasis on pronunciation occurred. Within each period of class the teacher has the students complete a variety of activities, thus keeping their attention. Whole class discussion/singing, partner discussion/work, and individual work/following along made up the bulk of the activities observed over the course of a week.

Students' level of comprehension was notably higher than the students at Western Washington Middle School; it can be inferred that this comprehension is a result of additional years of instruction in the French language. Simple conversation, such as greetings before class, and routine instructions yield a high level of comprehension on the part of the students. Often when students asked a question, the teacher would respond in French and it appeared that the students understood. She also occasionally responded in French that she could not understand an English question and that she needed to hear it in French. Students struggled through creating the French question with the teacher's help. Vocabulary lists were generated with the combined effort of the students and teacher, as various students were familiar with the French words for different animals. When asked questions regarding vocabulary, the students were regularly able to come up with a translation amongst themselves, rather than relying on the teacher. The teacher often used gestures and pictures before resorting to English translation as a means of building understanding of vocabulary. When English was used in class it appeared to speed up the pace of communication or convey solely administrative tasks. Any admonitions were usually in English, especially if they required additional explanation. Overall the students' comprehension is competent for classroom instruction and their ability to produce the language is developing.

Visages 2: Savoir Faire is the textbook used at British Columbia Middle School (Mas, 1994). The text is entirely in French, including publishing information, indicating to the students that French is an equally important language for communication. A teacher using this text must know the language. Just glancing through the book, it is more like a trade book than a textbook with colorful pictures and photographs. Each of the eight chapters is instead called a theme and focuses on a student relevant topic using cartoons and real-life examples to illustrate the ideas.

These themes include La pizza (Pizza), Les t-shirts (T-shirts), Les fourmis (Ants), Dans les nuages (In the clouds), Les pompiers (Firefighters), Les extraterrestres (Extraterrestrials), Le temps (Weather), and Les animaux en danger (Endangered animals) (Mas, 1994). Vocabulary is built in large quantities throughout the text without ever being identified as such to the students. No exercises or other activities are visible in the text for students; grammar drills are non-existent. The teacher's resource binder provides a vast array of supplemental materials, including an overview of the program, materials for each theme, and master copies. Recordings of songs, like "Sauvons les animaux", are included in the teacher resources. Just looking at the teacher resources for "Les animaux en danger" (Endangered animals) gives a sample of what is available to teachers. Core language and complementary language identify the vocabulary, cassettes include the recordings, flashcards with minis to reproduce are prepared for all vocabulary, scope and sequence for each sample lesson is given with option A or B to follow in lesson planning. Lesson plans are divided into Activity, Focus, Time, Material, Skill, Format, and Evaluation. The skills that may be taught are listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and representing using the formats of class, group, pair, and individual. Instructions for the lesson plans including "suggested teacher language" for the French are provided. A final project suggestion for each unit is included along with instructions. The aspects of language which the theme addressed are noted for the teacher; for "Les animaux en danger" (Endangered animals) these are gender of nouns and adjective placement after nouns. Using the teacher's resources provides a comprehensive French program to students even without additions from the classroom teacher. At first glance *Visages 2: Savoir Faire* seems like a fun interesting textbook, delving deeper it is a tool for students to learn French without cumbersome exercises confronting them from their textbook.

My interview with the French teacher being observed at British Columbia Middle School was productive. She estimates that 85% of her students have been studying French since Kindergarten and the remainder began French by fourth grade at the latest. However, the teacher does not consider this early beginning a substantial background in French, since instruction is only twenty minutes a day for Kindergarten to fourth grade. She stated that their vocabulary is pretty good, but limited, and their active vocabulary is low. Comprehension is good overall and relatively easy making it learning friendly. In adapting curriculum guides and materials the teacher tries to steer away from the predominantly audio-lingual methodology in place and incorporate at least three different activities per class: one listening, one writing, and one speaking. The teacher endeavors to use a mixture of everything in her teaching. She clarified that a purely communicative language teaching approach does not work because students do not make all of the connections without guidance. This mixture is her choice of language teaching method because communicative language teaching needs more explanation. Sixteen years of teaching, with thirteen teaching French amounts to a substantial teaching background. The teacher's husband is from Quebec (Canada's primarily French-speaking province) and she lived in Quebec for five years as a child and four as an adult. As a young adult the teacher undertook a five month French immersion program. She further shared that the hardest thing about teaching French as a second language to her students is the negative attitude toward French from students on the West Coast of Canada.

British Columbia Middle School has the advantage of students who have a background in the French language coupled with a teacher who exudes enthusiasm for teaching French. Being on the West Coast of Canada affects the students' connection to the French language. However, students in the district in which the case study was conducted are fortunate to begin French as a

Second Language instruction in Kindergarten. By sixth grade, the target language is used fluidly with English to support the students' language acquisition. The incorporation of a variety of activities into each lesson exercises the students' abilities in listening, writing, and speaking each day. Students' comprehension is admirable for sixth grade, especially considering the limits of their early French language instruction. The teacher is fortunate to have a textbook without cumbersome grammatical exercises or English to devalue the French. Interviewing the teacher revealed her personal insights from multiple years teaching and her desire to help her students achieve success in the French language. All of the students at British Columbia Middle School are required to take French in sixth grade.

ANALYSIS

Once the case studies were completed, the in-class running records, journal entries, textbook reviews, interview notes, and other materials were analyzed for categories and themes. The analysis resulted in the emergence of five general categories that provide insight into the issue of when foreign languages should begin. The literature review connected with these five categories to lend a theoretical basis for the inferences discussed in the final section of this paper. Target language use by the teachers occurred in both classrooms; however, language use varied by teacher and was related to comprehensible input. The teachers used a variety of activities with their students to facilitate engagement in second language acquisition and to practice communicative language teaching strategies. Comprehension adjoined with language acquisition on multiple levels, and the researcher's perceptions of students' comprehension provide insight into the discrepancy between students who began French instruction in Kindergarten versus sixth grade. Textbooks and curriculum guides provided teachers with ideas for in language

instruction, but they were adapted to expedite communicative competency in the language. Each teacher's perceptions of their program offered an inside perspective coupled with multiple years experience. A deliberate analysis of the following five categories ties back to when foreign language instruction should begin, both according to the literature and the case studies. In the following sections, these five categories are discussed in depth.

Target Language Use by the Teachers

Exposure to the target language in classroom instruction heightens students' familiarity with the language, especially oral communication. As Lee and VanPatten state, "Acquisition consists in large part of the building up of form-meaning connections in the learner's head" (1995, 38). During the on-site observations, the students at Western Washington Middle School and British Columbia Middle School received similar quantities of the target language used by their teachers. Encouragement and compliments from teachers to students occurred in French at both sites. This use of the target language created positive student associations with the language. Both teachers primarily used the target language to express content and used English for administrative tasks. For example, the Western Washington Middle School teacher often translated key instructions into English after stating them in French. Although she did not do this as often, the British Columbia Middle School teacher also used English to complete administrative tasks. I inferred that the additional time and effort to explain all directions in the target language would have subtracted minutes from the limited time available. The teachers later confirmed this observation. The one exception to the use of English for administrative purposes was that both teachers used French for high frequency instructions, such as common daily activities at the beginning and end of class. The learners' daily exposure to the vocabulary and directions meant they did not need to have the instructions in English.

Both classrooms provided sufficient comprehensible input that met the requirements of Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis for second language acquisition. The Western Washington Middle School teacher performed admirably in her use of the target language considering that the students have had less than a year of French instruction. British Columbia Middle School's teacher probably could have used more of the target language due to the students' experience with French; however, for efficient and effective communication regarding administrative tasks English was a logical decision. Target language use by the teachers sets the tone for the class; students in both schools receive a French-rich environment appropriate to their level of comprehension.

Variety of Activities

At the sixth grade level a variety of activities during each class period was essential to keep students engaged. Input activities that involved listening and reading were completed in both classes with varying levels of support. With more substantial support, output activities that used speaking and writing were completed. At Western Washington Middle School the major activities included listening comprehension, vocabulary building, independent work on projects, and explanations of assignments. Comprehensible input was given through the multiple listening comprehension activities. Students' vocabulary was growing rapidly during their first year of French instruction and many vocabulary-building activities were completed. The vocabulary was based on the textbook, *Bon voyage! Glencoe French 1A*, and was not always interesting for sixth grade students. The vocabulary developed during the one-week observation included food, adjectives for people, and animals. These are not typical units in the sixth grade curriculum; however, for the first year of instruction in a second language this vocabulary is necessary. Students' independent work on projects allowed them the opportunity to put their new

vocabulary to use and engage in one-on-one conversations with the teacher. Since very few parents speak French, this in class work time is essential for the Western Washington students' success on projects. The teacher's detailed explanations of assignments provided opportunities for her to use the target language in a meaningful context. They also provide a chance for the students to ask questions in order to make sense of the input. As a whole, the activities at Western Washington Middle School encompassed the necessary skills for first year language learners.

The British Columbia Middle School teacher had the advantage of teaching learners who had already completed two to six years of French language instruction. She used a variety of groupings, such as whole class, partner, and individual, as well as activities such as discussion, singing, worksheets, and following along reading. Throughout each lesson she varied the activities and kept the students engaged, thus minimizing frustration with any one activity. An excellent example was when she introduced a new topic and built students' vocabulary. She drew on students' prior knowledge through whole class discussion to brainstorm lists of pets and wild animals. The new vocabulary for endangered animals was introduced using a song. It is important to note that the vocabulary about endangered animals is appropriate to the sixth grade curriculum. Singing allowed the students to read the lyrics in French and to produce the language through song. This vocabulary building activity is more interactive than traditional notecards that were used in the Washington school. Textbook reading comprehension was aided by the teacher first reading aloud with the students following along and identifying the paragraph being read. After the teacher's example, the students continued to read with a partner. Another comprehension activity used the whole class discussion to compile a list of categories included in each paragraph after the students had completed their paired discussions.

Grammar was taught contextually. For example, the students learned about the gender of nouns through discussion and study of paragraphs describing endangered animals. The teacher would draw their attention to the use of pronouns in the paragraphs and show how the pronouns were related to the articles used for each noun. By helping the students develop the format of a response on the board, the teacher had students answer questions that replaced the noun with the appropriate pronoun. Follow-up worksheets were completed with a partner to provide immediate assistance with comprehension of the reading and production in writing responses. By implementing an assortment of groupings, along with various activities, there was little room for student boredom or inattention. Additionally, the activities used were grade appropriate and comparable to those that sixth grade students would be doing in other classes.

Researcher's Perceptions of Students' Comprehension

Second language acquisition relies on the learners' ability to comprehend language, thus acquiring new material when comprehensible input is offered. Having a basic vocabulary allows students to reason through input by picking out the words they know. Students at Western Washington Middle School have received limited exposure to French vocabulary and struggle to comprehend any input that goes beyond their vocabulary. Usually listening comprehension activities were played twice to give them an opportunity to check their answers and answer any questions they missed. British Columbia Middle School students appeared to understand more oral and written language input than those at Western Washington. Repetition and clarification occurred in almost all teacher-student conversations. The repetition and clarification at British Columbia Middle School did not occur as often. Both teachers used visual aids and gestures to supplement the language and help learners connect meaning to vocabulary.

Translation occurred when necessary or heavily requested by the student. At British Columbia Middle School, translation was used for vocabulary that did not lend itself to visual aids, gestures, or a French definition that used vocabulary the students knew. Furthermore, the students often produced vocabulary translations among themselves instead of having the teacher translate. Western Washington Middle School students were stuck on translation. Often students would push for a translation, even though attending to the teacher's visual aids, gestures, and clues in French would have helped them reason through what the word meant. The desire to obtain a translation, on the part of Western Washington Middle School students, could be related to their substantial understanding of English and limited understanding of French. Based on their use of French, I inferred that the Western Washington Middle School students think in English, thus relying on translation. In contrast, the British Columbia Middle School students were able to reason using their French vocabulary and developed their ability to produce an idea of what words meant, regardless of language. Translation relates to the language that an individual thinks in. Communicative language teachers try to avoid translation and help students connect meaning to vocabulary eliminating the additional step of translation for comprehension. It is much more challenging to have students connect meaning to vocabulary without using their first language when they are already competent in their first language. The British Columbia Middle School students have a considerable advantage over the Western Washington Middle School students in comprehension due to the vocabulary from their two to six years of French instruction.

Textbooks and Curriculum

In reviewing *Bon voyage! Glencoe French 1A* from Western Washington Middle School and *Visages 2: Savoir Faire* from British Columbia Middle School the differences were drastic

(Schmitt, 2002; Mas, 1994). The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Standards for Foreign Language Learning are included in the teacher's edition of *Bon voyage! Glencoe French 1A*. Yet, the book lends itself more to audio-lingual methodology than communicative language teaching advocated by the Council. *Bon voyage! Glencoe French 1A* follows a traditional format. Each chapter is divided into sections--such as vocabulary, a reading, pronunciation, and comprehension questions. Within these sections the students are given activities with instructions in French followed by an English translation, or instructions exclusively in English. The translation of instructions from French to English was repeated throughout the textbook, a feature that worked against students developing their ability to understand instructions in French. The repetition of the same instructions could have facilitated students learning them after a few chapters, thus making translation unnecessary. Unfortunately, the phasing out of the translations was not done. Basic comprehension questions emphasize facts and details and require little reasoning on the part of the student to process and understand the readings. Readings should promote meaningful connections, rather than merely check to see if the students correctly decoded the text. The students' "cahiers" (workbooks) correspond to the text and do little more than add vocabulary and grammar exercises with the occasional short written response. *Bon voyage! Glencoe French 1A* fails to share with students the interest and appeal of communicating in the French language, it supports learning of the language in place of acquisition.

On the other end of the spectrum, *Visages 2: Savoir Faire*, used by British Columbia Middle School, is a student text that could be read for entertainment. At first glance, *Visages 2: Savoir Faire* looks like a trade book with its themes, cartoons, real-life examples, and colorful pictures or photographs. The topics covered in the text are of interest to sixth grade students,

like pizza and endangered animals. Beyond the visual and content appeal, the text is entirely in French! French is even used for the publication information on the copyright page. This use of French strongly conveys to students that French is equal to English for effective communication of information. Teachers using *Visages 2: Savoir Faire* must know the French language in order to teach from it, although the teacher's resources include lesson plans and other materials in English. Even within the teacher's resources there are no grammar drills, instead each unit has instructions for a final project that helps students apply their new knowledge. The lessons provided in the teacher's resources take the text and shape lessons around each cartoon, story, or photographs and information. Any grammar learning is woven into the text through structured input that focuses on including a specific grammatical element. The teacher can then draw on the common grammatical element to teach students about it, in place of drills. Students do not see the exercises they are completing when perusing the text, hence it could be read independently for pleasure, not just to read and complete exercises for class. *Visages 2: Savoir Faire* is used in a comprehensive French language program centering on language acquisition.

Teachers' Perceptions of Programs

The energy, enthusiasm, and commitment to teaching French on the part of the two teachers observed are commendable. Western Washington Middle School's French teacher faces the challenge of sixth grade students who are just beginning their study of French. The ease of learning and acquiring French for her students depends on their ability level and study habits. Ability level involves the student's individual propensity to acquire a language, not prior experience. In adapting the curriculum, the teacher had to add projects, worksheets, and additional practical applications because there were not enough included in the textbook. After reviewing the textbook, it became apparent that these additions are the heart of the curriculum

implemented by the teacher. Engaging activities such as sharing personal experiences, learning games, flashcards, videos, songs, dances, and cooking supplemented the language and add culture to the students' learning. One of the teacher's aims is for communicative competency in her language teaching, a goal designed to meet the ACTFL guidelines and district goals. The ACTFL guidelines provide an excellent framework for foreign language instruction. The textbook selected by the district, which relies on the audio-lingual methodology more than communicative language teaching, may reflect the district goals. By supplementing the textbook the teacher supports language acquisition for her students. The Western Washington Middle School's French teacher shared that "every class makes the experience of teaching different through interactions" and that she loves seeing their development.

British Columbia Middle School's French teacher shared insights into teaching French in her school. Beginning the year with students who have two to six years of French language instruction provides vocabulary and comprehension that are pretty good. However, the teacher does not consider these experiences in French to be substantial. Even though the prior experiences are not substantial, the acquisition of French is relatively easy for the students because their background is learning friendly. Elementary school French serves to familiarize the students with the sounds of the language and provides vocabulary development that will be the basis for future learning. The teacher believes that most curriculum guides and materials follow the audio-lingual methodology, so she tries to give at least one activity in the following areas per class: listening, writing, and speaking. Her perception is that purely communicative teaching is ineffective since students do not make the connections on their own. As with all pedagogy a balance is needed to meet students' needs. In language teaching the teacher uses a mixture of all methods. The hardest part about teaching French to her students is the negative

attitude towards French held by many students on Canada's West Coast. Growing up on Canada's West Coast I remember that some students resented French, but many others appreciated the opportunity to begin a language before high school.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study began with the following research question: "Should foreign language instruction begin in elementary school?" The case studies conducted at Western Washington Middle School and British Columbia Middle School lend credence to the need for foreign language instruction to begin in elementary school. Differences in the level of French proficiency between students at the two schools support second language acquisition theory research that has found that younger learners are more likely to become fluent in a second language. Exemplary teaching of French at Western Washington Middle School and British Columbia Middle School cannot atone for differences between students who start language study in sixth grade versus those who enter sixth grade having completed two to six years of French instruction. Informal exchanges I had in French at British Columbia Middle School exemplified the students' comfort with the language and willingness to communicate using it. Conversing with students in a different sixth grade French class at Western Washington Middle School resulted in their frustration when I endeavored to talk to them only in French, using gestures and explanations to clarify words. Second language acquisition research addresses Krashen's five hypotheses and they may be used to assess the notable differences.

Acquisition opportunities and the ability to understand comprehensible input provide additional time to build language comprehension when foreign language instruction begins in elementary school. For these case studies, this meant that the students at British Columbia

Middle School had a higher level of comprehension than the students at Western Washington Middle School. Researchers have documented that children in elementary school are less likely to have a high affective filter regarding language learning, and tend to be more willing to practice and make mistakes. Adolescents, however, tend to be more concerned about making mistakes and embarrassing themselves. This finding was illustrated in this study.

Communicating in the target language was not a problem for the students at British Columbia Middle School even though their production was imperfect. They had already established the habit of practicing their French, and were not embarrassed or reluctant to use it with the researcher. Western Washington Middle School students, however, were hesitant to communicate in the target language and communicated in English amongst themselves when working on projects. In general, the case studies lend support to the argument that foreign language instruction needs to begin in elementary school. Additionally, the findings indicate the positive effects of communicative language teaching on students' acquisition of a second language.

When one looks at the larger context of foreign language teaching in the United States, the findings from this study also have implications at the national level. In this country, less than 15% of high school students study a foreign language, and of those, less than 5% reach any level of fluency. This number has not changed substantially since 1980 when Simon wrote *The Tongue-Tied American: Confronting the Foreign Language Crisis*. Simon noted that the widespread use of English around the world had led many Americans to feel that learning a second language was unnecessary. Simon argued that “the problem of linguistic isolation coincides with cultural isolation” (1980, 10). International negotiations require that people are able to communicate with each other, and not all people speak English. An inability to

communicate acts to the detriment of relations; ultimately resulting in the cultural isolation of which Simon spoke. Communication is involved in trade and the United States' economy needs business people who can communicate with people who speak other languages in the global economy. International conflicts have the potential to be diffused if those involved can communicate with each other. The ability to speak the same language develops cultural sensitivity and understanding. Sharing of scholarship requires that the scholars be able to communicate, if a scholar only speaks English then he or she is limited to resources and materials in English, potentially missing critical information discovered in another language. Although many people speak English, not all people speak English; this fact highlights the need for members of our global society to learn other languages.

Compared with other nations, the United States is severely disadvantaged due to its missing foreign language education policy. The real question is why foreign language instruction does not begin in American elementary schools. Canada begins a second language in elementary school, namely French in English-speaking areas, since English and French are its official national languages. The students at British Columbia Middle School are already benefiting from exposure to a second language, while their American counterparts are just beginning a language elective that some may decide not to continue. Simon's (1980) survey of language study in the seventy-six countries that responded to his inquiry powerfully demonstrates the United States' lack of a second language policy when compared with countries worldwide. Most other countries require that students study at least a second language, if not a third or fourth. In our global society those countries whose people speak other languages will be able to forge multiple international bonds, while the United States struggles to foster bonds with any countries where people do not speak English.

Students who commence second language acquisition as children tend to place greater value on their foreign language experience and attain fluency. The case studies addressed above demonstrate the difference between beginning a second language in elementary school versus middle school. Communication with people who do not speak English is a constant struggle for native English speakers in the United States and limits economic opportunities, political relations, cultural exchanges, and academic collaborations. To produce citizens who value and are fluent in more than one language, foreign language instruction needs begin in elementary school.

The implementation of this research project provided me with an answer to the research question that I asked: “Should foreign language instruction begin in elementary school?” The literature review provided me with the framework that I needed to understand and contextualize the data that I gathered within the larger context of foreign language teaching. An understanding of the impact that elementary school foreign language instruction has on second language acquisition was furthered by personal observations and the case studies. One limitation of this study was its scope. Although the case study method allowed for in-depth analysis of each site, additional studies would be needed to support the findings presented here. Additional research could involve longitudinal studies or additional case studies that compare the students over time in their acquisition of French. One question is whether or not the students who start language study in sixth grade can catch up with their peers who began in elementary school. Expansion of the research to include other countries, or studies that compare the acquisition of other languages—such as German, Russian, Italian, Chinese, or Arabic would provide a more thorough sample and more comprehensive data than that presented here.

Finally, the project greatly expanded my knowledge with respect to the reasons why foreign language instruction is important. In 1980, other countries were actively working to educate their citizens in more than one language. In the last 20 years, these countries have produced high school graduates who are fluent in one or more foreign languages. At that time, Simon wrote *The Tongue-Tied American: Confronting the Foreign Language Crisis* and condemned the paucity of foreign language education and ability among Americans. His book was published prior to my birth, and it is still relevant as I graduate from university. Given the findings from my study, I would argue that it is time for the United States to take actions to implement a national policy regarding foreign language education.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Andersson, T. (1969). *Foreign languages in the elementary school: A struggle against mediocrity*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Curtain, H. & Pesola, C. (1988). *Languages and children – Making the match: Foreign language instruction in the elementary school*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- Eggington, W. & Wren, H. Eds. (1997). *Language policy: Dominant English, pluralist challenges*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Eriksson, M., Forest, I. & Mulhauser, R. (1964). *Foreign languages in the elementary school*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Finocchiaro, M. (1964). *Teaching children foreign languages*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- Freeman, D. & Freeman, Y. (2001). *Between worlds: Access to second language acquisition*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Krashen, S. (1981). *Second language acquisition and second language learning*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Krashen, S., Scarcella, R. & Long, M. Eds. (1982). *Child-adult differences in second language acquisition*. Rowley: Newbury House Publishers, Inc.
- Lee, J. & VanPatten, B. (1995). *Making communicative language teaching happen*. New York: McGraw Hill, Inc.

- Lightbown, P. & Spada, N. (2001). *How languages are learned*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mas, J. (1994). *Visages 2: Savoir faire*. Montreal: Addison-Wesley.
- Ruiz-Funes, M. (2002). *On teaching foreign languages: Linking theory to practice*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Sauvignon, S. Ed. (2002). *Interpreting communicative language teaching: Contexts and concerns in teacher education*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Schmitt, C. (2002). *Bon voyage! Glencoe French 1A*. New York: Glencoe McGraw-Hill.
- Simon, P. (1980). *The tongue-tied American: Confronting the foreign language crisis*. New York: Continuum.
- Singleton, D. & Lengyel, Z. Eds. (1995). *The age factor in second language acquisition*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

APPENDIX A: WESTERN WASHINGTON MIDDLE SCHOOL JOURNAL

Monday, May 19, 2003

Today was my first day observing at a western Washington middle school in a French 1A class. The entry level was deemed most appropriate in selection of the class for observation. French 1A students are enrolled in the sixth grade and elect to take French as a second language. The French teacher at this western Washington middle school has an extensive teaching background. Observing her class resulted in a general picture of beginning French instruction.

Keeping a running record showed strong use of the target language. In all of the communications observed the teacher used French first, if not exclusively, to convey her instructions to the students. The class began with the traditional “Bonjour class”, “Bonjour Madame” exchange. This method of gaining the class’ attention was followed by genuine questions about school field trips from last week. The teacher posed genuine questions in French and received a mixture of French and English responses. Repetition of instructions occurred to transition the students to a demeanor appropriate for completing a test. The listening comprehension section of chapter four from *Bon voyage! Glencoe French 1A* was given using the CD recording. Keeping with the pattern of repetition the recording was played twice to ensure students had ample opportunity to utilize their comprehension skills and check their initial responses. Once the recording finished playing the second time the teacher asked in French if the students were finished and requested that they pass in their papers.

Writing homework assignments for the entire week on the whiteboard, entirely in French, and instructing the students to copy them down transitioned the class. During this activity the teacher asked the students questions about deadlines, again in French. A student asked what “affiche” meant and another student chimed in with the English “poster” while the teacher was drawing a poster image and writing dimensions on the whiteboard. Clarification of supplies necessary for the next day was given by initial instructions in French followed by the English translation to ensure students would be prepared for the next day. Further administrative tasks occurred, such as distribution of midterm progress reports and collection of “les cahiers” (workbooks).

Once the class settled paperwork, the teacher began a new lesson on vocabulary for chapter five of *Bon voyage! Glencoe French 1A* text. A recording with the instructions to listen and repeat gave correct pronunciation of vocabulary coupled with images in the text and on an overhead projector. The teacher repeats the vocabulary along with the students while looking at the text or overhead. Upon finishing the recording the teacher went through an extensive vocabulary review using the overhead to ask, “Qu’est-ce que c’est?” (What is this?) while pointing to images. Further discussion was facilitated based on the variety of vocabulary covered. Genuine questions were asked; for example, preference for vanilla or chocolate ice cream using an informal class poll coupled with answers from individual students. During this question and answer time a predetermined student helper passed out slips of paper to students as they responded. At the end of class students were able to redeem these slips for participation points contributing to twenty percent of their grade. Occasionally the entire class would repeat a vocabulary word together after a student answered or if a student was struggling. This activity ended the class for the day as students turned in their slips of paper for credit prior to dismissal.

My initial impression is that the teacher uses French in almost all of her speech; excluding the occasional translation immediately following the French to clarify instructions, like the next day’s homework. The students attempt to respond in French and work very hard to

do so when they have the opportunity to earn participation credit. It appears that the students have a decent comprehension of French for less than one year of instruction. Their ability to produce the language is less capable. Genuine questions are interspersed with textbook-based display questions aimed at vocabulary building. By supplementing the recording from the textbook company, the teacher works to connect the vocabulary more directly to the students' lives.

On a side note, I remained with the French teacher during four of the other five classes of instruction. The two French 2 classes consisting of eighth grade students pursuing their third year of French instruction were remarkable. Substantial improvement between the French 1A and French 2 students is readily evidenced. One example is in the almost exclusive use of French in the classroom by both teacher and students. French 2 students were independently writing short paragraphs to accompany overhead images connected to vocabulary.

Tuesday, May 20, 2003

A lengthy PA announcement began today's French 1A class usurping at least ten minutes of instructional time. The teacher used French to encourage the students to be quiet during this announcement. Actual class instruction did not begin until the students had been assigned new seats. All of the instructions for changing seats were given in French while the teacher gestured to new seats and called names. The students were excited to receive new seat assignments.

Once the students settled in their new seats the teacher asked them to take out their "cahiers". The students then received a handout which the teacher placed an overhead of on the machine. As a class they completed the blanks for feminine and masculine forms of adjectives in French. These adjectives are useful vocabulary for the "Ma famille" project the students are completing this week. The teacher asked the students how they would say each English word in French using a question in French. Students eagerly responded to the vocabulary they had learned previously. Occasionally the whole class would repeat a word aloud to practice pronunciation of the feminine and masculine forms. A student provided the French feminine for old, "vieille", and the teacher congratulated the effort with "Bravo student name". Constant encouragement to guess the word was provided prior to telling the students the vocabulary. When the overhead and students' worksheets were complete, the teacher reviewed some expressions for likes and dislikes included at the end of the vocabulary.

A transition into application deviated from the standard use of French instructions. In English the teacher assigned the task of describing four family members (including the student), while giving examples in French. After an initial explanation, with English dominating, the teacher resumed her use of French. The students were provided independent work time in class for their "Ma famille" projects. These projects involve building a family tree on poster-board and writing about each member. Throughout the work time the teacher was moving about the classroom assisting students, predominantly conversing in French. She handed out lists of French names to students who desired to select French names for their family members. Individual help was easily available during this work time. One student asked how to say "he likes to play video games" and the teacher used the whiteboard to show an example of writing it in French; "Il aime jouer des jeux videos."

With a few minutes left in the period the teacher interrupted the class with, "Pardon, nous avons trois minutes" (Pardon me, we have three minutes). The students were instructed in French followed by translations half of the time: to leave their posters in the class, return

supplies, collect papers, and that the work time would continue the next day. The class ended with the bell and polite exchanges of “Au revoir” between the students and teacher.

A second day revealed that French was not used almost exclusively as it appeared in the initial impression. However, the students received a vast array of input in French and were working on their own production of the language in writing about family members. A significant quantity of preparation through the vocabulary list and individual assistance scaffolds the learners’ creation of the “Ma famille” project. The independent work time is invaluable as students may not have access to French help outside of the classroom, but it is much more chaotic than formal instruction. French 1A students appear heavily inclined to rely on their native language, English, rather than attempting to communicate in French. The teacher was relatively neutral about whether they remain in French, excluding their communications with her.

Wednesday, May 21, 2003

The French teacher had finished correcting the students’ “cahiers” for chapter four and used the beginning of class to explain her grading. This explanation was given in English using the whiteboard to highlight some of the markings used for different reasons. Work is completed in the “cahiers” throughout the year, but only collected at the end of a chapter or other convenient break to allow for grading time. To encourage students to stay on top of their work symbols such as ☹ and * are given on days work is due. A ☹ means the pages were incomplete, and a * indicates that the work was done on time. These symbols translate to points during the grading process. Each page of the “cahier” is worth five points; points are mainly deducted for incomplete work and multiple erroneous answers. The teacher does not critically correct each page of the workbook, since it is primarily for the students’ practice. Instead she skims the exercises, reading through those which require the students to write in sentences. Students were generally pleased with their “cahiers” and had been anxious to have them returned.

As promised the day before the remainder of class time was devoted to students’ independent work on their “Ma famille” project. The teacher circulated through the room answering questions in French and English. At the beginning of work time she asked, “Qui a besoin d’une affiche?” and translated it to “Who needs poster-board?” She then produced poster-board for those students who had failed to get one. After the students had the supplies they needed to work on their projects, she went about the room checking for completed vocabulary notecards and answering more questions. It appears that positive class related exchanges are given in French, while English is used for reprimands regarding incomplete work or extreme signs of being off-task. When the noise level rose in the classroom comments such as, “Travaillez s’il vous plait” (Work, please) were made to the entire class. For those students who had not completed their vocabulary notecards on time, the option of making a list with the French word in one column and the English translation in another was given. Making this list and the notecards would result in full credit for the late vocabulary notecards. An explanation of this list was given in French and English. Multiple individual conversations occurred which were challenging to overhear with the many student voices in the classroom. A few notable words of encouragement were given in French to students who excelled or improved in their work.

Students worked enthusiastically during this class work time. They spoke to each other almost exclusively in English. Sharing supplies and conferring over photographs and magazine cutouts were favorite activities. Near the end of class the teacher brought their attention in with the comment, “Class, nous avons trois minutes. C’est tout parce que c’est mercredi” (Class, we

have three minutes. That's all because it's Wednesday). On Wednesdays, this middle school has shortened periods to create an after-school tutorial for students and additional planning time. The teacher gave further organizational and cleanup instructions in French and English as the class put away supplies, stored their projects and departed for their next period. A final reminder about the homework in their "cahiers" for the next day was given along with encouragement to work on their projects at home if they were not finished.

It seemed like the teacher used more English for administration in order to ensure that the students understood instructions. The shortened time frame may also have contributed to English use, which more quickly conveys information to the students. However, when students asked questions the teacher was much more likely to reply in French and give a thorough explanation.

Thursday, May 22, 2003

Students were instructed to sit down and listen to the PA using French as they entered the classroom to begin the day and the period. The daily greeting of "Bonjour class" signaled the beginning of instructional time. Questions about the day of the week and the date were posed to the students in French and they responded in French. The teacher then explained in French that they would study vocabulary for the first part of the class then be allowed to work on their projects for the remainder of class time.

The teacher used visual aids in the form of flashcard pictures of animals to help the students learn new vocabulary. She held up the flashcard and said the French word for each animal. Then the whole class repeated the word with the teacher. Once the entire set of vocabulary had been given the students began to record the French words for the animals on notebook paper. The teacher wrote the words for each animal on an overhead while showing the flashcard. Explanations and stories linked to each animal accompanied the collection of words on the overhead. Questioning the students by holding up a flashcard and asking, "Qu'est-ce que c'est?" (What is this?) helped the students practice their new vocabulary. Stories for the animals ranged from polls of who had rabbits to a story about neighbors with cows in a suburban area. A curious student asked how to say lamb in French and the teacher replied in French. Part way through the list a student asked why they were going so fast and the teacher replied that they had a lot to do that day. When the students had finished writing the words down from the overhead the class read them aloud with the teacher before being given time to work independently on their "Ma famille" projects.

Questions were dominated with how to say various animals in French after the lesson on new vocabulary. The teacher individually answered these questions as students began working. Students are required to include any family pets in their project, hence the value of learning vocabulary for some common pets at this time. One student had the teacher go through their entire project and help in reorganizing the pictures. In order to ensure availability of supplies the teacher again asked if everyone had poster-board and supplied it to any students who still needed it. In an exchange about completed vocabulary notecards the teacher used French. French was used to request supplies from the class such as sharing magazines. Overall the students were much more focused on their work today than the past few days. This increased attention is probably linked to the deadline tomorrow.

Class ended with a mixture of French and English. French for routine instructions, such as time left and cleanup. English to emphasize the project's deadline. The usual "Au revoir" dismissed the students.

Today's students could almost have been different from those earlier in the week. It appears that the project's deadline heightens their effort as they finish/begin working. The teacher did an excellent job teaching the new vocabulary using very little English in explanations. The flashcards help the students to build liaisons between the animal and the French word, rather than having the additional mental step of identifying the animal in English and translating to French. Independent work time has its benefits and downfalls. Some students use the time effectively, others socialize, and others are finished with nothing left to do. However, the school musical occurring this week supports the need for class time, since many students are too busy outside of class. Also in French, as any foreign language, it is difficult for students to find help outside of class since their usual resource people may not speak the language. It is readily apparent though, that the students do not understand the magnitude of the "Ma famille" project in synthesizing and using their knowledge. The task of finding pictures and selecting French names for family members entertains the students while subtly utilizing their language skills for sentences describing each family member. Hopefully the majority of the students will succeed with the project, but there are multiple different levels in French 1A.

Tuesday, June 3, 2003

Today commenced with instructions in English to say the Pledge of Allegiance without the PA system so that it would not disrupt science testing. Minor directions like "Levez-vous" (stand up) were given in French. The transition into French class occurred when the students were asked entirely in French to open their "cahiers" and take out a piece of a paper. A similar request in English followed although not a translation. The class' attention was gained through a mixture of French and English as the teacher ascertained who was talking, explained that although the end of the year was in sight a few weeks remained, and began the lesson.

Questions relating to the next day's poster assignment involving food and related vocabulary were posed. In French the students were asked to translate a variety of the vocabulary being learned. The teacher directed the students to look at an example completed before the due date by one of the students. She deviated from the direct discussion to check if all the students had the poster-board that they needed to complete the assignment. Questioning was done in English; however, color selection used the French words for the colors. A return to the vocabulary allowed the students to answer questions identifying many words in English. The teacher moved from this review of vocabulary for the next day's homework assignment to the homework assignments for the week on the whiteboard. She emphasized the students' need to study vocabulary for a test the next day. Clarification of all homework on the whiteboard occurred followed by an inquiry as to whether the students understood the expectations of them.

A lesson from the students' "cahiers" began with instruction in French to turn to pages twenty-six and seven. The students were then told in French that they had fifteen seconds before the teacher would begin the corresponding recording. After the recording had played the teacher went through the activity the students just completed using an overhead transparency. She explained the vocabulary and repeated the French using correct pronunciation. In French, the teacher checked if the students were ready before beginning the second recording. Once the recording finished the teacher reviewed the activity for the students to ensure that they answered the question so that each response corresponded to the picture. The teacher instructed the students to turn the page in French and they completed another listening activity with the recording. This last recording was played twice to assist the students' comprehension. Review

of the activity using an overhead transparency allowed the teacher to include additional information and question the students briefly.

The teacher asked the students in French to open their books to page one-hundred fifty-five then proceeded to ask the students, “Qu’est-ce que c’est?” (What is this?) while pointing to pictures on the overhead. The overhead was a transparency of the page in the students’ books. Often the instruction was given for the class to repeat the word as a group in French to practice pronunciation and help students connect the word to the picture. The activity of repeating the teacher and answering questions about vocabulary continued through a few pages of pictures for the unit being studied. At the close of this activity the teacher told the students in French that class was almost over and asked for them to come forward with their oral participation points for the day. She then recorded oral participation points for the students, reminded them of the two homework elements for the next day and dismissed the class.

After a little over a week’s hiatus from visiting this class, due to the teacher’s illness and my other case study, I noticed a slight change in the students. As the end of the school year approaches the students are less attentive, and the beautiful sunny weather fuels this distraction. Other than the general excitement about summer’s arrival, the students exhibited the same behavior as in earlier observations. This lesson was not on the same unit as those observed before but the teacher used similar methods of instruction. The importance of building vocabulary using visual aids is evident as the students identify pictures using the French vocabulary. For the introduction and practice of vocabulary the listening activities coupled with the teacher’s instruction are highly useful. As a whole the observation of this French class has yielded a variety of solid practices used by the French teacher for instruction at the beginning level.

APPENDIX B: BRITISH COLUMBIA MIDDLE SCHOOL JOURNAL

Monday, May 26, 2003

A British Columbia middle school in Canada was selected to observe a grade six French class. The majority of these students began their education in French at the Kindergarten level; thus they have six years of instruction prior to the class observed. Students receive French instruction three times per week for almost an hour each session. The British Columbia middle school is located in an upper middle class area outside of a city. Upon arrival the teacher was welcoming and proceeded with business as usual concerning classroom activities.

As students began arriving they were often individually greeted with “Bonjour” (Hello) or “Ca va?” (How’s it going?) to which they promptly responded in short French replies. One student was asked to remove his jacket by the teacher using French and motions. Papers were returned as the students settled into their desks. The majority of the early administrative tasks such as quieting the class and returning papers were conducted in English. To formally begin class the teacher used exclusively French such as “Tout le monde est pret?” (Is everybody ready?) and “On commence maintenant” (We begin now). A search for one of the two participation clipboards was conducted so that student helpers would be able to keep track of students’ oral participation in class activities. Some of the directions for this search were in English others in French. The students were asked in French to find a table in their notes such as the one on the board in order to add to it.

Once students found the clipboard, turned to the table in their notes, or copied down a new one the lesson started. The table consisted of two columns: one “Les animaux domestiques” (pets) the other “Les animaux sauvages” (wild animals). The teacher began by asking in French for the students to tell her “animaux domestiques”. She promptly corrected one student’s pronunciation of “chat” the French for cat, where the “t” is not pronounced. Students were required to say the animal in a complete sentence such as “Il y a un chat” (There is a cat). This sentence structure dominated the students’ answers. Once a sizable list of “animaux domestiques” had been compiled the students provided “les animaux sauvages”. The teacher gave encouragement, in French, while she recorded the words in the appropriate columns on the board. A few administrative comments were made in English as she shifted from the board to the overhead.

On the overhead students saw pictures of fourteen different animals with their names written in French underneath. In English the teacher instructed them to write down those they did not already have and to record the English word for any which they would not easily remember (although the English word was not provided only pictures). As the students were writing one of them asked to borrow a pencil in English. The teacher replied in French that she did not understand the English question and walked the student through his question in French. In English the teacher further instructed the class to discuss with their partners which of the animals on the overhead were endangered species. In French she told them that ten of the fourteen animals were endangered and that it would be easier to identify the four which were not endangered.

After ample discussion time the students were asked in French to share their predictions with the class. The teacher politely listened to each suggestion without indicating whether it was correct or not. She then told the class that they would look in the books to see. Administrative tasks for passing out books were conducted in English and French. Instruction for the page to turn to was given exclusively in French. The beep of an alarm ended the students’ perusal of

texts in partners. At this point the teacher asked the students which animals were endangered in English. These were compared with those on the overhead to see which four were not endangered.

The class finished with a lengthy discussion about listening skills conducted entirely in English. Throughout the period the students had been calling out or talking to their neighbors. This discussion aimed to set the tone for the remainder of the school year. The final words were given in French: “Vous comprenez?” (Do you understand?). Instructions for returning books and clipboards were given in French and English.

Overall the students comprehension of the teacher’s French was exceptional. The majority appeared to understand what was being said with little or no repetition. Aside from the lack of listening skills, the students were fairly on task and familiar with the French in use. The text used, *Visages 2: Savoir Faire*, is outstanding with color photos and text entirely written in French. It appears more like a trade book than a textbook it has kid-friendly thematic units and graphics.

Tuesday, May 27, 2003

The students’ second of three French as a Second Language classes is given at the same time of day on Tuesday as the Monday class. The teacher sets a timer as the students come in and take their seats. One student asks in French to shut the door and the teacher gives permission. When the timer goes off the students quiet down more quickly than the day before resulting in the teacher’s comment: “Merci tout le monde” (Thank you everybody). In English she and a student have a brief exchange about whether the class deserves a point for their good behavior. A segue into the lesson is made by the teacher reviewing yesterday’s lesson. A request is made for the students to tell her in French which four of the fourteen animals on the overhead were not endangered. The teacher provides a sentence on the board for students’ to use. Students give the four animals which are not endangered on the overhead.

With the review completed the teacher introduces the day’s lesson involving a song entitled “Sauvons les animaux” (Let’s save the animals). She comments on how musical the class is in English and poses a question about what the title of the song means. After students guess the teacher highlights the word “sauvons” and a student produces “save” which is the definition for the root of the French word. The teacher then translates the title for the class, “Let’s save the animals”. She then reads the first verse and asks, “Qu’est-ce que c’est?” (What is it?) One student correctly guesses a tiger from clues in French about pointed teeth, coloration and more. The chorus is next and the teacher reads while the students echo her pronunciation. A brief explanation of the reasons for using “on” instead of “nous” is given. These correspond to its rough translation as “we” or “one” and the formality of its use. The teacher read the second verse, along with actions, so the students can guess what animal it describes, in this case, a gorilla. The entire class then read the chorus together. “One more animal here” said the teacher as she read the final paragraph and encouraged students to guess which animal it is about. Instruction about returning to the chorus and the teacher’s expectation that the students will enjoy singing it are vocalized in English as she encourages them to move so they can see the words.

The music, with the lyrics sung by what sounds like a native French speaker, is played on a portable boom box. A majority of the students join the teacher in singing along to the chorus. A group of enthusiastic boys were rocking back and forth with the music and actively participating. When the song ended the teacher asked if the class would like to have it played

again which they did. Most of the students joined in singing not only the chorus, but also the verses in this second playing. Congratulating the students with “Bien fait tout le monde” (Well done everybody), the teacher shifts again, this time to textbook based work.

In French the teacher asks for two or three students to distribute textbooks and instructs the students which pages to open the books to. She draws the students’ attention to the paragraphs describing each animal. The students are asked to indicate which paragraph describes the blue whale by pointing to it; the teacher circles the room checking the students’ comprehension based on whether or not they are pointing to the correct paragraph. After reading the paragraph aloud the teacher asks the students what sort of things they are being told about the whale. She redirects her question so the students know they are to provide categories rather than specific traits, topics instead of translations. Following the students’ production of ideas the teacher summarizes what each paragraph describes for the students; the general categories covered are where it lives, what colors it is, what size it is, and what it eats. Moving to the paragraph on the parrot, the teacher again reads it aloud. She asks the class why the feminine pronoun “elle” is used for the parrot. A short explanation of masculine and feminine is given so students understand that in French all nouns have a gender.

Partner work allows for the other paragraphs to be read aloud and the students to practice their French. The goal of this partner work is to practice pronunciation as well as reading skills. Setting a timer for three minutes the teacher lets the students work. Once the general indication is that they are finished she brings them back together. A quick comprehension check is given by asking the students to use thumbs up or thumbs down to signify whether or not it was easy to understand what they read. The majority of the class responded with thumbs up. In English the teacher asks whether the students learned anything new, while telling the class that she learned the word “granivore” for the parrot who eats grains. The students offer a few facts they learned from the text.

Now turning to pages with a world map the students are questioned about what they just read regarding where the animals live. In French she asks where the blue whale lives and repeats the question. A student correctly replies “Dans les oceans” (in the oceans). Asking where the parrot lives the teacher has to help the student form a complete sentence to respond rather than just the continent name. As the end of class nears the teacher inquires “Should we just do the song one more time?” A resounding yes from the students leads her to direct them in French to pass their textbooks to the back of the class so they can be put away. In English she asks the boys who were singing/yelling before that they heed an artistic request for greater melody and less volume. She also asks that the students think about what the song means as they sing. A much more melodic rendition of the song along with the recording is produced. The teacher thanks the class in French and dismisses them.

The lesson required the students to draw on their understanding of the French language even though the teacher in many cases used English. Students use textbooks, which are entirely written in French, and resemble trade books with colorful photographs and interesting themes. These resources encourage students to immerse themselves in the language rather than learn isolated elements while following English instructions.

Friday, May 29, 2003

After two days without French instruction the students return for their third and final French class of the week. The teacher greets students individually with “Bonjour” (Hello) as they enter the room and find their seats. A student asked what was being done in class today

using English and the teacher responded in French. Unlike earlier this week the students quieted down before the teacher's timer beeped indicating time for class to start. In French she asked if they were ready and congratulated them on their attention before the beep beep of the timer.

An easy transition to the lesson occurred as the teacher began asking the students to tell her the names of the animals she pointed to on the overhead. She inquired in French that two students volunteer to record oral points on the clipboards. When the more challenging French question about whether the giraffe is endangered was asked, the teacher helped the students formulate an answer using the blackboard. An explanation of how all French nouns have a gender was given in English, coupled with minor admonitions to students who were disrupting the class. Once the teacher and students had worked out an appropriate sentence in French to respond whether or not the giraffe is endangered the teacher began asking the students about the other animals being studied. Students needed to identify the gender of the noun for the animal to use the sentence on the board with the correct pronoun. When students struggled to answer the questions the teacher redirected their attention to the example on the board. A student overused the example to say an endangered animal was not and the teacher helped guide by asking how the class could say yes the animal is endangered. The French word for bear begins with a vowel so certain uses do not indicate the gender of the noun. Asking the students if they could remember whether the French word for bear was masculine or feminine yielded a positive result.

Once the teacher had exhausted the question and answer activity focusing on the gender of nouns through questions related to the topic of endangered animals, she began an activity using music. In English she explained that on the overhead only one line of the song lyrics would be revealed at a time so the students could focus on the words and following along. The same group of enthusiastic boys sung along at a volume higher than the rest of the class, however, most if not all students participated in singing along with the recording. This interlude provided participation before segueing to an activity in the book.

The teacher asked in French for two students to distribute the books. A side discussion between a student and the teacher during this time addressed the use of "je puis" (I can) and "je peux" (I can) which are interchangeable ways of conjugating the French verb "pouvoir" (to be able to, can). It is interesting to note that a student identified the use of this verb in a different form than the one accustomed to. The class' attention was regained using the counting method in French adding "lence" to each number and ending with "silence" or six. In French the students were instructed to turn to page one hundred and one. Continuing the explanation in French the teacher states that each of the little paragraphs on the page corresponds to the picture beside it. In English she tells the students that she is going to read them in any order and that each student is to put their finger on the picture of the corresponding animal as she reads to show that they are following along. As the teacher read the paragraphs she circulated through the classroom occasionally asking a student to point if they were not. After this activity she congratulated the class in English telling them she saw they had little difficulty following along.

In partners the students were asked to discuss and determine four topics being addressed in each paragraph. The teacher encouraged the students to respond in French by telling them how much it would impress her. Once a few minutes elapsed the teacher asked in French what the subjects are. Students responded with single French words and the teacher corrected or added as necessary. The teacher wrote the subjects on the board using the correct French terms and led the students through all the possibilities. She also helped them to group some of their more specific subjects under a broader term. The process of coming up with generalizations is

complex and demonstrates the students' understanding of what they are reading in the paragraphs.

Next the students are asked in French to turn to page one hundred and eight to practice where the animals come from. The teacher read each continent name aloud and the students repeated after her mimicking her pronunciation. They were asked in French to close their books and pass them to the back of the room. In English the teacher gave instructions for the next partner worksheet activity. In partners the students name animals in pictures and say what continent they come from. As the activity concludes the teacher applauds the students' focus and leadership working together. A brief review of the activity occurred with the students responding aloud as called upon. Multiple pronunciation corrections were made related to the French verb "habiter" (to live). After going through the review the teacher returned to the song "Sauvons les animaux" (Let's save the animals).

In French the students were asked to close their books. The teacher broke down the lyrics of the song line by line a cappella. This helped the students practice the pronunciation of the words. The end of class bell rung dismissing the class during this final activity.

APPENDIX C: VERBAL CONSENT SCRIPT

Hello, my name is Kerry Jordan, and I am an undergraduate student in the Washington State University Honors College. I am collecting data for my research project on foreign language instruction, particularly when it should begin, and I'd like to ask you for your help by answering a few questions for me regarding your foreign language teaching. Your participation in this survey should take about 30 minutes.

These data will be strictly confidential and I will not record your name. Also, your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to not answer any questions you may find objectionable, and may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, just by letting me know you would not like to continue any further. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at WSU. If you have any questions or concerns about this research project, you can contact the WSU IRB at (509) 335-9661 or Kerry Jordan (425) 488-3115.

Are there any questions about my study that I can answer for you at this time? (Answer questions). Would you like to participate in my study?

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS/TOPICS

The majority of these questions will be addressed to the classroom teacher when the students are not in the classroom. Questioning will be flexible to obtain the most complete picture of the foreign language instruction used by the teacher.

- How long have your students been studying French?
- Does it seem like they have a substantial background in French as a second language? If not, has it been relatively easy for them to learn French this school year?
- Is there anything you would like to share with me about how you adapt the curriculum guides and materials for your class?
- What method(s) of language teaching do you endeavor to use?
- Why have you selected the aforementioned method(s)?
- How many years have you been teaching? How many of those years have been spent teaching French?
- Do you have anything else you would like to share with me about French teaching or your class?
- Are there any questions you have for me?