

**Understanding Educator Perspectives of French Language Instruction in
Play-Based Kindergarten**

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Abstract

This study examined issues related to additional language acquisition in French Immersion play-based kindergarten contexts, from the perspective of educators. Little is currently known about the impacts of play-based kindergarten on children in French Immersion programs in Ontario; the Kindergarten Curriculum does not address specific considerations with regards to Immersion students. The overarching research question for the study (RQ1) asks: How do play-based kindergarten programs impact student acquisition of French language skills, as perceived by French Immersion educators? Two additional sub-questions, (RQ2 and RQ3), guide this study. RQ2 asks: How do French Immersion kindergarten teachers and ECEs plan for and deliver meaningful French language instruction within a play-based setting? RQ3 asks: Which specific French language outcomes do educators expect kindergarten children to have achieved by the end of kindergarten? This study followed a basic qualitative design, using an online qualitative questionnaire to collect data. Participants included a purposeful sample of French Immersion kindergarten teachers (10) and early childhood educators (3) from one board in eastern Ontario. General inductive analysis was used to analyse responses. Findings indicate that educators are purposeful and intentional in teaching the French language, and there is a fine balance between direct instruction and play-based learning. A wide variety of approaches to play-based learning and additional language acquisition were described by participants, suggesting a need for consistent, clear expectations for educators. Ongoing professional learning for educators is needed. Future research is recommended to study an ideal entry point for early immersion programs.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2010, the Government of Ontario introduced Full-Day Kindergarten (FDK) to the province (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). This new kindergarten program was based partly on a report by Dr. Charles Pascal (2009), which included play-based learning (PBL) as the pedagogical foundation. The report indicated that “research and best practice indicate clearly that a deliberate and effective play-based approach supports young children’s cognitive development” (Pascal, 2009, p. 25). Over the next five years, full-day, play-based learning was phased into every school board and every kindergarten classroom in the province, becoming the norm for 4- and 5-year-olds in Ontario. The new kindergarten model includes an educator team of a teacher and an early childhood educator (ECE) working together to implement the program (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). With two educators in the room, class sizes grew, from a maximum of 20 students in the old model up to closer to 30 in many cases in the new model. The kindergarten curriculum directs the two educators to follow a play-based approach, supporting children’s learning and development through inquiry and play (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016).

There is a tremendous body of research supporting learning through play. Even as far back as Ancient Greece, Plato, in *the Republic* told the citizens to “let your children’s lessons take the form of play” (vii, 536, in Cornford, 1945). More recent research has shown many varied benefits to a play-based approach, including socio-emotional benefits (i.e., Miller & Almon, 2009; Howard & McInnes, 2013; Eberle, 2011), and academic benefits (i.e., Roskos & Christie, 2011; Skolnick Weisberg et al., 2013; Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Play in kindergarten

classrooms prepares children for their future and is now a widely accepted pedagogical approach to kindergarten.

In spite of this research supporting play-based learning, there is still confusion and controversy surrounding the concept. Educators do not have a clear, consistent conceptualization of play-based learning, and many do not implement it in their classrooms (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016). Educators and researchers also disagree on the role of adults in children's play, and research has shown that the way in which educators implement play in their classrooms varies, based on what they see as the role of play and the role of educators in play (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015). A useful framework describing play-based learning as a continuum with increasing adult intervention was developed by Pyle and Danniels (2017) and will be used as the framework to guide my study.

French Immersion can add another layer of complexity to play-based kindergarten pedagogy. French Immersion in Ontario involves the instruction of French language and other subjects in French, for at least 50% of the day, beginning as early as year 1 of kindergarten. Immersion programs include the full immersion of children into an additional language with the goal of fluency in the additional language (Cammaratta & Tedick, 2012). Educators teaching in immersion programs must balance content and language instruction, along with developmentally appropriate pedagogical methods, which can be a very challenging task (Cammaratta & Tedick, 2012). In French Immersion kindergarten classrooms in Ontario, teachers and ECEs need to balance the acquisition of an additional language with a developmentally-appropriate play-based pedagogy. How educators view and overcome the

challenges of French language acquisition in a play-based kindergarten setting is the focus of this research.

Research Problem

Little is currently known about the impacts of the play-based kindergarten model on children in French Immersion programs in Ontario. As noted, there has been plenty of research on the benefits of play, along with the benefits of French Immersion. The Kindergarten Curriculum, however, does not address any specific considerations with regards to students in French Immersion. The French Immersion curriculum in Ontario officially begins in grade 1, so overall and specific curriculum expectations for French are not available for kindergarten (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). As such, educators must use the English Kindergarten Curriculum, and adapt the expectations into French, taking into consideration that this is an additional language for their students. Kindergarten French Immersion creates a unique cohort of students which is not very well documented in the research. Kindergarten educators in Ontario face the challenge of ensuring that additional language acquisition takes place in a play-based setting; this study aims to examine this challenge in greater detail.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine French Immersion educators' perspectives of the impact of play-based learning on kindergarten students' acquisition of French language skills. The overarching research question, which will be referred to as RQ1, asks: How do play-based kindergarten programs impact student acquisition of French language skills, as perceived by French Immersion educators? Two additional sub-questions, which will be referred to as RQ2 and RQ3, guide this study. RQ2 asks: How do French Immersion

kindergarten teachers and ECEs plan for and deliver meaningful French language instruction within a play-based setting? RQ3 asks: Which specific French language outcomes do educators expect kindergarten children to have achieved by the end of kindergarten?

This research may assist educators, administrators and school districts as they attempt to optimize language learning for French Immersion kindergarten students.

Context

This study explores full-immersion kindergarten programs that begin in year 1 of kindergarten. In Ontario, kindergarten is a two-year program, beginning in the year children turn four years of age (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). Formerly known as Junior Kindergarten and Senior Kindergarten, these two years are now referred to as year 1 and year 2. Many kindergarten programs, including all of the classes involved in this study, include a mixture of students in year 1 and 2. Ontario has many different entry points for French Immersion, including year 1 of kindergarten, year 2 of kindergarten, and grade 1. School boards decide when to begin early immersion programs based on several factors, including demand and staffing, however it is unclear from existing research what the most appropriate time is to begin early immersion. School boards in Ontario may also offer full-immersion programs where 100% of the day is in French, or partial-immersion programs, where approximately 50% of the day is in French (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). The school board in which this study takes place offers full-immersion, beginning in the first year of kindergarten. It would be expected that educator expectations, programming, and student outcomes may differ in the various French immersion kindergarten models.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

This literature review is divided into three main sections. The first section reviews current literature related to theories of play and play-based learning. The second section examines research on French Immersion contexts and additional language learning, and the final section looks at some of the limited research that combines these topics.

Play and Play-Based Learning

Play and learning have long been connected, although that connection has not always followed through to classroom practice. Lynch (2015), wrote that, paradoxically, despite a recent decline in the amount of time kindergarten children spend playing, there has been an increase in research which identifies the benefits of children learning through play. The following sections examine literature related to definitions of play and play-based learning, benefits of play, and the role of adults and educators in children's play.

Characteristics of Play

Play is a difficult concept for researchers to define, as it includes very dynamic and variable concepts (Wallerstedt & Pramling, 2012). There is much disagreement amongst researchers about what activities constitute play, why we play, and what benefits we gain from playing (Wallerstedt & Pramling, 2012). Despite this disagreement, there are several common play characteristics and terms that researchers discuss when conceptualizing play (Wallerstedt & Pramling, 2012). These characteristics include aimlessness, spontaneity, fun, exploration, manipulation, activity, problem-solving, lack of purpose, non-utility, and an end unto itself (Wallerstedt & Pramling, 2012; Roskas & Christie, 2011; Ashiabi, 2007; Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Play has been described as actively engaging, opportunistic, pleasurable, and creative (Pyle &

Danniels, 2017) and involves exploration, problem solving, and non-utility (Wallerstedt & Pramling, 2012). Researchers also highlight the role of the environment in influencing play interactions and behaviours (Turnbull & Jenvey, 2006).

Some research emphasizes that the locus of control in play situations rests with the child, that is to say that play must be freely chosen, autonomous, and child-led (Ashiabi, 2007; Roskas & Christie, 2011). This would suggest that adult intervention in an activity would result in that activity no longer truly being considered play. Howard and McInnes (2013), however, argue that children only need to perceive an activity as play, and that if adults create contexts which are perceived by children to be play situations, children are more likely to benefit developmentally. Other conceptions of play accept that adults can intervene and be involved in children's play and still be considered a play context (Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Skolnick-Weisburg et al., 2013). Pyle and Danniels (2017) describe free-play and adult-guided play as two broad categories of play. The issue of adult intervention in play very closely linked to play-based learning, and blurs the line between the two, which will be further explored in the following section.

Play Based Learning- The Ontario Context

The Ontario Ministry of Education clearly states that “**Play is a vehicle for learning** and rests at the core of innovation and creativity” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 18). The Ontario Kindergarten Curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016) directs teachers and ECEs to approach play-based learning from an inquiry stance, that is to follow the lead of children when they show curiosity and use that as a springboard for instruction. Educators co-construct learning with children, asking questions, extending and challenging learning, and

supporting development through play (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). This follows the idea found in research that play allows children to try out their new knowledge in a non-threatening context, and that learning does not stop when 'lesson time' turns to 'play time' (Wallerstedt & Pramling, 2012). Play is certainly not the only way that children learn, but it can be seen as an important context through which children can acquire, practice and consolidate skills (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009).

Characteristics of Play-Based Learning

Similar to conceptualizations of play, play-based learning definitions are contested, which creates difficulties for teachers to understand how to integrate play-based learning in their practice. Researchers emphasize the role of adults guiding or scaffolding the play experience as one significant criterion of play-based learning, while the locus of control remains with the child (Skolnick Weisberg et al., 2013; Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Another criterion is that play-based learning generally includes a learning goal, which can be explicitly shared with children or kept to the educators (Skolnick Weisberg et al., 2013).

Play-based learning has been described as a continuum of five categories, with progressively increasing adult intervention (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). These categories include free play, inquiry play, collaborative play, playful learning and learning through games (Pyle & Daniels, 2017). According to Pyle and Danniels (2017) free play is entirely child directed and led, with little to no educator involvement. Inquiry play is also child-led; however, the educator intervenes in play to further the learning. For example, if children are building a tower, the educator might ask what they could do to make the structure more stable, and follow up with books about structures and stability. Collaborative play involves co-created play contexts,

where the educator has specific academic goals in mind. For example, the class might set up a 'store' with play money, to build the children's understanding of money, counting, addition, and subtraction. Playful learning involves educators setting up playful and engaging contexts in which children will learn targeted academic skills. For example, educators may integrate writing tasks within a play context that requires children to develop and practice writing skills.

Learning through games, the final category, is educator-prescribed and -directed, with a clear academic goal in mind (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). The context is playful, in that it is a game, but students must follow the rules of the game and do not have control of the scenario. Pyle and Danniels' (2017) continuum is a very useful conceptual framework to operationalize play-based learning, and will guide my study.

Adult Role in Play-Based Learning

In understanding the benefits of play for social, emotional and academic learning, it is critical to examine the important role of the educator. Given the autonomous characteristics that are frequently ascribed to play, there is much discussion among researchers and educators as to whether or not adults, including teachers, can direct or guide play towards academic goals, and what this intervention should look like (Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Ashiabi, 2007).

Wallerstedt and Pramling (2012) articulate this dichotomy, asking if it is possible to use play as an educational tool without fundamentally altering and destroying its nature. Some researchers have argued that educator intervention can increase the complexity and challenge of children's play (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009), and is therefore appropriate, provided that the children playing continue to perceive of their activity as play (Howard & McInnes, 2013). Conversely, other studies have revealed that many researchers do not accept adult intervention in play (Roskos &

Christie, 2011), which is consistent with some teacher perceptions described previously (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015). Based on the continuum of play-based learning (Pyle & Danniels, 2017) presented previously, my study will accept educator involvement in play as one important component of play-based learning.

Several studies have identified best practices to optimize play-based learning in classrooms (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009; Howard & McInnes, 2013; Roskos & Christie, 2011). Children should maintain the locus of control in play, initiating and leading, while educators should act as an equal play partner, asking open questions and presenting children with authentic choices (Howard & McInnes, 2013). Educators should not take over or dictate play, according to this research, but should follow the lead of children. Other research similarly suggests that play opportunities should include support and scaffolding from educators, be responsive and attentive to the child, and should be carefully planned with learning goals related to academic content in mind (Roskos & Christie, 2011; Skolnick Weisberg et al., 2013). Educators need to create literacy-rich play contexts for children, including plenty of print materials, posted vocabulary, and writing tools (Roskos & Christie, 2011). While it may seem contradictory to the free-flowing characteristics of play, planning and intentionality by educators has been shown to improve the challenge and complexity of play (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009) and support improved academic outcomes (Roskos & Christie, 2011).

Teachers' Perceptions of Play-Based Learning

When examining teachers' perceptions of play, research has shown that teachers' beliefs regarding their role in play falls into one of two opposing categories (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Teachers either believe that children's play should not be disturbed or interrupted at all,

or that teachers should direct play and interact with children during play, in order to optimize the potential academic and socio-emotional benefits (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). As previously discussed, how one views the role of an adult in play-based learning depends to a great extent on one's definition of play.

In a 2016 study examining how teachers' definitions of play-based learning impacts the implementation of play-based learning in their classrooms, Fesseha and Pyle (2016), found that there are a variety of perspectives among educators about play in classrooms, which leads to widely inconsistent implementation. Teachers in this study agreed on the potential for play as a tool for learning, while some teachers identified this learning as purely social in nature, others identified both social and academic learning outcomes (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016). The authors concluded that there is no clear definition of play-based learning among teachers, and as a result of this, more than half of the teachers involved in their study did not implement play-based learning (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016).

In another recent study on play-based learning, Pyle and Bigelow (2015) sought to explain how teachers' views on the purpose of play influenced how they implemented play-based learning in their kindergarten classrooms. The researchers found that each of the teachers in the study had a different perspective on play, and a different role for play in their classroom. These three approaches to play-based learning were described as play as separate from learning, play for social and emotional development, and play for academic learning (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015). The researchers found that the approach taken by each teacher was informed by that teacher's personal view of the role of play in kindergarten classrooms, and they concluded that with the many definitions and conflicting views of play in research, policy

and practice, it is difficult for teachers to share a common conception of play-based learning (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015). These studies show that what teachers believe will certainly impact their classroom practice. Whether or not play is used in classrooms to meet learning goals in math and literacy depends on teacher's attitudes, and if they do not see themselves as having a role in play, this attitudinal barrier can hinder or halt play-based learning (Ashiabi, 2007). When looking at play-based learning as a model for kindergarten, it is important to review the potential benefits to children.

Benefits of Play and Play-Based Learning

There is a tremendous body of research suggesting numerous benefits of play and play-based learning. These benefits are often categorized into two broad domains: socio-emotional benefits (i.e., Howard & McInnes, 2013; Miller & Almon, 2009) and academic benefits (i.e., Roskos & Christie, 2011; Skolnick Weisberg et al., 2013). There are also documented physical benefits of play, including the development of gross and fine motor skills, coordination, and counteracting the rise of childhood obesity (Miller & Almon, 2009). Unsurprisingly, there is some overlap between these categories, particularly socio-emotional and academic. Some research suggests that there is an emotional component to all learning, and that in order to learn academic skills such as literacy and numeracy, children benefit from certain socio-emotional skills, such as collaboration and compromise (Siraj-Blatchford 2009). Other research has shown that play experiences serve to educate children broadly, beyond just childhood (Eberle, 2011). Much of the research reviewed, however, looked at either the socio-emotional benefits or the academic benefits separately, which is how they will be discussed below.

Social and emotional development leads to well-being, which has been shown to help protect against a variety of problems such as behavioural problems, crime, and teenage pregnancy (Howard & McInnes, 2013). The link between emotional well-being and play is so important that specific play policies have been enacted in certain jurisdictions to ensure that children have access to play opportunities (Howard & McInnes, 2013). Play has been described as vital to physical, social and emotional development (Miller & Almon, 2009). Researchers have written about many of the socio-emotional benefits of play to children. In terms of emotional growth and development, play has been shown to relieve stress, counteract the rise of mental illnesses among children (Miller & Almon, 2009) and increase self-awareness, self-control, and positive affect (Weisberg & Gopnik, 2013). Play helps children learn about competition and cooperation, critical skills needed to socialize appropriately with others (Eberle, 2011), and gives children the opportunity to explore and test out predictions about interpersonal interactions, particularly in pretend play scenarios which may be exaggerated representations of reality (Weisberg & Gopnik, 2013). Children learn about peers' emotions, empathy, and others' responses to their behaviour in a safe, fantasy setting, and then can apply that learning to future interactions with peers and others.

Research into the socio-emotional benefits of play has also made the direct connection between socio-emotional development and improved school performance (Ashiabi, 2007). This study suggests that play lets children develop their skills in problem-solving, perspective-taking and theory of mind, which helps build and extend academic skills (Ashiabi, 2007). By learning how to interact and communicate with other children in non-threatening play situations, children build their pre-literacy skills of listening, speaking, understanding of narrative

structure, and vocabulary building. Pretend play teaches children perspective, to see things from another's point of view, and can build altruism, co-operation, self-restraint, and the ability to take turns and make compromises; play benefits children's emotional expression, emotional understanding, and emotional regulation (Ashiabi, 2007).

The academic benefits of play include positive links to literacy and mathematical development. Children develop linguistically by playing with words and sounds in early game-type situations (Eberle, 2011). Children's play teaches them about numbers and mathematics, about building and creating, and about who they are and what their place is in the world (Eberle, 2011). Play-based learning has a positive impact on reading and math scores (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Guided play is a more effective tool than either direct instruction or free play in improving math and literacy scores, and in the development of socio-emotional skills (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Teachers' use of play to build literacy skills is "related to children's increased engagement with these materials and the practice of literacy skills" (Pyle & Danniels, 2017, p. 276), which may help to explain why increased learning is achieved.

In one longitudinal study looking at academic and social differences between Ontario children enrolled in half-day and full-day play-based kindergarten, children in the full-day play-based program outperformed their peers in half-day programs in every area measured (Pelletier & Corter, 2019). This study was conducted as Ontario shifted from half-day kindergarten to full-day, play-based kindergarten, and took advantage of these two naturally-occurring cohorts to track their academic achievement over time, right through to the grade 3 EQAO provincial assessment. Results showed that students in full-day, play-based kindergarten scored higher in measures of literacy, numeracy, drawing complexity and self-regulation at the

end of kindergarten, and these benefits were maintained through the primary years to the end of grade 3 (Pelletier & Corter, 2019). It is important to note that this study looked at two differences between cohorts concurrently: a doubling of time in kindergarten from half-day to full-day, as well as a shift to a play-based pedagogy. It is unclear whether the benefits measured were a result of the increased time in kindergarten or the new play-based pedagogy. Nevertheless the study clearly showed long-term academic and social benefits of a full-day, play-based kindergarten model in Ontario, further adding to the literature regarding benefits of play-based learning.

Several other studies have examined the impacts of play on children's literacy development. One such study described the "play-literacy nexus as that space where play, language, and emerging literacy behaviors converge and interact" (Roskos & Christie, 2011, p. 204). This research revealed that literacy-enriched play environments can increase literacy behaviours, and that these environments should be carefully planned and created by educators (Roskos & Christie, 2011). Educators need to provide literacy supports, such as writing materials, vocabulary posted in the room, and adult scaffolding and intervention in order to ensure that play is meeting literacy goals. This study concluded that play needs to be carefully planned by educators, which may be counterintuitive to many, but is necessary in order to combine play with literacy learning goals (Roskos & Christie, 2011).

Other research similarly found that language development is enhanced when adults interact with children in play contexts, as play with others increases language input and output, increases complexity of language usage, and is effective at building vocabulary, due to the high levels of engagement during play (Skolnick Weisberg et al., 2013). This research explains that

various intervention studies have shown that adding more play increases improvements in literacy, but points out that the role of the adult playing with the child may be the critical factor in language development benefits of play (Skolnick Weisberg et al., 2013).

Understanding of narrative structures and conventions, a critical component of literacy, can also be improved through play (Weisberg & Gopnik, 2013). In pretend play, children enact different scenarios, and can see how they play out, learning from these fictional contexts in much the same way as adults learn from reading novels or watching movies (Weisberg & Gopnik, 2013). Roskas and Christie (2011) agree, explaining that play builds up understanding of plot, character, motive, emotion, and cause-and-effect. Play and play-based learning clearly have many varied developmental and academic benefits for kindergarten-aged children. The following section will look at literature related to French Immersion and additional language acquisition.

French Immersion and Additional Language Acquisition

French Immersion began in Canada in a suburb of Montreal in 1965. This early model saw children receiving only French instruction until grade 2, at which point English was gradually introduced, increasing as students got older (Genesee & Jared, 2008). Since then French Immersion has expanded to every province in Canada, serving hundreds of thousands of students, and now includes a variety of models and delivery methods (Genesee & Jared, 2008). French Immersion programs in Canada can differ according to the entry point, as well as the percentage of daily French instruction. Early immersion programs begin in kindergarten or occasionally grade 1, middle immersion programs begin in grade 4 or 5, and late immersion programs begin in grade 7 (Cummins, 1998). Full immersion programs begin with 100% of

instruction in French, and partial immersion programs usually begin with students receiving approximately 50% of their instruction in French (Cummins, 1998). In Ontario, French Immersion programs require at least 50% of the instructional day to be in French. At least two subjects in addition to French Language must be taught in French (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2019).

Immersion programs involve the integration of content and language instruction in an additional language (L2) with a fluency in the additional language being the desired outcome (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012). French Immersion is an additive bilingual program, in which language learning in English supports French language development and vice versa (Cummins, 1998). Students in immersion programs generally develop fluency in French while matching achievement levels of their peers in English-track programs (Cummins, 1998). Research has shown that French Immersion students initially lag behind English-track students in English skills when instruction is entirely in French (Genesee & Jared, 2008), but catch up quickly once English instruction is introduced, and significantly outperform English-track students in English reading and writing skills by grade 6, as demonstrated by Ontario's standardized EQAO assessment (Turnbull, Hart, & Lapkin, 2003). Furthermore, research shows that there is no gap in subject mastery, of those subjects taught in French; immersion students reach the same levels of achievement in math and science, for example, as students who are taught those subjects in their mother tongue (Cummins, 1998). One study compared student achievement in math among French Immersion students who studied math in French with math achievement among students in French Immersion who studied math in English (Bournot-Trites & Reeder, 2001). In spite of the testing in this study being conducted in English, the students who were

taught math in French had significantly higher achievement levels than their peers who had been taught math in English, supporting Cummins' findings (Bournot-Trites & Reeder, 2001).

Entry Points in Early Immersion

Different schools and school boards across Ontario may begin their early immersion programs in year 1 of kindergarten, year 2 of kindergarten, or in grade 1 (i.e., Limestone District School Board, 2021; Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board, 2021; Durham District School Board, 2019). There has been little research done to determine which if any of these entry points is most effective in terms of supporting student acquisition of French. Some researchers have compared outcomes between early, middle and late immersion programs (Turnbull, Lapkin, Hart, & Swain, 1998; Day & Shapson, 1998). While early immersion programs begin in kindergarten or grade one, middle immersion typically begins in grade 4 or 5 and late immersion typically begins in grade 7 (Lapkin et al., 1998). Research has shown that students in early immersion may demonstrate higher achievement in spoken French than students in middle or late immersion; however there is not a consistent, significant difference in literacy scores (Day & Shapson, 1998). One reason proposed for this finding is that while students in early immersion programs are exposed to much more French over time, older students are much more efficient learners, having increased cognitive abilities in their L1 (Lapkin et al., 1998). Cummins' (1979) Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis, which will be explored in greater detail in the next section, explains that certain language skills can transfer back and forth between L1 and L2, so the stronger a student's skills in L1, the easier it should be to acquire additional language skills.

It is possible that this earlier research can be extended to examine and explain benefits and drawbacks of different entry points for early immersion programs. A student entering in year 1 of kindergarten would be exposed to more French language, but a student entering in grade one would be presumed to have greater language skills in their L1, which would make learning of French more efficient. While this is certainly possible, research examining student achievement outcomes in different early immersion entry points is warranted to further examine this question.

Additional Language Acquisition

There has been much research into additional language (L2) acquisition, both within the French Immersion context, and in other contexts around the world. Dr. Jim Cummins conducted extensive early research into French Immersion in Canada. In 1979, he developed the Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis to help explain variances in L2 language acquisition among students (Cummins, 1979). Cummins' original hypothesis was that differences in L1 linguistic skills are related to differences in L2 language acquisition (Cummins, 1979). Therefore, there is transfer of certain linguistic skills between two or more languages; for example, a child with strong phonemic awareness skills in English is able to transfer that skill to French language acquisition to support L2 development. This research helped to explain the observation Cummins had made that middle-class children in an additive-bilingual program such as French Immersion were achieving high levels of L2 competence, while many other bilinguals, including immigrant families who were suppressing their L1 in favour of learning English in a subtractive-bilingual model, were struggling (Cummins, 1979). His hypothesis was that a strong L1 was needed to support L2, and that the student's first language needs to be taught and

strengthened in the home environment (Cummins, 1979). Cummins (1979) wrote that “as children develop high levels of L2 skills, their fluent access to two languages can give rise to enhancement both of L1 skills and other aspects of cognitive functioning” (p. 236).

The Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis has been examined and further developed by Cummins and many other researchers since it was first proposed. Looking at Turkish students learning Dutch, Verhoeven (1994) wrote that several linguistic skills, including phonological awareness skills and pragmatic skills, seem to transfer between multiple languages, while other skills, such as lexical and morphosyntactic skills, seem to not transfer between languages. Writing that oral skills are an important foundation to literacy skills, he concluded that students should build up oral language skills in their L1 before or while trying to develop L2 literacy (Verhoeven, 1994). This is a very important conclusion for French Immersion kindergarten, as it suggests that parents of children in an immersion program can support their learning by strengthening their oral L1 skills. It could also support a later entry point for immersion, once L1 skills are consolidated, or that support for struggling students in French Immersion could be in the students’ L1, and yet still support L2 development.

Other research has supported the theory that linguistic skills can transfer between languages. This research has suggested that phonological and morphological skills can transfer across languages, and that English skills can be a good predictor of later success in French reading ability (Genesee & Jared, 2008). Transfer of L1 skills to L2 development has been shown in some research to explain transfer of early reading skills, such as phonological awareness, rapid naming, and decoding (Krenca et al., 2019), however other research has argued that decoding is language-specific (Bialystok, 2007).

The Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis has been tested and looked at in relation to several contextual factors over the years, which some critics have suggested were ignored in Cummins' original research (Verhoeven, 1994). Research breaking language acquisition down into several component parts showed that there was interdependence in pragmatics and phonological skills, but much more limited evidence of any interdependence between L1 and L2 in terms of vocabulary and grammatical skills (Verhoeven, 1994). This research helped to show that language acquisition is a complex, multi-faceted process, and while some skills may transfer between languages, others may not. In another study examining L1 usage at home, the amount of L1 spoken by children in their home environment was a moderating factor in L2 acquisition, and students with greater L1 usage showed stronger positive transfer of skills to their L2 (Prevo et al., 2015). The authors explained this finding by suggesting that increased L1 usage led to deeper language processing and more frequent use of "cognitive-linguistic operations" needed to develop skills in L2 (Prevo et al., 2015, p. 463). This same study looked at the Socio-Economic Status (SES) of L2 learners and determined that SES was not a significant factor in L2 acquisition (Prevo et al., 2015). This research, however, as with Verhoeven's (1994) study, looked at Turkish students learning Dutch in the Netherlands, which is a different context than majority-language students learning an additional language at school, as is the case with French Immersion in Ontario. Nevertheless, these and other studies contributed to the further development of Cummins' hypothesis, and reinforced the notion that some linguistic skills developed in one language can transfer over to another language and support development in that language.

Cummins himself has continued to develop and refine his Linguistic Interdependence

Hypothesis since it was first written in 1979. By 1998, Cummins was suggesting that the transfer of skills was a two-way transfer, from L1 to L2 and from L2 to L1, and that the key for success was a strong home L1 environment (Cummins, 1998). Research had shown by then that French Immersion students were able to learn fluency and mastery in French at no cost to their English skills; there seemed to be a lag in some English skills, particularly spelling and writing, but those gaps were typically closed by grade 5, and there was no cost in other subject areas (Cummins, 1998). The Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis has withstood the test of time and is still a widely accepted theory of L2 literacy acquisition. An excellent summation of the hypothesis was written by Cummins (1998), who wrote that “to the extent that instruction in L2 is effective in promoting proficiency in L2, transfer of this proficiency to L1 will occur, provided there is adequate exposure to L1... and adequate motivation to learn L1” (p. 38).

In a French Immersion kindergarten setting, the Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis is a very important language acquisition theory. The theory of additive bilingualism, where English learning supports French language development and vice versa, is key for educators to understand and use in planning and delivering their program. French Immersion educators can support learning in either language and benefit students’ L2 acquisition. The Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis will be used as a language acquisition framework for this study.

Teaching Strategies in French Immersion

How best to teach students in French Immersion kindergarten is a topic of interest to both researchers and educators. An examination of teaching methodologies of early primary immersion teachers revealed that in successful immersion programs, beginners are not expected to communicate in the additional language right away, but rather teachers need to

balance use of the additional language to ensure understanding and build language skills (Akcan, 2004). Students should not be expected to 'sink or swim'. The study showed that teachers used a structured format to teach language skills to the whole class (i.e., carpet time), and provided many opportunities for students to communicate in their additional language; there was a clear expectation for children to attempt to use their additional language, and a lot of support to this end (Akcan, 2004). The research concluded that kindergarten-aged children acquire an additional language best when the educators use the language in relevant, meaningful contexts, rather than focusing on the structures, vocabulary, and grammar of the language itself (Akcan, 2004).

Other research has shown that in spite of the differences between English and French, the most effective teaching strategies for English literacy often match those for L2 French literacy acquisition in immersion settings. One high-yield strategy which has been identified by several researchers is a focus on phonological awareness skills (Krenca et al., 2019; Genesee & Jared, 2008; Jared, 2008; Wise et al., 2016). This body of research suggests that phonological awareness is essential to French Immersion students' ability to learn to read. Phonological awareness is a trans-linguistic skill that can transfer back and forth across L1 and L2 (Krenca et al., 2019). English phonological awareness skill has been shown to be a predictor of later French reading ability, further supporting the importance of phonological awareness in reading development (Genesee & Jared, 2008). Interestingly, English phonological awareness skills are a better predictor than French phonological awareness skills of future French reading ability among French Immersion students (Jared, 2008). Teachers should therefore explicitly teach phonological skills in kindergarten and early primary classrooms. In French Immersion

classrooms it would seem that it does not matter in what language these skills are taught, as the learning will transfer and support reading development (Bialystok, 2007; Wise et al., 2016). Simply put, research has consistently shown that having strong phonological awareness skills in any language is linked to later reading success in French Immersion (Wise et al., 2016).

Research has also shown the importance of French Immersion students' vocabulary and oral language skills in the acquisition of language. Oral mastery is needed to support literacy (Bialystok, 2007), and in French Immersion a lack of French vocabulary is a hindrance to French reading development (Jared, 2008). French reading comprehension often lags after kindergarten due to limited vocabulary among students in immersion programs (Jared, 2008). A smaller French vocabulary means that fewer words are known in French than in English. Reading comprehension suffers, because even if a student can decode a word, they may not have the meaning for it, and therefore do not understand what they have read (Verhoeven, 1990). It is important, therefore for immersion programs to focus on acquisition of oral language in the early years, building up students' vocabulary along with receptive and expressive skills in their additional language (Wise et al., 2016). Both decoding and comprehension are affected by a lack of oral language skills and have strong positive connections between high levels of oral proficiency and reading comprehension success in an additional language (Verhoeven, 1990). Jared, Cormier, Levy and Wade-Woolley (2010) looked at the link between oral skills in French Immersion students' first language and their ability to develop reading skills in French. They hypothesised, based on Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence theory, that strong oral skills in a students' first language would be highly correlated with an ability to read in an additional language (Jared et al., 2010). Their research

showed that proficiency in oral skills in English is a strong predictor of reading ability in French, but that while phonological awareness and grammatical ability seem to transfer strongly between two languages, vocabulary does to a much lesser extent (Jared et al., 2010). This would further support the need for French Immersion kindergarten educators to focus on French oral language and vocabulary with their students.

A final skill mentioned in the literature reviewed which contributes to French Immersion students' ability to read is letter-sound correspondence, also known as alphabetic principle (Jared, 2008; Genesee & Jared, 2008; Verhoeven, 1990). The alphabetic principle is a key predictor of reading ability in English and is also an important concept for French Immersion students in the development of reading skills (Jared, 2008; Genesee & Jared, 2008). Verhoeven (1990) discussed the challenges faced by L2 learners as they struggle with "orthographic constraints" (p. 92), which is closely tied to alphabetic understanding. Strengthening letter-sound knowledge and understanding of L2 orthography will lead to improved reading ability by students in Immersion programs (Verhoeven, 1990).

French Immersion and Play-Based Learning Programs

The Ontario kindergarten curriculum emphasizes a play-based learning program (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016), which is supported in the research as developmentally appropriate and highly beneficial to 4- and 5-year-olds. In French Immersion kindergarten classrooms, educators are tasked with integrating additional language acquisition into this play-based model. Research suggests that a focus on phonological awareness, oral vocabulary, and letter-sound correspondence are all high-yield strategies in terms of developing L2 literacy skills (Krenca et al., 2019; Genesee & Jared, 2008; Jared, 2008; Wise et al., 2016; Bialystok, 2007;

Verhoeven, 1990). Professional development guidelines from the Ontario Ministry of Education recommend that French Immersion kindergarten educators model authentic French communication to develop children's oral French vocabulary and grammatical structures (Curriculum Services Canada, 2015). There is limited research into how French Immersion kindergarten educators (teachers and ECEs) balance the demands of a child-centred play-based program with those of an additional language program.

One study by Rothschild (2017) looked at differences in outcomes between four cohorts of students in Ontario: English half-day kindergarten, English full-day kindergarten, French Immersion half-day kindergarten and French Immersion full-day kindergarten. This study took advantage of the gradual transition in Ontario from half-day kindergarten to full-day kindergarten, which created these cohorts of students. Looking at French literacy measures, this study showed that students in full-day kindergarten scored significantly higher than students in half-day programs in vocabulary and word identification, while there was no significant difference in measures of printing and decoding between the two groups (Rothschild, 2017). This study suggests that increased exposure to French is beneficial to initial vocabulary-building, although by grade 1 the students in half-day French Immersion had caught up, suggesting that this effect is short-lived (Rothschild, 2017). The research also demonstrated the importance of play in students' affect and engagement, concluding that in a play-based program, children will learn academic skills while they believe they are engaged in play (Rothschild, 2017). Rothschild's research shows that French Immersion can successfully be implemented as a play-based kindergarten program. Other work by Fortier (2014) and Fortier and Hamon (2014) looked more specifically at the challenges and opportunities in teaching

through inquiry in early French Immersion. The narrative inquiry by Fortier and Hamon (2014) examined four teachers' perceptions of teaching in French Immersion kindergarten through an inquiry-based approach, following students' lead to develop and build curricular themes. Findings showed that teachers used direct instruction to build French vocabulary, increased engagement of students through authentic experiences, improved French language skills, and generated more enthusiasm to use French (Fortier & Hamon, 2014). The journey of educators moving towards a more inquiry-based approach is described as having many ups and downs, but as being a positive shift overall for both educators and students (Fortier, 2014). My study will attempt to continue and build on prior research, by exploring educators' perspectives of the play-based learning model's impact on the acquisition of French language skills in a kindergarten setting.

Chapter 3: Methodology

To address the research questions for this study, a basic qualitative research design was used in order to discover and understand the perspectives of the participants involved in the study. I am most interested in describing the experiences and challenges of educators, in order to better understand the context of French Immersion kindergarten classrooms. A play-based approach is mandated in Ontario kindergarten classrooms; however, the Ministry of Education does not consider the special context of French Immersion in the kindergarten curriculum. Additional language acquisition is a complex task, and there are several well-documented strategies to assist young children in developing additional language skills. There is limited research focused on examining how teachers and ECEs balance these competing demands. In order to value and fully hear the voices of French Immersion kindergarten educators, a rich description of their experiences is warranted. A basic qualitative design, as described by Merriam (2002), seeks to discover and understand the perceptions and worldviews of participants, analyze them inductively, and discuss them using full descriptions. This strategy of collecting subjective data from educators, analyzing the data using general inductive analysis (Thomas, 2006) and discussing findings is the most appropriate way to understand the experiences of educators, challenges they face, and strategies they use to balance additional language acquisition and play-based learning.

A basic qualitative approach works best when researchers are seeking participants' perspectives on a concrete, real-world event or context (Percy et al., 2015). For my study, participants were all educators in French Immersion kindergarten classrooms, and therefore have first-hand experience with play-based learning and additional language acquisition. This

group of participants are most suited to articulate challenges in this educational model, as well as strategies used and descriptions of real-life experiences. For these reasons, a basic qualitative methodology is appropriate, and was the methodology chosen for the study.

Participants included French Immersion teachers and ECEs from one public school board in Southeastern Ontario. An online qualitative questionnaire was used to collect data. Data was analyzed using a general inductive approach. See Table 1 for a summary of research procedures.

Table 1

Study Purpose, Questions, Method and Analysis

Purpose	Research Questions	Methods	Analysis
To examine French Immersion educators' perspectives of the impact of play-based learning on kindergarten students' acquisition of French language skills.	<p>RQ1 (Overarching Question): How does a play-based kindergarten program impact student acquisition of French language skills, as perceived by French Immersion educators?</p> <p>RQ2: How do French Immersion kindergarten teachers and Early Childhood Educators plan for and deliver French language instruction within a play-based setting?</p> <p>RQ3: Which specific French language outcomes do educators expect kindergarten children to have achieved by the end of kindergarten?</p>	Online qualitative questionnaire (See Appendix A)	General inductive analysis (Thomas, 2006).

Recruitment and Participants

Purposeful sampling was necessary for this study. I am interested in the perceptions of French Immersion educators, and therefore my sample included teachers and ECEs in kindergarten immersion classrooms from one school board in Southeastern Ontario. Both the teachers and ECEs in this setting are bilingual and speak to the students in French. French Immersion kindergarten teachers must be certified to teach the Primary grades (k-3) and must have an additional qualification in teaching French as a Second Language. Many have also completed an additional qualification course in teaching kindergarten. Early Childhood Educators must be registered with the College of Early Childhood Educators, which requires a diploma or degree in early childhood education or equivalent (College of Early Childhood Educators, 2020). French Immersion ECEs in this board must demonstrate oral and written proficiency in French as part of the hiring process, although formal qualifications in French are not required. The participating school board in this study is a mid-sized public school board in Ontario, chosen for its proximity to the researcher and because its French Immersion kindergarten program is full-immersion. Children can enter French Immersion in year 1 of kindergarten, and instruction is 100% in French for both kindergarten years. The school board serves both rural and urban populations, with mixed SES levels. The board is not very ethnically or linguistically diverse, with approximately 85% of the population white, with small minority groups including Chinese, South Asian, Black and Arab. Over 90% of the population reported speaking primarily English (Statistics Canada, 2017).

With approval of the board, an email was sent by the researcher to principals of French Immersion elementary schools, through their general school emails available on their websites.

The email explained the study and asked them to forward the invitation to participate to all full-time French Immersion teachers and ECEs at their school. French Immersion kindergarten is offered at six schools in the board and based on enrolment usually includes approximately 30 classrooms in a given year. There are usually therefore approximately 60 French Immersion kindergarten educators each year, evenly divided between teachers and ECEs. Due to lower-than-typical kindergarten registration during the year of the study, presumably due to the impact of the COVID pandemic, there were 24 French Immersion kindergarten classes when data collection took place. This resulted in a total of 48 potential respondents (24 teachers and 24 ECEs). The anticipated participation rate was 20-25%, which would have produced a sample size of between 10-12 educators. Thirteen educators provided responses to the questionnaire, including three ECEs and nine respondents who indicated they were teachers. The other respondent did not indicate their position, however responses to other questions indicated that the respondent was a teacher (i.e., comments about teaching years ago, before Full-Day Kindergarten and the addition of ECEs to classrooms; comments about reporting, which is only done by teachers, etc.). This individual will be considered a teacher for data analysis, resulting in 10 teacher respondents along with three ECEs. These totals represent over 40% of eligible teachers and 12.5% of eligible ECEs. These responses provided a variety of voices to ensure that various perspectives were represented in the study. It is possible that a teacher and ECE from the same classroom both chose to participate in the study, however names and school name were not collected so this is unknown.

Ethics

Ethical clearance was obtained from Queen's General Research Ethics Board. The study was also sent to the Superintendent of Education to receive ethical approval from the school board. Once ethical approval was granted by the university and the school board, a letter of information was sent to administrators of elementary schools with French Immersion kindergarten classes, and to French Immersion kindergarten educators. The letter informed educators of the objectives of the study and invited them to participate in the online questionnaire. The purpose of the study was made clear to participants, along with the need for and importance of their voice to this research. Participants were not asked to disclose their names or school names, in order to maintain anonymity, and any identifying information was removed during data analysis.

Data Collection

Data for this study was collected through the administration of an online Qualtrics questionnaire. Questionnaires have some advantages and disadvantages over interviews, which is another common data collection technique for qualitative research. Questionnaires give respondents privacy and time to thoughtfully consider responses, whereas interviews demand an immediate response to questions (McGuirk & O'Neill, 2016). Questionnaires can also be widely distributed, and are cost- and time-effective, in that a researcher does not need to meet with each respondent to conduct an interview, and responses do not need to be transcribed. In the specific case of my study, I am a principal at an elementary school within the board in which I am conducting research. This position may have created a perceived power imbalance and discomfort for some respondents, and it is possible that responses may be more honest and authentic through anonymous questionnaires, rather than from in-person

interviews. Even with the use of another researcher to conduct interviews, respondents would have known who the lead researcher is, and likely would have felt more at ease submitting anonymous responses online rather than in person.

The questionnaire that was used includes brief demographic data, including role in the classroom and years of experience, followed by several open-ended questions to answer the research questions. The questionnaire was designed to take respondents approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. A sample of the questionnaire is included as Appendix A.

Data Analysis

Data collected from each respondent was considered a single set of data. Responses were copied verbatim from Qualtrics into an Excel spreadsheet, in order to maintain the integrity and authenticity of responses, and to ensure that the voices of individual respondents are heard. Data was analysed using a general inductive approach, as described by Thomas (2006). A general inductive approach to qualitative data analysis allows themes to emerge from the raw data, without any preconceived categories or expectations (Thomas, 2006). For this study, the 13 individual responses were copied from Excel into a separate Word document for each response. Each Word document was read over once to get an initial sense of the data. Raw data was then closely read in order to identify important and meaningful text segments, which were highlighted in each response. These highlighted text segments were extracted and copied into a new document, which included segments from all 13 participants, separated by response. These extracted highlights were grouped into categories, initially separated into three groups: participants 1-5, 6-9, and 10-13. This was done for convenience, due to the large amounts of data that I was working with. When this was complete, I had three new documents

with key highlights and phrases grouped into initial categories. In reviewing the categories, four overall themes emerging from the data: Teaching Approaches and French-Language Instruction, Educator Use of French, Student Use of French, and Educator Expectations for French Learning. The vast majority of data and categories could fit into one of these four themes, so a new document was created for each of these themes, and the data in the initial categories were moved into the new documents. When this was complete, I had four documents of coded data under the themes stated above. Each theme had several categories or sub-themes within it, ranging from six categories to 22 categories. Upon further revision and refinement, categories were combined, broader sub-themes were identified, and the data was re-read and re-analysed multiple times. This revision resulted in my four themes having 4-7 sub-themes each. My data analysis was reviewed by my thesis supervisor, who made further recommendations and suggestions (information on trustworthiness procedures described below). A final review and refinement of the data resulted in the data being coded into four themes with the following number of sub-themes (see Table 2): Teaching Approaches and French Language Instruction, four sub-themes; Educator Use of French, five sub-themes; Student Use of French, four sub-themes; Educator Expectations for French Learning, five sub-themes. These themes and sub-themes will be described in detail in the results section of this paper.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is built through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility in this study was supported through multiple generative conversations and debriefs with my supervisor, to

review data and discuss analysis (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Triangulation is another strategy used to increase validity of qualitative research (Mathison, 1988). For this study, triangulation occurred through the use of multiple data sources (educators). By opening the study to many teachers and ECEs, I was able to compare responses, analyse for commonalities, and identify differences among respondents. Mathison (1988) writes that triangulation is valuable whether the evidence is convergent, inconsistent or divergent, in that the researcher can develop good explanations for the evidence.

During the data analysis process, having another researcher code parts of the data to ensure inter-rater reliability and integrity of the coding categories was used to build dependability. Once I had developed my themes and sub-themes and had fully coded my data, I trained another researcher on my code book. This researcher was a graduate student who was trained in qualitative research methods and inductive analysis. We reviewed one complete questionnaire together, and she then coded three additional responses on independently. She first reviewed the three responses, highlighting important words and phrases; this was the same first step in analysis I performed with the data. My fellow researcher identified almost all of the same phrases as I had – she highlighted nearly 90% of the same words that I highlighted during my analysis. She did highlight quite a bit more of the responses in addition to what we both highlighted; however, in reviewing both sets of codes, there are some observations from this discrepancy. Some of the additional highlighting was simply ‘stretching’ words and phrases, adding one or two words here or there, or highlighting additional explanatory information. An example of this is the response one educator gave when explaining one use of direct instruction: “Whole group songs/vocabulary teaching – teaching songs and vocabulary

related to current inquiry/seasonal changes”. In my analysis I only highlighted the first part of this sentence, as I found the second part to be a repetition or further explanation. My second researcher highlighted the entire sentence. This does not significantly alter the content of what was extracted for coding, only the volume.

A second possible explanation for the additional highlighting by the second researcher is a lack of familiarity with the topic. Not having a large background in play-based learning and French Immersion kindergarten, she would be more inclined in an initial analysis to consider a broader selection of responses to be important and related to the topic. My research into the topic and experiences as an administrator of French Immersion kindergarten would be expected to give me a more precise understanding of the topic and allow me to be more precise and exact with my initial analysis.

Once the second researcher had highlighted three responses, she used the Code Book that I developed after my analysis to categorize responses and complete a thematic analysis of the data. Overall, our coding agreed, with minor differences. I carefully reviewed her analysis of the responses, looking for differences and reflecting on my categorization of these specific responses. Upon this reflection and further analysis, I moved some responses from one sub-category to another, or from one theme to another, but most remained in the way I had originally categorized them. This deep review and reflection following analysis by a second researcher further supports dependability of the data analysis.

Finally, a purposeful sample of French Immersion kindergarten educators was selected to support transferability (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Thick, rich description in reporting findings was also used to allow readers to determine transferability (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This will

allow other researchers to determine if the findings of my research apply to their contexts or research interests.

Statement of Reflexivity

It is important to note that I am the principal of a k-6 French Immersion school within the board in which I conducted this research. This positions me within the research problem, which would suggest pre-existing beliefs and/or views of the problem. I have been an administrator in immersion schools for more than 10 years and have observed schools transition from half-day to full-day, play-based kindergarten in that time. I have first-hand experience with the research problem and am involved daily in working with educators in French Immersion kindergarten classrooms. I am also male, Caucasian, and cisgender, which impacts my worldview and will influence my writing.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

Thirteen educators completed qualitative online questionnaires, providing data for this research project. Throughout this chapter, direct quotes from those completed questionnaires will be attributed to respondents using an alpha-numeric code referring to their position and the order in which responses were submitted. For example, the first teacher response will be identified as T1, the second T2, the first ECE response E1, etc. Data from the questionnaires included demographic information related to position, years of experience, level of French proficiency, and additional relevant qualifications or training. Five open ended responses provided data more specifically related to the research questions, addressing educators' perspectives around French language instruction in play-based kindergarten settings. As stated in Chapter 3, qualitative data was coded inductively, allowing themes and sub-themes to emerge from educators' responses. After much review and refinement, four main themes emerged. Those themes were: Teaching Approaches and French Language Instruction, Educator Use of French, Student Use of French, and Educator Expectations for French Learning. In this chapter, demographic findings will be shared, along with findings grouped in each of the four main themes. The themes and sub-themes that emerged are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Themes and sub-themes

Theme	Sub-Themes	Research Questions Addressed
Teaching Approaches and French Language Instruction	Play-Based Learning and Inquiry Educator-Directed Whole Group Instruction Small-Group/ Guided Practice Balance	RQ1, RQ2
Educator Use of French	Use of English Frequency of French Use Using French for Academics/Literacy Teaching Strategies Used Challenges with Educator French Use	RQ1, RQ2
Student Use of French	Whole and Small Group Instruction Asking Questions Responding to Educators Spontaneous Use of French among Children	RQ1, RQ2
Educator Expectations for French Learning	Phonological Awareness Receptive and Expressive Oral Language Reading and Writing Math Student Readiness for Grade 1	RQ3

Demographic Information

As discussed in the previous section, thirteen educators responded to the questionnaire (three ECEs and ten teachers). Respondents were asked to describe their French-language abilities on a 5-point scale, ranging from ‘French is my first language’ (5) to ‘I don’t believe my French language abilities are adequate for working in a French immersion kindergarten classroom’ (1). No respondents indicated that French was their first language. Six teachers who responded rated themselves a 4, ‘I am completely fluent in French’, and three rated themselves a 3, ‘my French language abilities are more than adequate for working in a French

immersion kindergarten classroom’; one teacher did not respond. The mean score for teachers was 3.67/5. All three ECEs rated themselves a 2/5 on the scale, indicating ‘I sometimes worry that my French language abilities are not adequate for working in a French immersion kindergarten classroom’. Respondents’ self-assessed French language abilities are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Respondents’ self-assessed French language ability

Position	Number of Respondents	Uncomfortable	Somewhat Comfortable	Very Comfortable	Extremely Comfortable - bilingual	Extremely Comfortable - francophone
ECE	3	0	3	0	0	0
Teacher	9	0	0	3	6	0

Respondents shared their years of experience both in a French Immersion kindergarten classroom and as an educator overall. One teacher did not respond to these questions. In terms of French Immersion kindergarten classroom experience, one teacher had less than two years, six teachers and one ECE had 2-5 years, two ECEs had 5-10 years, and two teachers had more than 10 years. Overall, one teacher indicated less than two years of experience, one teacher indicated 2-5 years of experience, three teachers and one ECE indicated 5-10 years of experience, and four teachers and two ECEs had more than 10 years of experience. A summary of this information is presented in table 4.

Table 4

Years of overall and French immersion kindergarten experience by position

Experience	Position	Number of Respondents	0-2 years	2-5 years	5-10 years	10+ years
FI kindergarten	Teacher	9	1	6	0	2
	ECE	3	0	1	2	0
Overall teaching/ECE	Teacher	9	1	1	3	4
	ECE	3	0	0	1	2

Respondents were also asked ‘What (if any) Additional Qualifications or specific training other than your diploma/degree do you have for teaching French Immersion kindergarten?’

Four respondents, two teachers and two ECEs did not respond. Six teachers indicated that they had French as a Second Language Additional Qualifications, two indicated that they had a Kindergarten Additional Qualification, and two indicated that they had a Special Education Additional Qualification. Some teachers indicated more than one Additional Qualification course, explaining why this totals more than the number of teacher respondents. One ECE indicated that they had taken “a few college French for beginners courses” (E2). Responses to the open-ended questions were inductively analysed to develop themes and sub-themes. Categories emerged from the data and after much refinement (see coding procedures described in the Data Analysis section of Chapter 3), four main themes were identified.

Theme 1: Teaching Approaches and French Language Instruction

The topic which was addressed the most by respondents formed the theme: Teaching Approaches and French-Language Instruction. Respondents included detailed information related to play-based learning and French-Language instruction. This was in line with the overarching research question for the study (RQ1): How does a play-based kindergarten

program impact student acquisition of French language skills, as perceived by French Immersion educators? This theme also addressed RQ2: How do French Immersion kindergarten teachers and ECEs plan for and deliver French language instruction within a play-based setting? Educators provided a wide variety of thoughts and opinions about teaching and learning in French Immersion kindergarten, including some consistency across respondents and some contradictions. Within this theme, four sub-themes were identified and will be discussed separately in the following sections: Play-Based Learning and Inquiry, Educator-Directed Whole Group Instruction, Small-Group/Guided Practice, and Balance.

Sub-Theme 1: Play-Based Learning and Inquiry

Teachers and ECEs shared their ideas and opinions as to the roles that play, play-based learning, and inquiry have in their classrooms. Generally, respondents recognized the important role of play in kindergarten: “Young children need to play. It’s how they learn” (T3). Educators described how play works in their programs. Most respondents indicated a specific time for ‘free play’, usually one block of the day. With most schools on a balanced timetable of three 100-minute blocks, this means 100 minutes of uninterrupted free play for the children. Several responses clearly differentiated this time from formal instruction. For example, one educator described “designated blocks of time devoted to uninterrupted play and designated blocks of time devoted to mathematics, language, and science” (E1). This sentiment was echoed by several other respondents and will be further explored in the next two sub-themes. The opposite idea was also expressed however, as one respondent noted that “all of the activities for math and literacy are play-based” (T4). The free play block described by educators includes free choice of activities, and the ability for children to choose play partners and how long they

will stay at a given activity. Some educators described setting out activities for the children to choose from, and described the children playing at tables, on the floor, or in various other spots in the room.

Responses also included the types of activities in which the children engage. Dramatic play, songs, activity corners, small world play, and group games were all listed by educators as examples of children's play. Some respondents indicated that they use student interests to determine the type of activities provided. This notion was reinforced by others, describing an inquiry approach, where learning and play are connected through inquiries based on students' interests. For example, one educator wrote that "what the children are interested in determines what kind of activities we provide, if they are interested in sharks we try to provide learning opportunities about sharks" (E3).

Respondents reflected on the connection between play and French language acquisition in several ways. Some educators wrote that they lead games in French, and that since the children want the teacher to be involved in their play, this provides an ideal opportunity to develop French language skills: "Through play, I always try to reinforce the French language we have learned and encourage them to use it. For example, while playing hide and seek outside, I always remind them to count in French" (T6). Other responses described teaching French words to students while interacting during play, or educators circulating during play and asking questions in French: "While joining in on play, you can introduce the language" (T9). Educators reported translating, modelling vocabulary and phrases, prompting further learning among students and inviting oral communication during play. One educator described their vision:

“Play-based immersion learning creates a rich environment that allows children to ‘bathe in the sea of oral language’” (T2).

While many respondents described the French learning that takes place during play, others expressed a contrary view. They explained that the focus is not primarily on the children learning French. It was explained that it is difficult to reinforce French language during play as students do not have the vocabulary, and that students would use more French if they knew more vocabulary words. One educator noted that the goal is to have fun and make the children feel safe, so the focus is on that rather than learning French. One respondent noted that the educators are the only source of French in the class, and it is very challenging to get around to all the children while they are playing. This challenge was expressed less frequently than the opportunity within play for French instruction; however, it is nevertheless important to note.

Sub-Theme 2: Educator-Directed Whole Group Instruction

Respondents provided detailed information related to the use of direct instruction in their programs, both whole-group and small-group. Each of these teaching approaches will be discussed as a separate sub-theme. Many respondents identified whole-group instruction as a common practice. Some classes report using this only in small amounts, for short periods of time, 5-15 minutes in length, a couple of times a day; one respondent wrote that they “begin learning blocks with a whole-group lesson” (T6). It was expressed that direct instruction is important and used to meet curricular expectations, as one respondent noted that it “mainly involves curricular expectations from math and literacy frame” (T1). Explicit instruction during whole-group lessons can include math and literacy concepts and may be used to begin a learning block.

Educators described a variety of activities that were used during whole-group instruction. Many respondents wrote about singing songs, including body movements and actions as a way to build muscle memory. “Using games and songs to introduce new vocabulary makes learning French fun!” (T9). Whole class read-alouds were also mentioned frequently, as a way to build vocabulary, model fluent French reading, and develop reader behaviours (i.e., making predictions, finding connections). Many educators described various oral language activities and opportunities in a whole-group setting. These included a lot of repetition, of words and common phrases. Sentence starters in French may be introduced in a whole-group setting. Sharing circles were described as an opportunity for students to build oral language, giving them an opportunity to speak and share. Expectations for French use increased based on individual readiness; at the beginning of the year children may ask a question in English, which is repeated back in French by an educator, and repeated again in French by the student. As students progress in their use of French, praise reinforces spontaneous French use and students celebrate each other’s development.

While most educators reported using a whole group carpet time, or gathering time/meeting time, for a variety of purposes, one respondent made a point of explaining that in their class, “we do not do a ‘carpet’ or ‘meeting’” (E3). As with other practices and approaches, while there are commonalities among educators with regards to whole-group instruction, there was not unanimity amongst respondents.

Sub-Theme 3: Small Group/Guided Practice

Grouping students for explicit instruction or purposeful centres was an instructional practice that was identified as an important part of many kindergarten classes. “Students can

learn in a more intimate setting and the teacher can directly teach the curricular expectations” (T4). Various respondents discussed working with small groups, intimate settings, or one-on-one sessions, where “most of the teaching happens” (T4), including literacy, math, social skills, self-regulation, and other curricular expectations. Both educators, the teacher and ECE, were identified as running small groups. “The teacher and ECE trade off on working in small groups throughout the day” (T1), using provocations and a variety of manipulatives and tools. The instruction in small groups was generally described as being separate and distinct from play or play-based learning by educators.

Respondents described small-group learning taking place in table-top centres, in a rotary-style approach. Students work on different purposeful activities at different centres within the class, rotating from table to table or activity to activity during an instructional block. Educators described having different hands-on math or literacy activities at each table, where the students could practice their skills. Educators might stay at one centre and have students rotate through, or circulate from table to table interacting with different groups. This was described by several respondents as the preferred technique for direct instruction of French language and literacy concepts, as well as math. “During this time both educators often run small groups and take notes during these small groups or observe other students around the class” (E3). One educator described the activity centres as including blocks, games, puzzles and other toys, and working up from about 15 minutes per centre at the start of the year to about 30 minutes per centre as the year progresses. Small-group, guided learning clearly emerged as a preferred instructional practice amongst respondents in this study.

Sub-Theme 4: Balance

Another sub-theme that emerged as educators wrote about teaching approaches and French-language acquisition was the notion of balance. “There is a real balance between direct instruction and play-based” (T5). Respondents noted that the program entailed a balance of whole group, small group, and play-based learning. One educator remarked that it took “a good mix of direct instruction and play based learning” (T10). The wide variety of teaching approaches and strategies reported by respondents shows just how many different techniques are used in French immersion kindergarten programs.

The balance needed between French and English usage was also remarked upon by respondents. This was cited as being key to implementing math and literacy instruction, but was also widely written about throughout responses. Educators recognize that they are the only source of French in the classroom and must directly teach vocabulary and sentence structure to students. At the same time, understanding by children is necessary, which often means using English. The struggle to find this balance was explicitly mentioned by a few respondents; however, was also implicitly woven throughout many answers.

Theme 2: Educator Use of French

One of the questions in the questionnaire asked educators to describe the balance of French and English usage in their classrooms. The responses to the question will help to provide insight on the ways in which educators incorporate French into their programs in order to build second-language skills in their students (addressing RQ 1 and RQ2). Responses were coded into five sub-themes: Use of English, Frequency of French Use, Using French for Academics/Literacy, Teaching Strategies Used, and Challenges with Educator French Use. These will be further discussed in the following sections.

Sub-Theme 1: Use of English

Respondents described why they use English, and in what contexts. One frequently repeating idea that emerged was that of student safety. When safety is an issue, and “instructions and information need to be clearly understood” (T1), English is used by educators. This can include situations in which students are being unsafe towards themselves or others, or when educators are discussing school safety, such as during fire drills or playground boundaries. One respondent noted that when they want students to know “something serious is happening” (T8), they use English. This was repeated by virtually every questionnaire respondent.

Other responses to the question of English usage indicated a variety of situations and contexts in which English are used. One respondent wrote that they read chapter books in English to work on “skills such as predicting, retelling, and making connections and inferences” (T7). Another respondent echoed this sentiment, noting that English texts were read when the message is more important than vocabulary building, for example when reading books about bullying, kindness, Indigenous themes, etc. When educators want to ensure that students understand the message, they may read in English. These are “times that I sacrifice French to ensure that the concept is solidified” (T8). Other respondents wrote that they may use English during the play block, to ask questions or give guidance for solving problems with peers. It was also noted that when important concepts need to be solidified, English is used. The use of English by educators can be contrasted to responses about French use, described in the remaining sub-themes.

Sub-Theme 2: Frequency of French Use

Educators in general wrote that they use French as much as possible. Many responses showed teachers and ECEs who were dedicated to speaking French with each other: “conversing in French with my teaching partner and other adults as well” (T2). It was noted by a couple of educators that the ideal would be to use French 100% of the time, and that this is a goal they progress to as the year goes on.

Educators wrote about using more French as the year went on; as one educator wrote, “slowly we decrease our English explanations and increase the instructions in French” (T4). This progression, or gradual increase of French use was written about by several respondents. At the beginning of the year, more English is used to ensure understanding of important rules and routines amongst newcomers. One respondent went as far as saying that at the beginning of the year “we do all of our instructions in English” (E3). As the year progresses, more and more instruction takes place in French. Some educators quantified their French use, for example: “between September and December we work up to using about 60% French, by March Break we are speaking in French 90-100% of the time” (T7). Educators were not consistent in this quantifying however. One respondent wrote that French use is 50% at the beginning of the year and 75% by the end of the year, while another aimed for 80% French by November. While amounts varied, educators were consistent in increasing French use as the year goes on.

Sub-Theme 3: Using French for Academics/Literacy

A common idea that emerged from the data was the use of French for academic instruction, especially literacy instruction. Most respondents described explicit teaching of vocabulary in French as one of the big goals for their program. Educators described modelling vocabulary and weaving it into the day. Students quickly learn key words, as educators point

and gesture at objects and integrate them into conversations. Frequently used sentences are taught, including greetings, and concepts such as shapes and numbers. “French books will be read, sometimes with many translations, sometimes with many questions” (E1). Educators model fluent French reading and teach reader behaviours. French books are read, according to one response, “when vocabulary and fluency is a learning goal” (T7). Multiple responses specified academic instruction as taking place in French, and one respondent quantified their comments by suggesting that French is used “90% of the time in direct math and literacy instruction” (T7).

Sub-Theme 4: Teaching Strategies Used

Educators who described adult use of French in their classes frequently mentioned two specific teaching strategies which gave context to their use of French in the classroom. These strategies were the ‘sandwich model’ and repetition.

The ‘sandwich model’ describes when an educator says something in French, repeats it in English, and then says it again in French. This teaching strategy was identified many times as supporting student acquisition of vocabulary and literacy. One respondent commented that they “sandwich the English word between the French translation ex: chien-dog-chien, and then have the student(s) repeat the word” (T1). The sandwich model is used for single vocabulary words, as well as sentences. This technique is used to introduce new words and phrases, and to reinforce important concepts. Educators’ frequent reference to the sandwich model shows that it is a favourite teaching strategy of French Immersion kindergarten educators as they work to develop students’ oral French.

Similarly, repetition was often-cited teaching strategy among respondents. Students are taught to repeat back when educators use French. When students use English, educators repeat back to the students in French, and have them repeat the proper French sentence. Educators reported repeating words and phrases consistently to support French acquisition among students. One respondent noted that there is “lots of repetition and opportunities for practice through songs and games” (T5). This repetition allows educators to reinforce vocabulary and correct student pronunciation by having students repeat slowly.

Sub-Theme 5: Challenges with Educator French Use

A smaller sub-theme emerged in the data related to the challenges faced by respondents regarding French use by educators. Not all respondents commented on this, but several educators added similar points. It was noted by a teacher that “many ECEs do not speak fluently in French” (T3) and by an ECE that “I am not fluent in French” (E2). One teacher wrote that additional language development is challenging because the teacher is the only source of the French language in the classroom, and large class sizes make reaching every student difficult. One respondent saw their self-described weakness in French as a learning opportunity for the children, explaining that they “see me learning along side them and they think ‘hey, if Mme can make a mistake and it’s ok, I can try too’” (E2). The difference in levels of French proficiency between teachers and ECEs was also noted in the demographic data, as ECEs all rated themselves as a 2/5, whereas six teachers rated themselves as 4/5 and three as 3/5. This data adds to the challenges faced by educators regarding French use. This challenge led one teacher to question whether kindergarten should be taught in French, writing: “Do we start French Immersion solely in grade 1 since finding two competent French speaking educators in

kindergarten appears to be a challenge?” (T3). This question will be further explored in the discussion chapter.

Theme 3: Student Use of French

Respondents were asked to describe how and when students use French in their class. This was asked in order to address RQ1 and RQ2. By looking at the contexts and situations in which students use French, I hope to shed light on the balance between play and language acquisition and explore educators’ strategies to build additional language skills in a play-based context.

Responses in the Student Use of French Theme were coded into four sub-themes: Whole and Small Group Instruction, Asking Questions, Responding to Educators, and Spontaneous Use of French among Children. Each of these sub-themes will be explored below.

Sub-Theme 1: Whole and Small Group Instruction

Educators wrote about students using French during instructional times, in either whole group or small group settings. This was identified, as mentioned previously in the first theme, as separate and distinct from children’s play time. Educators described carpet times, whole group songs, circle times and “all calendar activities” (T6), as whole-group instructional situations in which students were encouraged to use French. As one respondent noted, “Students share what they know in English with as much French as possible” (T2). Small-group instruction, such as guided groups, were also identified as situations in which students “are encouraged to use French vocabulary” (T9). This context supports the information shared earlier in the first theme that many educators distinguished between play settings and instructional settings. In this case, French usage by students occurred in instructional settings.

Sub-Theme 2: Asking questions

As students are exposed to French and given models of high-use questions, educators noted that many begin to use the French questions themselves. “They use it to ask specific questions that have become ‘routine’ for us” (T8). Many respondents noted that students will begin with question starters such as ‘est-ce que je peux...’ (can I...) for permission to go to the washroom, get a drink, get various toys or supplies, etc. When asking for a specific object or material, one respondent noted that students may use the French question starter, followed by the object name in English, as students don’t have the French vocabulary. Several educators wrote that students ask for assistance in French, with such tasks as lunch: “Ouvre, s’il vous plait, ferme, s’il vous plait” (T6) (open please, close please). It was noted that this French questioning evolves, and that the second-year kindergarten students are more comfortable asking questions than the first-year students, as one respondent wrote: “most of our seniors and some juniors now feel comfortable asking in French” (T10).

Sub-Theme 3: Responding to Educators

As well as generating questions in French, educators noted that students respond to educators’ questions and prompts using French. One example cited was during whole group or circle time, “responding to ‘Comment ça va?’ with ‘Ça va bien parce que...’” (T6). Students may or may not complete the sentence in French, but if they don’t have the vocabulary and finish the sentence in English, the educator will repeat what they say in French and have the student repeat it.

There were many other contexts and scenarios in which students use French to respond to educators. “In play,” commented one respondent, “we sit with students and interact with

them... and teach them the French words to things they are interested in. For example, when playing with blocks we can say: 'est-ce que c'est un chateau où une maison?'" (T4). One educator described looking for opportunities throughout the day to elicit French from students, writing "even at dismissal, we ask students to say 'je vois maman/papa/grande-mère when they see their adult and are ready to go" (T10). Others wrote about building French sentence use authentically, adding French vocabulary such as numbers, shapes, and letters into daily conversation. Respondents had students repeat French words and phrases back to them and spoke to students in French. One educator described students' emerging use and understanding of French in this way: "many of our students... seem to be able to respond to the French so at the very least, they are beginning to listen and to understand in French" (T10).

Sub-Theme 4: Spontaneous Use of French among Children

In a play-based kindergarten setting, much of children's time is spent playing with each other, and not in direct interaction with an adult. I was interested, therefore, to see what comments educators would make about students' French use with each other. There was a definite lack of consensus in this sub-theme. Several educators indicated that students seldom if ever use French when playing among themselves. One ECE captured this by sharing: "when children are 'hard at play' at such a young age, they will resort to their first language" (E1). "Children only play in English" (T10), and "do not use (French) when speaking casually with peers or teachers" (T8), are more examples of respondents' thoughts related to children's lack of spontaneous French use. "Students do not have the French vocabulary to acquire the language from their peers" (T5), was a common sentiment.

Other educators responded that some students “do slip in a little French here and there” (T10). Sometimes students can be heard using common phrases such as ‘merci, non, oui, s’il vous plait’ (thank you, no, yes, please), during play time. Vocabulary and motivation were cited as key to children using French spontaneously. One respondent wrote that children use French if they have the language, and another wrote that a reward system is used in their program to reinforce French use. Students receive praise or a small token if they are heard using French while playing, and this motivates them to use more. Finally, it was noted that “we often see the children reenacting some of our routines when they are playing in dramatic play or out in the yard” (E2), and in those situations some French is heard as the students mimic the routines and phrases of the classroom.

Theme 4: Educator Expectations for French Learning

The second research sub-question (RQ3) asked: Which specific French language outcomes do educators expect kindergarten children to have achieved by the end of kindergarten? By understanding the goals for the end of the kindergarten program, it helps to provide context and inform the teaching and learning programming that takes place within the two years of kindergarten. Educators’ responses in this theme were divided into five sub-themes: Phonological Awareness, Receptive and Expressive Oral Language, Reading and Writing, Math, and Student Readiness for Grade 1. These sub-themes will be explored in the following sections.

Sub-Theme 1: Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness is an umbrella term describing a broad set of oral skills that involves identifying and manipulating parts of spoken language, including syllables, onset-rimes,

and phonemes (Wise et al., 2016). Educators identified strong phonological awareness skills as being a key goal for students in the French Immersion kindergarten program. One teacher indicated that they want students “to know the sounds of most letters of the alphabet and be able to blend sounds together” (T7). Other educators explained that they want students to be able to identify initial sounds and final sounds in a word, and connect sounds with letters. These skills were identified repeatedly by educators as the basic expectations for students' development of French language skills. Targeted small group teaching of sound skills is used, and students must explicitly learn the names of letters along with their sounds. Phonemic awareness, which is the ability to identify and manipulate individual sounds in words (Wise et al., 2016), was identified as a subset of phonological awareness by some respondents. One respondent noted that students should “at least all of their sound skills mastered” (E3), and another indicated that by focusing on phonological awareness in kindergarten, students would be ready for reading and writing in grade 1.

Sub-Theme 2: Receptive and Expressive Oral Language

While phonological awareness is a specific set of oral skills, educators indicated a wide array of other oral communication expectations for their students by the time they finished year two of kindergarten. Many educators echoed the sentiment of one teacher, who wrote that there is “a strong focus on oral comprehension and production from day one” (T2). Respondents repeatedly wrote that students should be able to understand the French that is spoken to them. They should have “strong oral comprehension” (T2) and be able to follow simple French instructions. They should be comfortable listening to French and understand a variety of high-frequency words.

In addition to oral comprehension, respondents indicated various expectations for French oral production by students. One respondent noted that “when a child is ready, he/she will start by using French vocabulary in their sentences” (T3). They should be able to communicate needs or ideas using complete sentences, ask basic questions and use common phrases. Students are expected to produce simple sentences in French and incorporate high-frequency words and phrases into their oral language. Educators identified colours, numbers, animals, shapes and classroom materials as some examples of the types of high-frequency words students should know. They should be able to respond to simple questions asked in French with simple French answers and begin to use French on their own without prompting.

Sub-Theme 3: Reading and Writing

Oral skills, including phonological awareness and receptive and expressive oral language skills, were mentioned by almost all respondents as expectations for student French by the end of kindergarten. Less-frequently mentioned were reading, writing and math skills. There was also a more diverse set of opinions as to the expectations for reading and writing skills than there was for oral language skills. Only one respondent indicated a standard reading level expected of students: GB+ level 1 (The GB+ reading assessment is a French-language levelled-reading program commonly used by immersion teachers in this board). Other responses were more vague, suggesting that students should be able to decode small words, or recognize high frequency words. Educators expected that students be able to recognize letters and begin working on syllables. One response was even less specific, indicating that students should “demonstrate reading behaviours by engaging with text” (T2).

Writing expectations were similarly diverse and non-specific. Many responses indicated that students should start to write words by blending sounds. One response noted that “woven throughout the classroom environment and the daily schedule are targeted and open-ended opportunities to write and explore letter-sound relationships” (T1). Some responses indicated writing expectations at the letter level, others at the syllable level, and others at the high-frequency or simple word level. According to respondents, students may begin to add labels to drawings, and should be able to write their name. There was variance of opinions, as one educator wrote that “most students...aren’t ready to read and write in French at the kindergarten level” (T10).

Sub-Theme 4: Math

Educators were not specifically asked about students’ level of math proficiency upon completion of kindergarten, as the focus of the research is on French language acquisition. Nonetheless through the responses, some educators gave an indication of their expectations in math, particularly as they relate to language. Responses indicated that students should “know their numbers 1-10 in French... (and) write the numbers 1-10” (T5). One respondent suggested that students should have this skill up to 20. Educators also expect students to have certain math language, including shapes and magnitude concepts, including “understand and use words like plus, moins, combien, compte” (T7).

Sub-Theme 5: Student Readiness for Grade 1

One final sub-theme that emerged from the data related to expectations for French learning has to do with student readiness for grade 1. There were several responses that indicated that students are not ready to read and write in kindergarten, and this leaves them

unprepared for grade 1. Conversely, one respondent noted that the focus on oral skills leaves children “ready to build the connections between hearing and spoken sounds and written text for reading and then writing” (T2). This opinion was not widely held, as another educator noted that the expectations for reading and writing in French are limited in kindergarten, and a teacher wrote that the struggle kindergarten students have when moving to grade 1 has been quite serious at their school. This same educator wrote: “I think if some of the ‘sit down, paper to pencil’ learning came back, and if grade 1 had more free choice, we’d see those struggles decrease” (T8). A lack of clear French reading and writing expectations in kindergarten may leave educators with mixed feelings about how well prepared their students are for grade 1. One educator specifically referred to this issue, writing that “there should be a firm expectation of the level of French required by the end of year 2.... (T)he level of French expected differs (from class to class)” (T7).

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

Based on the results of the questionnaire responses, there are several key findings that can be identified and explored for their significance. The overall research question asked: How do play-based kindergarten programs impact student acquisition of French language skills, as perceived by French Immersion educators? The sub-questions for the study were: How do French Immersion kindergarten teachers and ECEs plan for and deliver meaningful French language instruction within a play-based setting? and: Which specific French language outcomes do educators expect kindergarten children to have achieved by the end of kindergarten? The discussion provides answers to these questions from the perspectives of French Immersion kindergarten teachers and ECEs. As such, this research offers insight into the challenges surrounding additional language acquisition in a French Immersion play-based kindergarten setting. These implications will be discussed, and recommendations for future research will be presented.

French Language Acquisition

The overarching research question for this study examined educators' perspectives on the acquisition of French language skills by students in French Immersion kindergarten. Educators shared many insights into how an additional language develops in their programs, what strategies they use, how language acquisition is balanced with play-based pedagogy, and what French language skills are expected in students by the end of kindergarten.

Educators are explicit and purposeful in their teaching of French language skills. French learning does not happen by accident; it is planned and intentional within a French Immersion kindergarten program. Instruction takes place in a variety of settings and contexts. Overall,

educators shared that the majority of language instruction takes place in whole-group or small-group targeted settings. Specific French language oral and literacy skills were generally not identified as being taught through play, although many responses indicated that these skills were supported and reinforced through play. Educators identified specific teaching moments, either whole-group or small group, in which French language is taught. This is understandable, since an additional language is completely new for all students in immersion; it is really not something that students can learn from each other anecdotally in less-structured play settings. As one respondent wrote, “the teacher is the ONLY source of the French language” (T3). As students learn beginning vocabulary, frequently-used questions and responses, they can reinforce and support each other’s learning, however many respondents reported that this happens infrequently, and that for the most part children’s play is in English.

It is a fine balance, therefore, between play-based learning and French language instruction. Educators are expected to deliver a play-based program while at the same time building additional language skills in students. This balance plays out differently in different classes, as teachers and ECEs do their best to meet all students’ needs. Educators determine for themselves what to teach explicitly, how to divide their day between play and direct instruction, and when to use French or English in communicating with students. There is no clear direction in curriculum documents or in this Board’s policies or practices to guide educators as they develop and deliver their programs. Therefore, each classroom has a different balance and different expectations.

Respondents reported a wide variety of expectations for students’ level of French language skills by the time they finish kindergarten. There are no standard levels of

achievement set out in curriculum documents, particularly as the French Immersion curriculum does not start in Ontario until grade 1 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). Most respondents indicated a focus on phonological awareness skills and oral language skills, with less of a focus on reading and writing. Educators generally expect French Immersion kindergarten students to know their alphabet and associated sounds, and to have basic receptive and expressive French skills. Beyond that, each educator must decide what is expected in terms of reading and writing skills, and how those are going to be taught. Some educators use direct instruction to teach beginning sound blends, high frequency words, and other early reading skills, while others focus more on playing with sounds to prepare students who will be ready to read when they reach grade 1. Some classrooms have students incorporate writing in their play, for example in making a shopping list or writing their own and classmates' names. Other classrooms do not have a formal focus on writing, but rather use drawing, finger painting, and other fine motor activities to prepare students for printing. This lack of clear expectations for kindergarten classrooms leads to vastly different programs, as evident in the information shared by respondents. Common standards for French language skills would support educators in the development and delivery of their programs and would help to ensure that all French Immersion kindergarten students are having similar experiences, even in different classrooms.

Planning for Play-based Learning

The second research question asked how French Immersion kindergarten educators plan for and deliver meaningful French language instruction within a play-based setting. Every respondent in my study described using play in their program and discussed the various purposes of play. No respondent questioned the use or value of play in kindergarten. From the

responses to this study, it appears as though play is widely accepted as the best model to deliver a quality kindergarten program. There were no clear differences between teachers and ECEs in terms of their views of play. Both educators in the room value and plan for play, as the means through which kindergarten happens.

That being said, there is a wide variety of approaches to play, and variety in how play is used as a conduit for learning. Respondents shared a great deal of insight into the roles of play in their classrooms, and the interactions between play and learning. Overall, educators reported a distinction between play and learning; that generally, play was for the sake of play, and learning took place in whole-group or small-group focused instructional settings. There was a great deal of variance among responses, however, and educators described a wide variety of play scenarios.

These responses can be examined in the context of Pyle and Danniels' (2017) conceptual framework discussed in chapter 2, which is comprised of a continuum of five categories of play. The five categories describe the level of adult intervention in children's play, from free play, which is completely child-led, to learning through games, which is completely educator-controlled (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Respondents described play contexts in their classrooms which represented all five categories on the continuum. Educators reported purposeful planning of play situations, including setting aside time for free-play, when children are in control of the play situations, and the educators observe but generally don't interfere. Respondents also described play situations which could be described as inquiry play and collaborative play, where educators intervene to further the learning, or set up particular play situations with specific goals in mind (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). These levels of play seemed to be

described the least frequently. More commonly discussed were playful learning and learning through games, situations in which the educators set up specific play scenarios with clear learning goals in mind (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Games involving sound skills, early reading (i.e., flash cards), writing (i.e., shopping lists, etc.) were described as play situations set up by the educators. Learning at centres which were created by the educators was also described frequently. Whether this is truly play-based learning or not could be a topic of debate. Howard and McInnes (2013) argued that children only need to perceive of an activity as play in order for it to produce the developmental benefits of play; therefore if teacher-created centres and contexts are believed by the students to be play, then perhaps they are, even though they are highly teacher-supported or directed play situations. Overall, responses gave the impression that play situations were certainly seen by respondents as supporting learning, although the learning through play was generally identified as social skills learning, including belonging and contributing to a group, and self-regulation skills, or as supporting and reinforcing learning that had happened during lesson time. This reflects the view that play is an important context through which children can practice and consolidate skills (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009). Play was generally described not as a time to teach, but rather as an opportunity to support student discovery, exploration and growth.

Teachers in this study described a wide variety of ways in which play is incorporated into their programs. Research by Pyle and Bigelow (2015), which looked at how teachers in English kindergarten programs integrated play-based learning found a similar spectrum of play in classrooms, which the authors attributed to teachers' view of the role of play in child development. The authors described teachers in English classrooms struggling to balance

academic demands with developmentally appropriate play experiences (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015). These findings are reflected in the French classrooms from my study, showing that in the cases in question at least, the challenges faced by French kindergarten educators may not be all that different from their English counterparts.

Expectations for French Learning

The third research question asked respondents to identify specific French language outcomes they expect students to have achieved by the end of kindergarten. There was wide variance in the responses to this question. All respondents mentioned phonological awareness skills and receptive and expressive oral French skills. Even within these two broad categories there were differences of opinions, however, as some respondents expected students to have mastered all of their sound skills, and others expected students to have sound-letter correspondence and maybe some ability to blend, segment, and manipulate sounds. Oral French expectations varied as well, and included responding to questions, using common phrases, understanding directions, and building up a vocabulary of common nouns, adjectives and verbs. Fewer respondents mentioned reading and writing skills. These skills are developmentally more advanced than oral and phonological skills, so it is not surprising that these were identified less frequently as expectations by respondents.

The lack of consistency regarding educator perspectives on French language outcomes in Kindergarten speaks to a need for clearer guidelines for educators. There is no French Immersion kindergarten curriculum; in the absence of a provincial standard, school boards should produce their own set of standards, based on their entry point (year 1 or year 2) and the amount of French in the program (50% or 100%). The board involved in the current study, for

example, begins their 100% immersion program in year 1 of kindergarten, so should build their expectations starting in year 1. This would increase consistency across classes and schools in a district, would support educators in the planning and delivery of their programs, and would help parents know clearly what their children should know and be able to do when by the time they finish kindergarten.

Additional Findings

Responses to the questionnaire led to two further discussion points which were not directly part of the research questions but are certainly worth describing. These points include the need for ongoing professional learning among educators, and whether or not French Immersion should begin as early as kindergarten. These points will be further explored in the following sections.

Ongoing Professional Learning

One of the demographic questions at the beginning of the questionnaire asked respondents what additional qualifications they had to teach French Immersion kindergarten. Of the 10 teachers who responded, only 2 indicated that they had an Additional Qualification (AQ) course in kindergarten. In order to teach kindergarten, teachers are required to have a Primary Basic Qualification, but no kindergarten-specific qualifications. In addition to AQ courses, teachers may engage in ongoing professional learning at the board or school level to support their understanding of teaching kindergarten. This finding should be explored further. Kindergarten-aged children have unique and specific growth and development needs, and learn in very specific ways. Teachers who teach kindergarten should be trained in evidence-based practices associated with teaching kindergarten students. Whether in English or French

Immersion, kindergarten students should be provided with quality educational experiences that are grounded in empirically supported practices. Educators who teach kindergarten should be required to either complete an Additional Qualification course in kindergarten teaching, or participate in professional development related to teaching kindergarten. This is critical to the success of these children. Play-based learning is not simply a case of sitting back and letting children play. It is intentional and purposeful and must be carefully planned for the developmental and learning needs of children. This research suggests that teachers in French Immersion kindergarten may not be current in their knowledge of best practices and optimal pedagogy, and this issue should be further explored and addressed. It would be useful to investigate what training kindergarten teachers (English and French Immersion) have in Ontario and other jurisdictions, and to develop a plan to ensure that these educators are properly equipped to deliver the best possible program for children.

Entry into French Immersion Kindergarten

While it was not one of the research questions for this study, the issue of when French Immersion should start, and more specifically whether kindergarten should be offered in French, is an important issue with which Boards across Ontario are faced. Currently in Ontario Early French Immersion can begin in kindergarten (Year 1 or Year 2), or in grade 1. As well, only 50% of subjects need to be taught in French. School Boards across the province approach French Immersion kindergarten in many different ways. The Board involved in this study offers 100% French Immersion beginning in year 1 of kindergarten, whereas other Boards offer 100% French Immersion in year 2, 100% starting in grade 1, or 50% starting in kindergarten year 1. It is unclear in the research whether student achievement is impacted by an entry point of grade

1 as opposed to kindergarten, and boards may make this decision based on a variety of criteria (i.e., teacher/ECE shortages, demand from families, transportation, etc.).

Respondents in this study offered some insight into this debate, which is worthy of note here. One respondent openly questioned whether kindergarten should be offered in French, asking at the end of their responses, “do we start French Immersion solely in grade 1 since finding two competent French speaking educators in kindergarten appears to be a challenge?” (T3). This comment highlights one aspect of the issue, but there are others which will be discussed below.

Certainly, the level of French competence among ECEs came to light in this study. While it was referenced by the educator quoted above, it was also commented on by an ECE, who noted that they “are learning right along with the children” (E2). One question at the beginning of the questionnaire asked respondents for their level of French proficiency, on a scale of 1-5. Six of the teachers rated themselves as a 4, and three rated themselves as a 3, while each of the ECE respondents rated themselves as a 2. This is representative of a very small sample size, with only 3 ECEs and 9 teachers responding, but is still important to note. One of the most important strategies for teaching French in a play-based kindergarten is the ongoing conversation between the two educators in the room (Curriculum Services Canada, 2015), and when one of these partners struggles with French, the learning amongst students would suffer correspondingly.

In addition to educators’ level of French proficiency, the overall challenge of school boards to hire and retain qualified French teachers and ECEs may lead to decisions by boards around whether or not to offer French Immersion at the kindergarten level. The shortage of

qualified French teachers in Ontario has been a documented problem since the early 2000s (Jack & Nyman, 2019). When school boards are not able to hire qualified educators to meet their demands, they are forced to make difficult decisions around which programs are offered. This could be part of the reason why some boards only offer 50% immersion programs, and why others delay the start of their French Immersion program to year 2 of kindergarten or later. These decisions may not be based on what is best for student acquisition of an additional language, but rather on Human Resources considerations.

In an ideal world, students should begin French Immersion at a time when they will have the greatest chance of successfully acquiring the language. Further research would be needed to fully determine what the ideal entry point is. Nothing was shared in my study to indicate clearly that kindergarten should **not** be done in French. Children in the classrooms from my study are exposed to an additional language, they pick up words and common sentences and questions. Educators teach them phonological awareness and oral language skills which they will need to learn to read in French in grade one. Some students begin to read and write, progressing from the letter-sound level, to syllables, easily-decodable words, and in some cases simple sight words.

While very little research was found regarding entry points for early immersion programs, some research was found comparing outcomes from students in early, middle and late immersion programs (Turnbull, Lapkin, Hart, & Swain, 1998; Day & Shapson, 1998). This research indicated that students in early immersion tend to outperform students in middle and late immersion in terms of spoken French, but not in French literacy (Turnbull et al., 1998). Day and Shapson (1998) noted greater variability in their results, but also found that in many cases

students entering French programs later achieved the same outcomes as those entering in kindergarten. These studies do not compare the different models and entry points in early French Immersion programs in Ontario, but perhaps some of the same explanatory factors could be used to identify an ideal entry point for early immersion. For example, it was noted that students entering late immersion learn the L2 more efficiently because they have already developed “cognitive academic linguistic proficiency” (Turnbull et al., 1998, p. 31) in their L1 which makes learning the L2 easier. Would children be better served consolidating sound skills and pre-reading skills in English kindergarten before switching to French in grade one?

According to Cummins’ Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis, many language skills developed in one language transfer to the other (Cummins, 1998). So if students spend kindergarten fully immersed in English sound skills, phonological awareness and pre-reading tasks, it is possible that they will be better prepared to transfer these skills to French in grade one than they are in a French Immersion kindergarten system, where they are taught French vocabulary and some phonological awareness, but play in English most of the time with peers, and interact with educators in a potentially-confusing mix of English and French. It is possible that by having students do kindergarten in English, they would be able to develop and consolidate L1 skills so that a grade one entry into French Immersion would lead to more efficient learning. More research is certainly warranted to determine if there is a best time to begin early immersion, and if so, when that time is.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. This research focused on one school board only, therefore only looked at one model of early immersion. Early immersion programs in

Ontario can begin in year 2 of kindergarten or grade one, as well as in year 1 of kindergarten as is the case in this board. Furthermore, while this board offers 100% immersion, other boards offer a 50% immersion model. Educators in these different models may experience different challenges than those that were shared by the respondents in my study.

The number of respondents and research method used has some inherent limitations as well. This research gave a voice to 13 educators, who provided rich detailed information, but is a small proportion of the French Immersion kindergarten educators in the province. The results reflect only the views and experiences of the respondents and can only be generalized with caution. In addition, only three ECEs responded to the questionnaire. Therefore more work is needed to capture the perspectives of ECEs. The use of questionnaires did allow for a greater number of respondents than would have been the case if interviews had been used, however questionnaires also limit the ability of the researcher to ask probing questions and clarify responses. Anonymous questionnaires must be analyzed as they are written, without the opportunity for further prompts, which can be another limiting factor.

Finally, this research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic drastically changed how schools ran, added restrictive health and safety protocols, and made in-person meetings challenging if not impossible. These conditions may have reduced the overall number of educators willing to respond to the questionnaire, and may have altered responses. The data analysis and conclusions should be viewed in light of the fact that the research was conducted during a global pandemic.

Concluding Thoughts

This study has sought to explore educators' perspectives of the impacts of a play-based kindergarten program on the acquisition of French language skills by students in French Immersion. French Immersion kindergarten teachers and ECEs must plan for and deliver meaningful additional language learning opportunities in a play-based setting. This is a challenge for educators, who must find a balance in their program between explicit instruction and student-guided play opportunities. I hope that this research has given voice to these educators and allowed their stories to come through my work. The educators who shared their insights for this research demonstrated thoughtful, purposeful additional language instruction, and supported children's growth and development through play opportunities that encompassed Pyle and Danniels (2017) continuum of play. Educators shared several challenges, including the lack of clear, consistent French language expectations, difficulty among some ECEs with their own level of French, and certainly finding the perfect balance between letting children play and interact in their first language, and intervening in play scenarios to reinforce French vocabulary and phrases.

These challenges faced by French Immersion kindergarten teachers deserve attention from school boards, the Ontario Ministry of Education, and researchers. School Boards and the Ministry should develop a French Immersion curriculum for kindergarten. There should be a clear set of standards for French Immersion kindergarten educators, with regards to oral French (receptive and expressive), as well as pre-reading and writing expectations. One of the main foci of the French Immersion educators in this study is building up a French vocabulary for their students, including common words and phrases, as well as subject-specific math and science terms (i.e., numbers, shapes, etc.). This vocabulary should be common across classrooms, and

should therefore be developed and shared by the Ministry of Education, or at least by school boards across the province. The Ministry also needs to address professional development needs of educators. More needs to be done in order to train, recruit and retain qualified, fluently bilingual teachers and ECEs. Once educators have been hired, there should be ongoing professional learning, both to support educators' improvement of their own French skills as needed, as well as to learn, discuss and reflect on best practices for implementing a play-based approach in French Immersion. Researchers can look further into different entry points and delivery models for French Immersion, and determine which model is best for children. If the ideal entry point is not kindergarten, school boards should act on the best, current research and review their kindergarten programs. French Immersion and Play-Based kindergarten are both well-researched and supported practices; the Ontario education system needs to continue to research and reflect on the confluence of these two practices to ensure that the programming we offer our youngest learners is the most effective programming to meet developmental, social, academic and second-language learning needs. Our kids deserve the best.

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Appendix A: Educator Questionnaire

French Immersion Kindergarten Educator Questionnaire

Thank you for taking time to complete this questionnaire. I am researching the ways in which French Immersion kindergarten educators balance language instruction and play based learning, and I value your input. All responses will be combined for analysis purposes, and no identifying characteristics of respondents will be shared in the final report.

1. What is your current teaching position?
Teacher ECE

2. How comfortable are you working in a French immersion environment in terms of your own French-language abilities?
 - Extremely comfortable – French is my first language
 - Extremely comfortable – I am completely fluent in French
 - Very comfortable – my French language abilities are more than adequate for working in a French immersion kindergarten classroom
 - Somewhat comfortable – I sometimes worry that my French language abilities are not adequate for working in a French immersion kindergarten classroom
 - Uncomfortable – I don't believe my French language abilities are adequate for working in a French immersion kindergarten classroom

3. A. How many years of experience do you have in a French Immersion kindergarten setting?
 0-2 years 2-5 years 5-10 years 10 years +

B. How many total years of experience do you have as a teacher/ECE?
 0-2 years 2-5 years 5-10 years 10 years +

4. What (if any) Additional Qualifications or specific training other than your diploma/degree do you have for teaching French Immersion kindergarten?

5. Describe the balance between direct instruction and play-based learning in your classroom. Please share examples of curricular expectations that are addressed through direct instruction and expectations that are addressed through play.

6. How do you determine the balance of French and English that you use with your students, in various contexts throughout the day (including play)?

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7. What specific French language skills do you expect students to have acquired when they leave year 2 of kindergarten (reading, writing, and oral)? What teaching strategies and/or pedagogical approaches do you use to support students' acquisition of these language skills?
8. Describe how and when children use French in your class (i.e., during carpet time, when playing, in small group instruction, asking questions, etc.).
9. Do you have any other comments or thoughts about the balance between play-based learning and French language acquisition in a French Immersion kindergarten class?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. I appreciate your candid responses in support of my research.

Appendix B: Introductory Letter to Principals

Dear Principals,

I am currently completing my Master's of Education at Queen's University. For my thesis I am conducting a research study entitled: Understanding Educator Perspective of French Language Instruction in Play-Based Kindergarten. In Ontario, there are currently no specific French Immersion curriculum expectations for kindergarten students; French Immersion expectations begin in grade one. The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine French Immersion educators' perspectives of the play-based learning model's impact on the acquisition of French language skills by kindergarten children. The results of this study will help to inform educators' practice, and can be used by administrators and school boards to guide professional development and focus support for French Immersion kindergarten educators.

For my study, I am asking French Immersion kindergarten teachers and early childhood educators in Limestone DSB to complete an online questionnaire, which should take approximately 30 minutes. Can you please forward this email and the attached Letter of Information to all the Immersion kindergarten educators at your site? I am inviting all such educators to participate, hoping to have between 10 and 20 respondents.

If you have any questions, please contact me at seiverightg@limestone.on.ca . Thank you for your support of my research.

Sincerely,

Greg Seiveright

Appendix C: Letter of Information and Consent

Letter of Information and Consent

Study Title: Understanding Educator Perspective of French Language Instruction in Play-Based Kindergarten

Name of Principal Investigator: Greg Seiveright

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Kristy Timmons

I am inviting French Immersion kindergarten teachers and Early Childhood Educators to take part in a research study. The purpose of this study is to examine French Immersion educators' perspectives of the play-based learning model's impact on the acquisition of French language skills by kindergarten children. If you agree to take part, please click the link below to complete an anonymous online questionnaire. The questionnaire should take approximately 20 minutes. There is a small risk that participants may feel compelled to participate or get the 'right' answer, due to the lead researcher's role as a principal in your school board. To mitigate this risk, the questionnaire is anonymous, so the researcher will not know if you participate or not, and the researcher will not be able to identify respondents by their answers. While there may be no direct benefit to you as a participant, the study may benefit participants in that results may help to inform practice of teachers and ECEs, and may inform Boards of Education regarding areas in need of support or professional development. Study results will contribute to a greater understanding of how French Immersion educators balance play and language instruction in kindergarten. There is no remuneration for participating in this study.

Participation is voluntary. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to. You can stop your participation at any time by submitting your questionnaire in progress or closing your browser. Your data cannot be withdrawn after the submission of the anonymous questionnaire.

Your confidentiality will be protected to the extent permitted by applicable laws. I will do this by using an anonymous questionnaire in which identities of respondents are not recorded. The study data will be stored on an encrypted hard drive on Queen's University servers. Access to study data is limited to those researchers on the study team, as well as the Queen's General Research Ethics Board (GREB) may request access to study data to ensure that the researcher(s) have or are meeting their ethical obligations in conducting this research. The data set will be made freely accessible in the Queen's University's Institutional Repository after a 5 year embargo period.

I plan to publish the results of this study in a Master's Thesis. I will not include any quotes or personally identifying information from responses when presenting my findings. I will never include any real names with quotes. I will do my best to make sure quotes do not identify participants.

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If you have any ethics concerns please contact the General Research Ethics Board (GREB) at 1-844-535-2988 (Toll free in North America) or email chair.GREB@queensu.ca. If you have any questions about the research, please contact me at 3gms@queensu.ca or 613-533-6000 ext. 33025.

This Letter of Information provides you with the details to help you make an informed choice. All your questions should be answered to your satisfaction before you decide whether or not to participate in this research study. Keep a copy of the Letter of Information for your records.

You have not waived any legal rights by consenting to participate in this study. By clicking on the link below, you are verifying that: you have read the Letter of Information and all of your questions have been answered, and you agree to participate in the study.

To participate in this study please click on the link:

https://queensu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cD3FD2RrQWK0eOh

Thank you in advance for your participation and insight,

Sincerely,

G. Seiveright, principal researcher