Peer Tutoring Reading Interventions for Students with Reading Difficulties in a French Immersion Classroom

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of implementing a peer-tutoring program in a primary class to improve the reading abilities of all French immersion students on a Tier 1 level. I was particularly interested to see what the effects would be on the struggling students in these classes. I used action research to answer the following question: How can I implement a peer tutoring program to support reading development of struggling Grade 1 and 2 French immersion students? The population of the study consisted of 20 Grade 1 and 2 students as well as 18 intermediate students who participated as peer tutors. The study was conducted over the course of five weeks during which both classes came together four times a week for approximately 20 minutes per day. During this time, students followed structured steps to perform one-minute repeated readings of the same text over the course of a week. Students then graphed the total number of words read and the number of errors every day to measure progress. The second intervention consisted of reading French levelled texts while referring to a strategies cue card to help with decoding and comprehension strategies. A variety of data collection instruments were used such as pre and post surveys for primary students, pre and post reading level assessments for primary students, researcher journal and observations, graphs from the repeated reading sessions and an intermediate focus group. Findings include observed increases in engagement, confidence, and willingness to read. All of the primary students improved in their French reading skills.

Keywords: French immersion, peer-tutoring, reading interventions
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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

In Canada, parents of school-aged children have the option of placing them in a French immersion program, where students are immersed entirely in French at school and learn all subjects in French. However, not all French immersion programs are the same. Some programs start in Grade 4, known as late immersion. Other programs offer French as a language of instruction 50% of the time (Canadian Parents for French, 2010). Second language instruction is available in most provinces and is meant for students who do not speak French at home. After all, Canada is a bilingual country. Enrolments in French immersion programs have increased by 5.5% from 2012-2014 (Statistics Canada, 2015). In fact, during the 2015-2016 school year, 52,545 students were enrolled in the French Immersion program across British Columbia (BC), or 9.5% of the entire student body. In my school district, 14% of the student body is registered in French immersion, suggesting that this program is growing in popularity (Canadian Parents for French, British Columbia & Yukon, 2016). At the Vancouver Island, BC, school where I have the pleasure of working as a primary learning support teacher, French immersion starts in kindergarten and English language instruction begins in Grade 4. All students including students with learning exceptionalities are welcome in the program. The Ministry of Education in British Columbia mandates that “school districts should provide equitable learning resources, library books and student services in the same manner they are provided for in regular English programs” (Ministry of Education, B.C., n.d.).

Introduction

As a primary learning support teacher in a single-track French immersion school educating over 489 children, I help students from kindergarten to Grade 4 learn to
potential in a second language. Our school’s vision is: “A bilingual community that engages all learners in achieving their unique learning potentials in a safe, supportive and respectful environment”. My professional goal through this action research is to improve my effectiveness as a teacher and, therefore, the quality of support services to our struggling students particularly those with reading challenges with and without Ministry designations so that they can benefit and thrive in a French Immersion (FI) program. Research and personal experience in the classroom have led me to explore the effects of peer tutoring as a supplemental strategy to help struggling readers.

Peer learning enables a one-to-one relationship which explains the high levels of engagement (arousal, interactivity and engaged activity time.) Peer learning also offers a communication that, although simpler, allows high levels of modeling, demonstration and personalized exemplification. The individualization promotes great opportunities to question (and to be questioned), to receive and give immediate feedback and many other opportunities for reinforcement (praise and encouragement). …And finally, it can have a large effect on social and communicative skills, as well as on self-esteem. (Topping, Duran, & Van Keer, 2016, p. 23)

Peer tutoring is known to be an important strategy for inclusive education due to its social implications; however, it is not always practiced to its full potential. Genesee and Jared (2008) suggest that second language development may be limited in a school environment where students are not given enough opportunities for social interactions with peers in the second language. Due to minimal French interaction outside of the school for most FI students, more educational experiences with social engagement would
be beneficial throughout the school day. Through action research, I will explore the following question: *How can I implement a peer tutoring program to support reading development of struggling Grade 1 and 2 French immersion students?*

In Chapter 1, I provide an overview of FI programming, my role as a French immersion learning support teacher within the FI program and I describe reading challenges within a FI context. The difficulties affecting student retention in the French immersion program are then discussed. Often, students who struggle in the FI program tend to transfer to English schools. I share some research supporting retaining struggling students in FI. This then leads me to address several challenges impacting the quality of support services to struggling readers in this second language program. I conclude this chapter with information on peer tutoring as an effective strategy. Lastly, I provide a summary of my study.

**Personal Context as a Learning Support Teacher**

In some schools, my professional role may be called “special education teacher” or “resource teacher.” In my current district, the position is called Learning Support Teacher (LST). Ultimately, in my role as a LST, I help improve students’ literacy skills, particularly those with learning difficulties or exceptional learning needs. This support is manifested in a variety of ways. However, most of the time, I teach small, structured group reading interventions in the learning support room, which is a quiet and calming environment. Sometimes I work in the classroom and rotate groups. Students are typically grouped according to similar reading levels in every class. These groups are dynamic in nature; ever changing as students develop reading skills at different rates.
Research indicates that the literacy skills required for proficient reading include phonological awareness, vocabulary, reading comprehension and fluency (e.g., Allington, 2001; Bournot-Trites, 2008; Fountas and Pinnell, 1996; Topping et al., 2016). Phonological awareness refers to the ability to identify, understand, and manipulate individual parts of speech like letter sounds or phonemes, syllables, and rhymes, for example. Vocabulary is also an important aspect of reading comprehension, especially in a second language. If the reader is able to decode the unknown word but does not understand its meaning, he or she must derive meaning using other strategies such as context and pictorial cues. Reading comprehension is a complex cognitive process in which a reader actively engages with the text and understands the author’s intention and message (Allington, 2001). Reading comprehension “is heavily dependent on skilled word recognition and decoding, oral reading fluency, a well-developed vocabulary and active engagement with the text” (Topping et al., 2016, p. 7). Strategies to help develop reading comprehension include self-monitoring, making connections, making predictions, and establishing reading objectives, to name a few (Topping et al., 2016, p. 7). Formal and explicit strategy instruction is required to help students improve reading comprehension (Topping et al., 2016). Fluency is the ability to read orally with speed, accuracy, and vocal expression (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). The ability to read fluently is necessary for reading comprehension (Allington, 2001). A child who reads word for word will have difficulty drawing meaning from the text. “This accuracy and automaticity of reading serves as a bridge between decoding and comprehension” (Topping et al., 2016, p. 6).
At the beginning of the school year, classroom teachers and I assess all of the students’ French sounds recognition along with sight word reading and we administer a reading assessment using GB+ French reading assessment kits of resources using levelled reading texts ranging progressively from Kindergarten to the end of Grade 6. For students in Grade 1, I also administer a phonological awareness assessment in French allowing us to pinpoint possible gaps in phoneme knowledge and the ability to discriminate rhymes and syllables with beginning readers. For students who are able to read, a reading assessment provides educators with accurate reading levels and allows educators to record (on paper) student errors, self-corrections, reading behaviours, retelling analysis and comprehension responses. A reading level is determined by the accuracy, in other words, the correct number of words read. The criterion used to determine a student’s instructional reading level is the ability to read a text within 92% to 95% accuracy, which is calculated by dividing the number of correct words read by the total number of words in the text. Reading with fluency, as well as being able to retell the text and answer comprehension questions is also taken into consideration. Some teachers may also record correct number of words read per minute to chart reading fluency rate. By charting all of this information in conjunction with sound and sight word recognition, we are able to identify our most struggling readers, those who are not reading at grade level or those who may require extra support in a specific area.

Our primary team consisting of learning support teachers, kindergarten teachers, first and second grade teachers follows pre-selected criteria in accordance with the provincial curriculum expectations. For example, in Grade 1 FI, we expect students to be able to read approximately 45 high frequency sight words by December. As for reading
levels, most first graders can read a level two by December, a level three by March and fall between the level five to seven range by June. In Grade 2, students typically read a level six to eight by December and can read a level 12-14 by June. They can read all of the 100 Grade 1 sight words as well as 45 of the Grade 2 sight words by December. In my position, I tend to work four-five times a week with each small group from each class for approximately 30 minutes at a time, usually by withdrawing them from the regular classroom to work on guided reading and literacy activities in the learning support room. Depending on classroom schedules, sometimes I am able to form groups of students that are alike in their development of a reading process from different classrooms. Typically though, I tend to dedicate four-five blocks per week per classroom for small group intervention.

The focus of the small group instruction is to practice French sounds using common visuals and vocabulary across the school, sight words, repeated readings and we practice levelled guided reading. Guided reading is a teaching approach designed to help individual readers build literacy skills with increasingly challenging levels of text with support. It is targeted, scaffolded reading instruction that increases students’ confidence and allows them to read a variety of genres with meaning, comprehension and insight. As defined by Fountas & Pinnell (1996) “Guided reading enables children to practice strategies with the teacher’s support, and leads to independent silent reading” (p. 1). Guided reading lessons sometimes involve a short writing component allowing students to make a written connection to the text. I assess and track student growth often using the benchmark assessments and systematic observation as we work together. Once a student makes significant gains, the classroom teacher and I will review the data and a student
may be released from learning support services.

**Reading—The Key to Overall Achievement**

The mode of communication that we most often use in the school curriculum is reading. If students have difficulty reading in the primary grades, accessing information in the intermediate grades will create a significant barrier to learning.

Reading—the unlocking of the language in a written text so that it is accessible and open to interpretation, debate and question.

Being successful at reading is closely related to competence with language; being successful at reading is the key to unlocking every kinds of written text in every subject the student will encounter in school. Consequently, reading is very highly correlated with overall school achievement. (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, (OECD), as cited in Topping, Duran & Van Keer, 2015, p. 3)

French immersion educators and learning support teachers are often searching for effective research based practices and information regarding effective reading interventions for English-speaking immersion students who are at-risk, or have reading difficulties in the French immersion program. Following best practice, at our school, we put more emphasis on early intervention so that we can prevent and/or remediate reading problems before students enter Grade 4 (Genesee and Jared, 2008; Sauvé, 2007; Wise and Chen, 2015; Wiss, 1989).

Studies (Bourgoin, 2014; Genesse, 2007; Genesee and Jared, 2008; Sauvé, 2007; Wise and Chen, 2016) that examined the reading outcomes of French Immersion (FI)
students with literacy difficulties found that they are not at greater risk for reading and writing difficulties in immersion than similar students in English programs. These studies also found “that these immersion students benefit from participating in immersion in acquiring significantly better French language skills, including reading and writing, than students in core French” (Genesee, 2007, p. 6). The challenge lies in the fact that these students may receive less support at home in French from their Anglophone parents and may not have the opportunities to practice their French readings skills outside of school. To compound this problem, as soon as a reading difficulty in French is recognized, parents, rightly concerned, may choose to place their child in an English school. In many cases, parents justify their decisions to withdraw their children from French immersion because of reading difficulties, moving them to the English stream before the end of Grade 3 (Wise & Chen, 2015). In my experience, parents tend to feel overwhelmed because their child is learning a language they themselves are not familiar with, and they may feel inadequate in supporting their child at home in this second language.

However, several researchers argue that the theory of cross-linguistic transfer is valid and that children can acquire and transfer language skills from one language to another (e.g., Genesee & Jared, 2008; Harper, 2010, Sauvé, 2007). Harper’s (2010) study confirms that “reading involves a linguistic basis that is shared by different languages and that for individuals who speak more than one language, linguistic skills do transfer from one language to the other” (p 14). Harper studied how French immersion students could benefit from an English Family Literacy program in Grade 1. Her findings suggest that early English literacy programs, and any literacy support in English at home
contributed positively to the development of language and literacy skills in both languages. This is an important finding to share with parents who are conflicted about the idea that they are unable to support their children’s literacy skills because of the language barrier. Evidently, even English-only reading support at home can benefit students’ French reading skills development due to this cross-linguistic transfer.

Special Education Context

Regarding students with learning challenges, a concern of mine is to ensure that educators provide appropriate research based interventions to improve our struggling students’ reading skills at school, as much as possible, to retain these students in French immersion. Some French immersion teachers feel unprepared when working with students who have difficulties learning in a second language. In Ontario, from 1993 to 2010, research studies conducted by Lapkin, Harlye and Taylor (1993), Calman and Daniel (1998), Mollica, Philips, and Smith (as cited in Arnett and Mady, 2010) have agreed that teachers are mostly concerned with their abilities to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties within the French immersion classroom. “Such provincial results have been corroborated nationally. In their national survey of over 1300 FSL (French Second Language) teachers, Lapkin, MacFarlane, and Vandergrift (2006) highlighted that in response to an open-ended question, teachers raised particular concerns over meeting the diverse needs of their students” (Arnett & Mady, 2010, p. 8). Arnett & Mady argue that French immersion programs in Canada experience continued challenges in including students with learning difficulties in FI classrooms. These researchers explain that the provision of special education services is based on a deficit-orientation model, which identifies students with specific needs by what they cannot
achieve, compared to their peers. This model is in opposition to the philosophies of inclusion and differentiation. “ Accordingly, teachers and other stakeholders are getting mixed messages about the purpose and function of special education” (Arnett & Mady, 2010, p. 12). The Ministry of Education in British Columbia:

Promotes an inclusive education system in which students with special needs are fully participating members of a community of learners. Inclusion describes the principle that all students are entitled to equitable access to learning, achievement and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of their educational programs.

(Ministry of Education, BC, 2006)

This philosophy applies to French immersion students as well. How can educators meet the needs of learners, including those who are struggling in French immersion? One key to this puzzle is using differentiated instruction. Moore (2016) articulates the idea of differentiation by posing these two questions for educators. “Which of my kids are the hardest to get? What do I need to do so that they get it?” (p. 51). In essence, differentiation consists of creating the best learning experience possible by tailoring instruction to meet individual needs. Teachers may differentiate content, the process, the products, and the learning environment. The differentiating process can be challenging for teachers to plan and implement, especially those teaching in French immersion. This strengthens my argument that an inclusive peer-tutoring model, allowing for extensive individualization, should be studied within a FI context (Bournot-Trites, 2008; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005).
As a learning support system working with diverse students, educators need to explore a variety of ways to meet everyone’s needs. Teachers need to be equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to be comfortable teaching an increasingly diverse classroom. As Arnett & Mady (2010) state: “The system, as it stands, cannot continue to function as a barrier to certain student population simply because of the inaction of its stakeholders” (p. 12). This means FI educators have a responsibility in learning more about second language learning and inclusive pedagogy. This is one of the main reasons why I’m particularly interested in the inclusive aspect of peer tutoring as an important mechanism for the improvement of reading in French immersion classrooms. Besides, helping teachers implement such a program also allows me to work alongside them in the classroom with all of the children rather than out of the classroom with a small group of students.

One of my challenges as a French Immersion Learning Support Teacher is not being able to work one on one with all our struggling readers. Using a Response to Intervention model, I tend to work with small groups of struggling students outside of the classroom. Response to intervention (RTI), which I will write about in more detail in Chapter 2 is a framework for classroom teachers and learning support teachers of looking at all student responses to specific instruction interventions by using measurable evidence to help ensure academic growth and achievement of all learners (Katz, 2013). I try to cluster my groups so that they are as homogeneous or alike in reading levels as possible so that I may individualize the lessons and target their specific reading goals. The problem is that as the special education teacher, I cannot reach all struggling readers in my small groups nor can I address all the needs in the regular classroom due to limited
time and resources. This is one problem I intend on addressing through this action research. It is my hope that one on one peer tutoring will allow all students and particularly those who struggle to benefit from individualized feedback. This peer-tutoring framework is a truly inclusive model, which allows for differentiation of content, process, products, and learning environment. I will delve into the details of the reading model and its variations in Chapter 3.

**Student Retention**

Another significant challenge in FI is retaining students with difficulties in the French immersion program, particularly in the early grades since student attrition from the FI program is common when learning challenges arise (Wise & Chen, 2015). Attrition refers to students who transfer out of the FI program to the English stream. When parents realize their child is struggling to read in French, they tend to want to move to an English program in order to avoid what may be perceived as additional educational hurdles. Parents, school administrators and teachers need to make informed decisions about the educational options to avoid these significant misunderstandings that may prevent certain students from receiving a bilingual education. Research clearly confirms that any student, struggling or not, can become proficiently bilingual (Au-Yeung, Hipfner-Boucher, Chen, Pasquarella, D’Angelo and Deacon, 2014; Bourgoin, 2014; Bruck, 1979; Cummins, 1984; Genesee, 2007; Genesee & Jared, 2008; Lapkin, Hart & Turnbull, 2003; Sauvé, 2007). “Attrition-oriented issues in French immersion programs are particularly concerning, because research indicates that nearly all learners would benefit from learning in an immersion setting” (Bourgoin, 2014; Wiss, 1989, p. 173). Obviously parents and educators are making important decisions while not being
completely informed about recent findings. There is consensus among educators that students who transfer out of FI are generally those whose performance is below average. “Where educators divide is on the issue of whether students’ difficulties are specific to being in an immersion program or more general, and hence likely to reappear when they enter the regular program” (Lapkin, Hart & Turnbull, 2003, p. 1). Armed with research, we know that with appropriate support and a willing attitude, all students can benefit from a French immersion program.

Researchers explain that a student will learn at the same rate as he/she would in his/her native language (Sauvé, 2007). A student having a reading difficulty in English will likely have the same challenge in French immersion and will develop at the same rate as he/she would in English. Mannavarayan (2002) states “immersion programs enhance the cognitive development of children at no cost to their English skills” (p. 525). In fact, most students in FI tend to exceed their English-only peers by Grade 5 on standardized tests of reading vocabulary and reading comprehension in English. By Grade 6, their written output in English including vocabulary, fluency, spelling, grammatical usage is on par with if not better than the English-only peers (Bourgoin, 2014; Genesee & Jared, 2008; Lapkin et al., 2003; Sauvé, 2007; Turnbull et al., 2001).

Obadia and Theriault (1997) indicate that one of the main reasons for attrition from French Immersion is due to “academic difficulty” (p. 1). Research conducted by Sauvé concludes “switching students with RDs (Reading Difficulties) out of immersion did not improve outcomes” (2007, p. 72). In our school district in the past five years, 70 students have left the French immersion program and have moved to the English stream (Woolman, 2015, p. 8). We do not have data indicating the reasons for this attrition but
my experience and research evidence lead me to believe this may be related to reading and academic difficulties in a second language, perceived as being too challenging for students. Based on research, it is safe to conclude that struggling readers have a place in French immersion if they want to continue learning in French and as long as appropriate support services are available (Bourgoin, 2014; Genesee, 2007; Sauvé, 2007). It’s up to FI educators to use research evidence and best practices in order to provide students with the most effective instruction to support students in overcoming their reading difficulties. Peer tutoring is such a strategy for improving reading skills due to its inclusive and individualized features (Topping et al., 2016).

**Peer-tutoring**

According to Desrochers and Major (2008), “very few studies have been devoted to the effectiveness of intervention programs designed specifically for immersion students” (p. 80). Fuchs and Fuchs (2005) stress the importance of using differentiated instruction to meet the needs of below-average and above-average readers. “An advantage of peer mediation is that subgroups of children in the same classroom can operate different levels of curricula and use different instructional procedures” (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005, p. 34). Peer-tutoring is a form of collaboration between two students where one student provides the other with individual instruction and support in acquiring knowledge and skills (Topping, 2016). There are various peer-tutoring models. Differences may include same age or cross-age tutors and tutees. The tutor is more experienced or may have training to help support the tutee. Evidently, the tutee is the student who receives the individualized instruction or guidance from the tutor. Regardless of age or curriculum content, the intent usually remains the same: peer
tutoring entails a deliberate intent to help a student achieve a learning goal (Topping et al., 2016). According to these authors:

Peer tutoring is a first-order strategy for inclusive education. The different formats of cooperative learning and peer tutoring in particular are a privileged methodology for responding to diversity, because they take advantage of the differences among students. (2016, p. 22)

Teachers can vary the difficulty of reading material and structure peer lessons according to strategies and concepts that need to be practiced. Bournot-Trites (2006) states that peer-tutoring “may be effective at improving the early reading skills of at-risk monolingual students” (p. 4). Research has shown an improvement in children’s reading comprehension when students work together in cooperative and structured manners (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). If we believe and understand that we can learn by teaching, “peer tutoring becomes a powerful methodology capable of taking pedagogical advantaged of the differences among students, and providing them with opportunities to learn by teaching” (Duran, as cited in Topping et al., 2015, p. 26). This instructional tool allows teachers to differentiate materials and strategies to meet diverse needs of all learners.

If we can successfully train our tutors to further develop our students’ reading skills, our students will only benefit and we may be able to reach more of our borderline struggling students. “Peer tutoring usually substantially increases the amount of exposure to print and this is a key feature in its effectiveness” (Topping et al., 2016, p.7). Numerous studies indicate benefits of peer tutoring. Findings by Bowman-Perrot et al. (as cited in Topping, 2016), explain that students with disabilities demonstrate greater
academic gains than their peers without disabilities. Not only do tutees benefit; studies have indicated that peer tutors themselves may benefit from their teaching role. Roscoe and Chi (2007, 2008) explain that tutors are challenged to think through the learning content at a deeper level by using different perspectives because they need to engage in questioning and explaining concepts to their tutees.

**Statement of Problem**

My role as a FI learning support teacher is to help struggling students improve reading skills in their second language. The fact that Anglophone parents choose to move their children to English schools when reading difficulties are raised is a concern to me because research indicates that students can benefit from an education in French immersion, as long as the student is happy in the FI program and receives necessary support. In addition, the lack of one on one time with all struggling readers by the classroom teachers and by myself, the learning support teacher, is another growing concern. As well, our school district has been facing budget decreases in the past decade, threatening cuts to student services. Educators could proactively set models in place to support struggling readers in the event that learning support services are reduced and as the number of students requiring support grows. Lastly, inclusion of students with learning difficulties is an important issue in French immersion. “A growing body of literature portrays inclusive program delivery as a cognitively and affectively positive mode of providing special education support for children” (Burge et al., 2008; Carter & Hughes, as cited in Cobb, 2015, p. 172). If French immersion is indeed beneficial to learners of all kinds, FI educators need to know which strategies work in order to help
struggling readers succeed to their full potential and this is what I intend to uncover and share with my colleagues.

**Overview of Study**

Through action research, I explored the following question: How can I implement a peer-tutoring program to support reading development of struggling Grades 1 and 2 French immersion students? Through reflection and evidence gathered through this research, my goal was to improve my effectiveness as a learning support teacher and to strengthen the provision of quality literacy support in my school. Research indicates that struggling readers benefit from staying in French Immersion so we need to find ways to better support them with the limited resources we have (Genesee & Jared, 2008; Sauvé, 2007; Mannavarayan, 2002; Bournot-Trites, 2008). This intervention and research may help contribute to informing the practice of other FI educators and unlocking the world of written text for many struggling students by providing that one-on-one experience students may require.

This narrative, reflective process followed cycles of inquiry consisting of planning, acting (implementing plans), observing, and reflecting then making decisions (plans) for the next cycle through various phases (Cohen et al., 2003). The study was centred on me as I created knowledge through this process in the goal of improving my professional practice. I wanted it to inform me and inspire my colleagues to explore and implement similar research-based best practices in their classrooms. My audience may include other educators, parents, youth workers and school staff.

As a French immersion learning support teacher, my caseload of students with reading difficulties seems to grow each year. The possibility of strengthening our literacy
program for all students excites me. Learning support teachers and in particular, those who support students in a second language, are always looking for better interventions to meet the needs of struggling students in FI.
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review explores the field of French immersion and its struggling students. It examines the historical background of French immersion in Canada and its suitability in meeting the needs of a diverse clientele of ranging abilities. The review uncovers a variety of research surrounding the question of placement for struggling students in the FI program. It reflects on today’s problems in FI and the attrition from the program due to misunderstandings and lack of support. In addition, it explores the need for early identification and differentiated instruction in order to foster an inclusive French immersion environment. This review then discusses the pattern of underfunding for support services in BC and how the framework I propose can counteract an increase in struggling students and a possible decrease in services and support.

This literature review then explores peer tutoring as an appropriate intervention for struggling readers in the FI program. Repeated readings as an intervention coupled with the peer-tutoring framework are investigated. Finally, the review describes the Response to Intervention model, which is the current model in BC for providing three Tiers of support to students. The peer-tutoring framework I propose to use in my research is based on Tier 1 support for the all students, including those who struggle with reading. Finally, gaps in research regarding supporting students in French immersion will be addressed.

Historical Background of French Immersion in Canada

French immersion programs were introduced in the 1970s to encourage bilingualism in the country’s two official languages. “The Canadian French immersion approach is premised on the importance of promoting the target language of instruction
for the delivery of academic subjects, and as the medium of communication for student—student and teacher—student interactions” (Makropoulos, as cited in Cobb, 2015, p. 173). French immersion is a growing alternative to mainstream English education today in Canada. In British Columbia alone, approximately 250 public schools in 45 of 60 school districts offer French immersion education to their students (Canadian Parents for French, 2010). BC’s French immersion enrolment has increased by 9.5% of student enrolment and by 14% in my school district (Canadian Parents for French, 2016). “Parents typically choose the FI option because they want their sons and daughters to benefit from the reputed advantages of bilingualism in French and English, Canada’s two official languages” (Lambart & Tucker, 1972; Mannavarayan, as cited in Wise & Chen, 2015, p. 289). Many parents see the benefits of offering second language education intended to prepare students to take further education in French at the secondary or even post-secondary level, allowing for more employment and travel opportunities.

While French immersion programs have expanded across Canada and continue to grow in popularity, concerns relating to attrition rates and special education access persist (Cobb, 2015; Genesee, 2007). French immersion classrooms are welcoming a wide range of learners including those with special needs or specific learning difficulties (Bourgoin, 2014; Sauvé, 2007; Wise & Chen, 2015).

**The Suitability of French Immersion for Students with Learning Difficulties**

Ever since French immersion’s inception in the 1970s, educators have struggled with the question of its suitability for students experiencing learning or reading challenges (Genesee 2007; Sauvé, 2007). Studies examining this issue have consistently found that immersion benefits students of all abilities. “It has been found that early
immersion students continue to perform as well as comparison students in all English reading skills assessed when evaluations are carried out in higher grades” (Genesee & Jared, 2008, p. 140). Genesee and Jared’s review indicates that early total immersion students tend to catch up to students educated entirely in English after one or two years of English language instruction, suggesting that language skills are easily transferable from one language to another (Genesee & Jared, 2008, p. 140; Sauvé, 2007). Bourgoin (2014) affirms, “Research has consistently shown that the program poses no detrimental risk to normally developing students or to students who may be at risk for academic or learning difficulties” (p. 8). Although research indicates that students can benefit from learning a second language, some factors may lead families away from a French immersion education.

Lapkin, Hart, and Turnbull (2003) conducted comparative research with English-only and FI students based on the results from Ontario-wide testing using province wide curriculum-based criterion-referenced tests from Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). The purposes of EQAO’s assessments are to gather objective, reliable, and useful data about student achievement in reading, writing, and math every year for students in Grades 3, 6, and 9. EQAO’s research projects examine the factors that influence student achievement and education quality (Education, Quality and Accountability Office, 2015). Similarly in British Columbia, provincial wide Foundation Skills Assessments (Foundation Skills Assessment, 2017) are administered to gather a snapshot of how well BC students are learning foundations skills in reading comprehension, writing, and numeracy (Foundation Skills Assessment, 2017).
The research conducted by Lapkin, Hart and Turnbull (2003) based on Ontario’s results investigated French immersion students’ performance on English reading, writing, and mathematics tests and compared this with those students in the regular English program. Results showed that Grade 3 FI students lag behind their English-only peers academically. This lag can be attributed to the fact that most FI programs do not formally introduce English language instruction until Grade 3 or 4 (Lapkin, Hart & Turnbull, 2003). Within one year of formal English language instruction, immersion students reach parity with students in the regular English program (Bourgoin, 2014; Genesee, 1987; Genesee & Jared, 2008; Swain & Lapkin, 1982, Lapkin et al., 2003; Genesee & Jared, 2008; Sauvé, 2007). Most importantly, Grade 6 students in French immersion out-performed their English-only peers in all three areas of English reading, English writing, and mathematics in English. “Differences were notable even in comparison with the performance of the highly selected English program enrichment group” (Lapkin et al., 2003, p. 18). This study corroborated studies conducted 20 years ago conducted by Swain (1975) and Swain and Lapkin (1982). Such findings should reassure parents and educators parents who are considering FI programs for their children. “French immersion students are not disadvantaged in English in the medium to long term” (Lapkin et al., 2003, p. 1).

With respect to French reading and listening comprehension skills. “Below-average students in immersion scored significantly higher than below-average students in the English program, indicating that the immersion students were benefitting from immersion in the form of enhanced French reading ability despite their academic challenges” (Genesee & Jared, 2008, p. 142). This research suggests that struggling
students in the immersion program were benefitting from learning to read in a second language despite their learning difficulties. Lapkin, Swain, and Argue (1993) discuss the advantages of a bilingual education promoting a greater flexibility in thinking and a better sensitivity to sound and language. These children are “blessed with bilingual brains” (p. 15).

The bulk of research (Genesee & Jared, 2008; Sauvé, 2007) in this field tells us that poor readers in immersion programs generally demonstrate difficulty reading in English as well. Despite these difficulties, students benefit from learning to read in another language. “With immersion education, the child acquires a second language at no expense to his or her first language or home culture, a situation referred to as additive bilingualism (Cummins; de Courcy, as cited in Sauvé, 2007, p. 50). Similarly, Genesee (2007) states: “students with academic and language learning challenges can acquire substantial communicative competence in French while maintaining parity in their academic and L1 development with similarly challenged students in all-English programs” (p.174). Students with learning difficulties in French immersion will not be at an academic disadvantage compared to their peers in English-only programs. In fact, as previously mentioned, by the end of Grade 5 or 6, most Canadian early immersion students scored as well or surpassed their English-only program peers on standardized tests of reading vocabulary and reading comprehension in English (Turnbull et al., 2001; Lapkin et al., 2003, Sauvé, 2007). Genesee and Jared (2008) determined that immersion students achieved parity with their English-only peers within a year or two of English language arts instruction. We can conclude that learning in a second language is
beneficial to diverse learners and does not affect the development of a child’s first language.

**Student Attrition**

Student attrition from the immersion program, particularly in primary grades, is of concern to educators. Attrition refers to students who transfer out of the FI program to the English stream (Wise & Chen, 2015). “Parents often cite reading difficulties to justify their decisions to withdraw their children from FI programs and generally make the switch to the English stream before the end of Grade 3” (Wise & Chen, 2015, p. 290). Regarding students with learning challenges in French immersion, Bruck (1979) examined the case studies of three students with learning disabilities who had left the immersion program. Bruck found that the academic difficulties remained even after the students with Learning Disabilities (LD) moved into the regular English program. Only two factors contributed to improvement for these students. First, the parents were now able to support their children with homework because of the English language instruction. Second, specialized learning support was now available at their school. The researcher wondered whether, had the same learning support services been available to the children when they were enrolled in French immersion, would they have experienced more success? She concluded that French immersion education did not impact or impede learning to read in English, even among students with language disabilities. Consequently, Bruck strongly recommended that at-risk students remain in French immersion as long as appropriate support services are provided. She insists that at-risk students should have the opportunity to acquire a second language despite a learning problem in either language. “All studies dealing with reasons for switching out of
immersion mention academic difficulties as the most important contributing factor in the decision to withdraw from the program” (Mannayarayan, 2001, p. 44). Current research focusing on this subject is still lacking, explaining why most notable French immersion researchers such as Wise and Chen (2015) still refer to Bruck’s work from 1979.

Sauvè’s (2007) research on the suitability of FI for students with Reading Difficulties (RD) concludes that immersion education is suitable for all children, including those with reading difficulties. In her study, students with RDs in French immersion were matched with non-disabled control students. Groups were matched on age, gender, socioeconomic status, and IQ. Participants were in Grades 4, 5, and 6 and were tested in English. Results proved that students with reading difficulties in FI performed on par with students having reading difficulties in core English. The spelling, arithmetic, phonological awareness, and reading comprehension subtests were all comparable. In addition, parents and teachers did not rate these students as having more behavior issues or social and emotional problems. Her study also compared students with RDs in immersion and students with RDs who left French immersion. These findings revealed no significant differences between the two groups, proving that switching students out of immersion did not improve outcomes. “It was concluded that immersion education does not place students with RDs at a disadvantage despite being taught in a second language” (Sauvé, 2007, p. 7).

These findings may leave some educators wondering what we can do to prevent student attrition from French immersion programs given the knowledge that French immersion is suitable for all learners with reading challenges, as long as they are happy, thriving, and supported in their learning. Thanks to research, we know that students with
challenges are not at a disadvantage in FI. Educating parents and educators with research-based information would help in reducing the amount of students leaving the program. Additionally, early intervention and appropriate support, as suggested by multiple researchers in the next section, would benefit struggling students early in their acquisition of a second language and help prevent unnecessary switching to the English only education stream.

**Importance of Inclusion in FI with Students with Learning Difficulties**

In order to retain and meet the needs of as many struggling immersion students as possible, educators are studying whether progress in learning to read in FI can be predicted by students’ English language skills upon entering the FI program given that French literacy skills are non-existent at this point of entry (Wise, 2015, Genesee, 2007). Comeau, Cormier, Grandmaison, and Lacroix (1999) provide evidence supporting the idea that English language skills can be a strong predictor for French immersion students’ word identification assessment. Their study focused on early assessment of English phonological awareness. Bruck and Genesee (1995) define phonological awareness as “the ability to reflect on and manipulate sub-lexical phonological units such as syllables, onsets, rimes and phonemes” (p. 308). Researchers wondered if English phonological awareness skills could benefit second language acquisition and predict literacy challenges early in FI. Comeau et al. (1999) concluded that phonological awareness skills are indeed transferable from one language to another. Bournot-Trites and Denizot’s (2005) study support this theory. In their study, kindergarten and Grade 1 immersion students considered at risk following a series of English phonological awareness tests, sight words, sounds, were found to have the same difficulties in French language tests
Providing explicit phonics instruction has been shown to improve reading scores among good and poor readers, first and second language readers, and younger and older readers alike (Bender, 2004; Lesaux & Siegel, 2003; Nag-Arulmani, Reddy, & Buckley, 2003; Snow et al., 1998 as cited in Sauvé, 2007, p. 32). Since improved reading skills are linked to better academic achievement, French immersion educators need to link current research to their practice. (Topping et al., 2016, Allington, 2001) According to Wiss (1989) and Wise & Chen (2015), early intervention is the key to preventing attrition from French immersion.

While early identification and prompt intervention would reduce the rate of attrition, funding constraints create a dynamic where low-achieving readers face limited options. Attrition-oriented issues in French immersion programs are particularly concerning, because research indicates that nearly all learners would benefit from learning in an immersion setting. (Wiss, 1989, p. 173)

It is clear that early identification and intervention are very important factors in reducing attrition and helping our struggling students succeed. Results from a variety of studies suggest that immersion students gain a second language at no cost to their academic achievement (Bourgoin, 2014; Bruck, 1979; Genesee & Jared, 2008; Lapkin et al., 2003; Sauvé, 2007; Wise & Chen, 2015; Wiss, 1989). Additionally, immersion students are able to transfer the knowledge and skills acquired through French into English (Genesee & Jared, 2008; Harper, 2010; Sauvé, 2007). In some instances, immersion education may even enhance academic achievement. Sauvé (2007) found that FI students benefit in all academic areas. “These results are particularly compelling in view of the fact that most of these studies tested immersion students in English on academic material they learned in
French” (Sauvé, 2007, p. 70). It can be concluded that immersion education is suitable for all students including those with a learning difficulty, as long as they are identified early and given the appropriate interventions. Students would benefit from support in areas of need to help close the gap. The advantages of including students with LD in FI include enhanced education in the acquisition of a second language.

Mannavarayan (as cited in Makropoulos, 2002) suggests that students who leave immersion leave because they tend to experience academic difficulty with reading and writing and have general difficulty understanding what is going on in a FI class. “These students commonly develop low self-esteem and emotional distress as a result of their ongoing learning difficulties” (Mannavarayan, as cited in Makropoulos, 2002, p. 525). Mannavarayan challenges the notion that FI should be suitable for all by arguing that more studies need to address well-rounded education: providing the opportunity to develop their self-esteem and reach their full potential. Her literature review suggests that intelligence is not the only factor in learning a second language. Personality traits and attitudes toward learning in a second language also play an important factor (Mannavarayan, 2001; Sauvé, 2007). She cites several studies that focused on transfer consequences. “In no case studied did it appear that the decision to transfer from the French Immersion program was traumatic for the child” (Campbell, as cited in Mannavarayan, 2001, p. 66). Her personal experiences coupled with her research affirmed her belief that French immersion is not suitable for all students and that individual differences must be considered such as emotions and intuitions.

Thus, it transpires from most studies that when a child is not happy in Immersion, the earlier the switch, the better, as the adjustments time will be negligible if done
as early as kindergarten; children will not have to repeat a grade and will not have to feel like a failure – a feeling which could damage their self-esteem eventually. (Mannavarayan, 2001, p. 66)

Mannavarayan believes that FI may not fit all learners and that we must look at the child’s social and emotional needs as well as academic ability to help with placement decisions.

Even though the majority of research indicates that French immersion is suitable and beneficial for all learners, a small group of researchers from the 70s and 80s have found mixed results indicating that a second language may compound academic difficulties and that at-risk students should move to English streams (Trites & Price, 1978; Wiss, 1989). This mentality among some teachers and parents remains prevalent today. Other researchers have maintained that students with learning difficulties should be permitted in French immersion provided that they receive appropriate and adequate instruction and support services (Bruck, 1978, Genesee, 1979b, Genesee, 2008, Sauvé, 2007).

Appropriately differentiated instruction is required for all students to reach their potential in French immersion programs. Students with learning difficulties should be included in FI provided they are given adequate support, as their English-only peers would be expected to receive. Research has shown that with early identification through English language skills assessments and early intervention, students can improve their literacy skills. Since improved reading skills are linked to better academic achievement, FI educators need to put theory into practice to ensure proper and prompt support of all its learners.
Lack of Funding for Support Services in British Columbia

In order to fully support and retain our struggling learners in French immersion, appropriate support services and education need to be put in place. Genesee and Jared (2008) also recommend that researchers and educators should focus their attention of developing effective teaching methods and differentiated instruction for teaching struggling students. Funding and lack thereof has been a topic of great debate in British Columbia. The relationship between the BC Teacher’s Federation (BCTF) and the provincial government has been strained during the past decade, mostly due to underfunding and the stripping of language from the teachers’ collective agreement. In September 2014, BC teachers went on strike to advocate for public education funding. BC teachers tried to negotiate class size limits, class composition guarantees, and minimum specialist staffing levels in the BC teachers’ collective agreement (BCTF, 2014). When I initiated my research on support services in 2015, most school districts projected having to cut back on funding. Non-teaching staff such as counsellors, speech and language pathologists, and learning support teachers were at risk of being reduced or cut altogether. According to Statistics Canada, (2010, 2011), the summary of public school indicators for provinces and territories, investments in BC’s public schools fell from above Canada’s GDP to well below it. This equated to approximately $1,000 less per-student than the national average (BCTF, 2016). In fact, in just five years, the number of classrooms with four or more students with special needs jumped by more than 3,000. With 770 fewer special education teachers and 120 fewer counsellors, the wait for assessments and help kept getting longer (BCTF, 2016; Better Schools BC, 2016.). However, the recent Supreme Court ruling in November 2016 ensures that
actions restoring supports to students will take place in the near future (BCTF, 2016). It is unclear, at this point, what this ruling will bring to public education, but we do know that supports will be increased and this is favourable for public education. Nonetheless, the pattern of underfunding and the low cost associated with peer-tutoring have led me to the current study in order to investigate how peer tutoring could serve as a framework to support struggling readers in early French immersion.

To Teach is to Learn Twice

As described in Chapter 1, peer tutoring is a form of collaboration between two students where one student provides the other with individual guidance and support in acquiring knowledge and skills (Topping et al., 2016). Research confirms that peer-tutoring programs offer many advantages in the classroom (Burns, 2006; Ezell, Kohler & Strain, 1994; Topping et al., 2016). This instructional strategy allows teachers to differentiate materials and strategies to meet the diverse needs of all learners. Peer tutoring is particularly beneficial for students who are having difficulties in learning to read by providing them with one-on-one attention from a more skilled reader. The tutor can also provide support and encouragement (Burns, 2006). Learning to read is one of the most important skills and it can be improved with practice and feedback (Therrien, 2004). “At least one in five students have significant difficulties with reading acquisition” (Lyon & Moats, as cited in Therrien, 2004, p. 252).

Rationale about Peer Tutoring as an Appropriate Intervention

Peer tutoring can address a number of issues related to supporting students with reading struggles in French immersion and is advantageous to both tutees and tutors. Parents of FI students often feel helpless assisting their children with home reading.
“Studies have observed that French immersion students engage in little French reading outside of school” (Genesee & Jared, 2008, p. 141). Although we know that language skills can transfer from one language to another, it’s still important to offer as many opportunities for students to read French in school, especially for those students who struggle to read.

The heart of peer tutoring relies on social interactions. Piaget (1977) and Vygotsky (1978) both place social interactions at the centre of their theories of cognitive development. “The structure of the interaction in the one-on-one peer tutoring context appears especially promising and richer than the more traditional exchanges between teachers and students (i.e. teacher initiation of the dialogue, student response, teacher feedback)” (Burns, 2006; Swain, 2011; Topping et al., 2016, p. 13). It is implied that students benefit from peer learning perhaps more than in a traditional teacher to class method. “Since interaction and discussion are the core elements of peer tutoring, peer tutoring is primarily a social process” (Topping et al., 2016, p. 14). The peer-tutoring model can be done as a class-wide activity and is inclusive of its diverse learners, creating the least restrictive environment in which students can thrive. Inclusion of students with learning difficulties is an important issue in French immersion. “A growing body of literature portrays inclusive program delivery as a cognitively and affectively positive mode of providing special education support for children” (Burge et al., 2008; Carter & Hughes, as cited in Cobb, 2015, p. 172).

Lastly, peer-tutoring, also referred to as paired reading by Topping et al. (2016) addresses budget cut and cost issues. With less and less specialized support services for struggling students and growing numbers of students with diverse needs, peer-tutoring
models can be implemented at low-cost for high return gains of students involved. “PR (paired reading) typically involves very modest additional costs in time and materials, with strong implications for relative cost-effectiveness” (Topping et al., 2016, p. 38). With little to lose and much to gain, this is an intervention worth implementing.

Bournot-Trites (2006) carried out a questionnaire-based evaluation of a peer tutoring program conducted in five schools across Canada for Grade 2 French immersion students who were experiencing mild reading difficulties. The peer tutors were Grade 5 and 6 French immersion students who received training in how to prompt their tutee appropriately and the steps needed to guide instruction or practice. The tutees were described as having mild reading challenges based on the number of high frequency words the students were able to read. The intervention took place twice a week for 30 minutes for duration of 10 weeks. The results from questionnaires indicated that all participants including parents and teachers felt the intervention helped the tutees improve their reading skills. The tutees felt confident and were motivated to read. Benefits also included improved social relationships on the playground. “Peer-tutoring is a systemic social endeavor that can have far-reaching effects on the lives of all participants in the school community” (Bournot-Trites, 2006 p. 4). Not only did students with mild difficulties read better, their tutors also “expressed increased self-esteem and better organizational and leadership skills” (Bournot-Trites, 2006, p. 4). It is clear that tutees benefit from this peer-tutoring model; tutors gain from this leadership role as well with respect to the students’ self-esteem, interest in reading, and reading ability. “These results attest to the feasibility of providing intervention for French immersion students with (mild) reading difficulties using a peer-tutoring model” (Bournot-Trites, 2006, p. 5).
Repeated readings. Repeated readings have been reported as the most commonly recommended procedure to improve reading fluency for students with reading difficulties. They are often used in combination with other interventions to improve reading fluency (Lee & Yoon Yoon, 2017). Repeated readings (RR) is an evidence-based strategy used to increase reading fluency and comprehension (Therrien, 2004; Topping et al., 2016). Reading fluency is the ability to read with speed and accuracy using appropriate phrasing and articulation (Lee & Yoon Yoon, 2017; Therrien, 2004). Short passages are practiced and reread for a predetermined number of times. The National Reading Panel (NRP) found that guided RR was effective in improving reading achievements (as cited in Oddo et al., 2010; Lee & Yoon Yoon, 2017). “The effectiveness of repetition and the effects of repeated reading (RR) intervention are derived from a theory of automatic word processing. That is, when automaticity is achieved it allows students to focus on meaning” (Lee & Yoon Yoon, 2017).

Oddo, Barnett, Hawkins, and Musti-Rao (2010) discussed the positive impact of repeated readings on oral reading fluency and comprehension in student pairs in a Grade 4 English class. Results indicated reading fluency and reading comprehension gains after four weeks of intervention and those levels were maintained during the next four weeks of intervention. Researchers also found that 82% of students reported enjoying the peer RR program and 96% felt they were better readers because of it.

Freeze’s (2002) Precision reading ™ program involves rereading a short, meaningful passage until a satisfactory level of fluency is reached. Repeated readings are “effective in increasing word recognition, fluency, and comprehension” (Freeze, 2002, p. 9; Lee & Yoon Yoon, 2017). Students’ readings are measured daily, counting the
number of words read and number of errors made. This is charted daily on an individual
teach. All passages are drawn from levelled texts or from classroom materials and are
formatted using increased font size with running word counts in the margin for easy
tallying. Formatting includes expanded spaces between lines, narrowed margins and
removal of pictorial and graphic cues to focus on fluency and word accuracy. Students
count and graph each day for seven to 10 consecutive days. This program was designed
for students with low reading achievement one, two or even three grade levels below
expectations and there are a variety of adaptations that can be added to meet specific
needs. Freeze (2002) explains: “It is a powerful tool for promoting reading achievement
in the context of an overall reading program” (p. 11). Katz (2013) emphasizes the
importance of making a game of this repetitive method in order to overcome any
resistance. The element of visual graphing can be highly motivating for students.

While some adults may assume that rereading the same passage may be
monotonous, it is quite common for beginning readers to find comfort in rereading the
same story or passage (Freeze, 2002). In addition, repeated readings are short, which can
be advantageous for students with short attention spans and learning challenges. Students
experience some level of measured success on a daily basis by charting their progress on
a chart. They are reinforced by their own success and by their tutor’s pride. “In effect,
they are motivated by internal and social positive reinforcement, rather than external,
tangible rewards. Many students relish the direct one-on-one support they receive from
their instructor before, during and after the precision reading activity” (Burns, 2006;
Freeze, 2002, p. 37). Another advantage of this method is that automaticity, in other
words, reading fluently, makes reading fun. For many struggling students, reading is a
laborious task. With this strategy, they soon discover that reading can be enjoyable. In addition, the positive relationship that builds between the tutor and tutee often leads to improvements in student’s classroom behaviour, attitude, motivation, attendance, attention, effort and respect for others (Burns, 2006; Ezell et al., 1994; Freeze, 2002). In a study of repeated readings at a secondary school conducted by Burns (2006), many positive observations were made with same age peer tutoring using Pause, Prompt, Praise (PPP) procedures. Confidence of all students soared with respect to their reading abilities, effectively leading to an increase in reading levels and an increase in self-correction rates. The participants made academic and social gains. Camaraderie slowly developed between tutors and tutees, which lead to a relaxed and trusting learning environment.

**Challenges with Peer-Tutoring Programs**

Peer-tutoring programs come in different shapes and sizes. This instructional strategy may have potential drawbacks, which should be addressed. Just pairing two students in the hopes that learning will occur is not advisable nor is it a guarantee (Topping et al., 2016). The success of a peer-tutoring model depends on proper application (Burns, 2006, Topping et al., 2016). The knowledge and skills of tutors and the interaction that occurs between pairs of students play an important role in its effectiveness. Tutors may not intuitively know how to guide interactions or instruction and may require proper training before commencing the tutoring process (Burns, 2006). Tutor training with scripts and structured materials is necessary in activating the roles and activities of desired tutor behaviour (Topping et al., 2016). Other possible risks would include the tutor’s failure of detecting errors or misunderstandings or even reinforce
errors, which would be counterproductive. Additionally, tutors may show impatience during the reading process and quickly give the answer thereby reducing the learning opportunity (Burns, 2006, Topping et al., 2016).

Fontana (1990) as cited in Topping et al., (2016), stresses the importance of a well-planned introduction of peer-tutoring in a school. One big conflict can be attributed to the traditional concept of the teacher as being the sole keeper of knowledge and the linear transmission of knowledge. The overall success of a peer-tutoring model relies on “recognizing, anticipating and finding ways to overcome these (challenges)” (Topping et al., 2016).

**Response to Intervention**

Like in many other provinces in Canada, many BC schools have adopted a Response To Intervention (RTI) model to provide appropriate support to all students. “RTI is an assessment and intervention model that enables schools to deliver sound instructional methods to students who might otherwise “fall through the cracks” (Brown, 2010, p. 2). In other words, RTI allows classroom teachers and learning support teachers to come together and examine their student responses to specific interventions. School based teams can make adjustments to the instruction based on measurable evidence to help ensure academic growth and achievement of all learners (Katz, 2013). RTI can be
represented visually by a triangle cut into thirds.

![Figure 1](image.png)

**Figure 1.** Note. Adapted from Provincial Outreach Program for Early Intervention, Response to Intervention. (Watson and Zekulin, 2017).

The largest portion, the base, known as Tier 1 reflects the general education curriculum provided to all students. Approximately 80% of students are successful in Tier 1 without additional interventions (Brown, 2010; Watson and Zekulin, 2017). In general terms, 15% of these students require additional small group Tier 2 supports, the middle part (Brown, 2010). Tier 3 interventions, usually one on one, are reserved for roughly 5% of the population requiring comprehensive evaluation and intensive instruction (Brown, 2010). “RTI involves reviewing current classroom practices to identify those that yield evidence of effective instructions as well as those that do not. RTI methods call for teachers to replace those practices that do not yield student improvement with those that do” (Brown, 2010, p. 13; Watson & Zekulin, 2017).

In effect, the interventions I propose in this action research will serve as a Tier 1 intervention, reaching as many students as possible. “If we improve our tier one instruction, students with mild to moderate disabilities will not need any more support than most students do at some point in their education” (Katz, 2013, p. 141). Thus, I will
learn how to implement effective, research-based reading practices through a Tier 1 peer-tutoring model through this action research. By following the cycles of inquiry, I will be able to review and adjust interventions accordingly, based on student needs.

**Gaps in Research Regarding Supporting Students in French Immersion**

Identifying gaps in research within the studies reviewed indicates where further research is required in French immersion education. Many of the studies identified similar gaps in regards to best practices in French immersion reading intervention strategies and their impacts on struggling readers. “There have been few studies that have examined the success of interventions for French immersion students with difficulties in learning to read” (Genesee & Jared, 2008, p. 144). Most of the research so far has concentrated on the *suitability* of French immersion for struggling students and has confirmed that all students can participate and benefit from second language education (Genesee & Jared, 2008; Genesee, 2007; Sauvé, 2007). “Admittedly though, there have yet to be any studies that measure the learning of students with difficulties in the FSL (French Second Language) context, and this is a clearly needed research area” (Arnett, Mady & Muilenberg, 2014, p. 448). Research proves that peer-tutoring models are positive and beneficial to all but more research is clearly needed in measuring how effective they are and in with varying reading abilities, specifically with students having severe reading problems or language impairments (Topping et al., 2016). My research proposes to address how a peer-tutoring framework coupled with evidence-based reading practices like repeated readings and peer tutoring can improve reading skills of all students, particularly those with reading challenges in French immersion. Very few studies have included peer tutoring in a French immersion context and from reviewing
the literature, no research has studied specific reading strategies such as repeated readings with students learning to read in a second language. I am excited to explore the impact of this research on my teaching experience using best practices such as repeated readings and peer tutoring in our French immersion school.
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of a peer-tutoring program as an intervention for students with reading difficulties in French immersion. I used an action research approach to answer the following question:

*How can I implement a peer-tutoring program to support reading development of struggling grade 1-2 French immersion students?*

Researching this topic allowed me to reflect on the impact of implementing a peer-tutoring program to help struggling readers in French immersion through a Tier 1 model. I wanted it to inform me and inspire my colleagues to explore and implement similar research-based best practices in their classrooms. The factors that drove me to research this intervention model include retaining students in French immersion by addressing and supporting their needs, by offering more direct support in school in an inclusive way, and offering a cost-effective approach to individualized reading practice due to a steady decrease in funding for learning support services.

**Methodological Understandings**

McNiff and Whitehead (2010) state:

Action research is about how you can improve your learning to influence new actions, and then bring your learning and actions to influence the learning of other people so that they can use their learning, in turn, to inform their new actions. (p. 143)

This form of research is often used in the education field, allowing teachers to critically reflect on their teaching practice. “The aims of any action research project or program
are to bring about practical improvement, innovation, change or development of social practice, and the practitioner’s better understanding of their practices” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 345). The study was centred on me. My research followed the four guiding principles of action research: 1) a commitment to educational improvement; 2) a research question asked with educational intent; 3) putting the “I” at the centre of the research; 4) education action that is informed, committed and intentional (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010, p. 7). Action research is a narrative, cyclical process, which responds to the environment in the study as I focused on the implementation of a peer-tutoring model and used several different strategies within this model. As described by Cohen et al. (2003), the process consists of four cycles. First, the planning stage in which the identification, evaluation, and formulation of the research problem is critically addressed. A plan is formulated based on this information. The second stage involves implementing the plan and putting it into action. Next, the implementation and its effects are closely monitored and recorded. The data collected is analyzed. The last stage of the cycle involves reflecting on the action and reviewing the process and the outcome. The cycle then starts over with adjustments and new plans made based on previous cycles. By studying this problem through an action research lens, I gained a better understanding of how to implement effective research based reading strategies for struggling readers in a French immersion classroom. I also gained a new perspective on the importance of inclusion and differentiation to meet the needs of all learners in FI to avoid unnecessary attrition from the FI program.

During the study I used mixed methods for data collection. Reams and Twale (2008) explain “mixed methods are necessary to uncover information and perspective,
increase corroboration of the data, and render less biased and more accurate conclusions” (as cited in Cohen et al., 2003, p. 22). Mixed methods refer to using a combination of qualitative data and quantitative data. Using qualitative data such as a reflective researcher’s journal, field notes and a focus group, I was able to capture perspectives and reflections during the cycles of inquiry. My observations guided me through the process and provided me feedback into the success of my work and indicated which adjustments needed to be made to get better results. Quantitative data are generally measurable or quantifiable in some way. I used pre and post intervention reading assessments for all tutees as important data. In addition, the tutees completed pre and post intervention surveys to help give a well-rounded perspective. Using a variety of methods provided rich information to help triangulate the variety of data for interpretative purposes.

**Data Collection**

“The only sensible rule for selecting any particular method is that it enables you to find out what you want to know better than another” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010, p.155). My mixed-methods study consisted of both qualitative data and quantitative data, relying heavily on my personal observations and reflections. “Possibly the most powerful form of data, however, is in those instances when you are able to comment critically on your own processes of learning, when you demonstrate reflexive critique, and show how and why you have deliberately changed your thinking, informed by your values” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010, p. 145). As an action research project, putting the “I” at the centre of this study is imperative in acknowledging the kinds of knowledge I created through the use of the qualitative tools described below.

**Researcher journal.** As described in McNiff and Whitehead (2010), my
researcher journal was well organized using dates involving observations, descriptions, and explanations. i. What I did, ii. Why I did it, iii. What I learned from what I did; and iv. The significance of my learning (Appendix A). By using a researcher journal, I recorded my thoughts on important events throughout my practice. “Explaining the significance of your practice and your research encourages you to reflect critically on your practice and identify its strengths and limitations (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010, p. 106). Using data I have collected, I constructed and reflected upon representations of what I have learned. I explored my journey as a learning support teacher. Not only did I want to improve my understanding of how I can implement a peer tutoring intervention to help struggling Grade 1-2 readers, I hope that this process will also benefit my colleagues and students of all ages in the long term. I aim to be a better learning support teacher for the formation of stronger literacy support in my school.

**Field notes.** Field notes using exact quotes were used to capture student voice. “The use of field notes ensures that important information from the researcher’s personal experiences in the study are incorporated into the process of analysis” (Rumrill, Cook & Wiley, p. 171). Consent and assent were respected, as I only reported on data collected from willing participants. I kept a clipboard with me at all times during the process where I took note of interesting observations and quotes from students during my interactions with them.

**Focus group.** Another source of data was a focus group for the Grade 4-5 tutors after the completion of the study, once I knew which students had agreed to participate. Focus groups are a form of group interview producing a large amount of data on a specific topic in a short amount of time. The benefits of a focus group include gaining
valuable perspectives and insights that might not otherwise be observed in class or obtained in a straightforward interview (Cohen et al., 2011). These students were invited to meet with me during lunch so that I could ask informal questions about their thoughts regarding the reading processes with their tutees. I asked them a series of guiding questions and jotted down specific quotes with student names (Appendix F). The discussion was audio recorded using an Ipad. Benefits of this focus group included listening to participants interact with each other rather than with the researcher because the dialogue unfolded naturally in a small group. It produced large amounts of data in a relatively short time, and it was useful for triangulation on particular issues. The focus group provided a new perspective to the study. Three additional quantitative measures provided my research with descriptive, measurable data, which helped in the overall analysis of the interventions.

Assessments. Assessment data (Appendix B) such as Pre and Post intervention reading assessments using the commercial GB+ levelled reading assessments provided information on overall French reading improvement. Essentially, this type of formative assessment tool is considered to be a commercial, criterion-referenced test providing educators with information about exactly where a student falls on the reading ability continuum (Cohen, et al., 2011). “Formative testing is undertaken during a programme, and is designed to monitor students’ progress during that programme, to measure achievement…and to diagnose strengths and weaknesses” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 481). Reading benchmarks are completed periodically throughout the school year with all primary students as formative assessment to gauge progress and areas to focus on. Additionally, reading information graphs were used daily to help collect data following
the one-minute repeated readings. The total number of words read in a minute and the total number of errors read per minute over the course of four days (Appendix C) were charted to show reading accuracy and fluency growth on a line graph. This was part of the Precision Reading program.

**Survey.** A pre intervention survey was administered with primary students (Appendix D). Rumrill et al. (2003) explain:

The primary purpose of survey research is to gauge the status of particular variables within a sample of respondents or to draw inferences regarding the constitution of a population of people on the basis of the characteristics of a sample of individuals drawn from that population. (2003)

My goal was to find out how the students felt about their reading abilities, their confidence and their willingness to read. Then, the same survey was administered to the same group of students following the five-week intervention study. This survey was comprised of 10 questions in the format of a pictorial scale (Appendices D & E). This helped triangulate the assessment data with the peer tutors focus group and allowed me to see if students (tutees) enjoyed the process and felt they benefited from it.

**Participants.** The participants in this study consisted of 24 students in Grade 1-2 French immersion class. Twenty of them had been given consent to participate in this study. As for students receiving learning support on a regular basis, three Grade 1 students received learning support four times a week for 30 minutes per block for reading intervention. Additionally, one Grade 2 student received learning support five times a week. The peer tutors in this study consisted of a split Grade 4-5 class of French
immersion students. There were 29 students in the intermediate class but only 18 students were given consent to participate in my study. The remaining students were not included in the data analysis however; they were involved in the whole class experience.

First, I sent home a recruitment letter to all students in both classes introducing myself, providing detailed information regarding the project. The letter included an invitation to an information session and an ethics statement (Appendix H). Later that week, I hosted an information session in the library after school explaining my research project to parents and guardians, answering any questions they had. I followed my script quite closely (Appendix I).

The following day, parent/guardian consent forms (Appendices K & L) were sent home along with sealable envelopes for all students. Two copies were provided to every student in case parents or guardians wanted to retain a copy for themselves. Primary students received a different form since they did not require assent because of their young age (Appendix K). Intermediate students received consent and assent forms along with envelopes (Appendices L & M). Families were instructed to return sealed consent forms to the school office, where the school secretary added these to a large envelope in the principal’s locked filing cabinet.

It was clearly on communicated to parents that it was their choice to give consent to participate in the study and even if they initially gave consent, they had the right to withdraw at any time during the study until envelopes were opened at the end of the study for data analysis purposes. It was also clearly explained that every child would participate in the intervention regardless of consent/assent and that nobody, including the researcher or the teachers, would know who had consent/assent until the intervention had
been completed. Following the study, the researcher would then open sealed envelopes to see which data could be used in the study analysis. The researcher did not coerce students to sign assent forms as they were sent home with parents. This ensured there was no bias towards any students or parents who chose to participate or not in the study. Consent and assent forms remained in individually sealed envelopes in a large sealed envelope until the completion of the intervention in a locked filing cabinet inside the principal’s office.

The names of participants were anonymous until after the five week reading intervention was completed. Student names were coded during the five week reading intervention study. Participants were identified by giving them a number starting with their grade level, a dash then a number instead of their name. Older partners had a number starting with their grade level, a dash then the same number as their tutee so that the researcher could keep track of partnerships. I did not include details that would directly identity any of the students. However, reading assessments were not coded as these are part of the regular assessment routine. Immediately following the last session of the five week reading intervention implementation, I opened the consent letters to see who could participate in the focus group and which student data could be used in my study.

Finally, Grade 4-5 students with consent and assent were invited to my focus group. Since there were more than six eligible students interested, the teacher drew names to see who would participate. I chose to find out which students had consent before conducting the focus group because I wanted to ensure that the data collected during the focus group could be used in the study.
Intervention

The purpose of this study was to examine how I could implement a peer-tutoring program to support reading development of struggling Grade 1-2 French immersion students. The two participating classes came together every day, Monday to Thursday from 11:25 am to 11:45 am for the duration of five weeks. Students were grouped in pairs, one intermediate student with one primary student. In some cases, there were two intermediate students for one primary student because of numbers.

Ethical considerations included whether these two groups of students could afford to miss 15-20 minutes of class time per day in order to read with their peer tutors. I had a discussion regarding this question with our school administrators and with both classroom teachers and we all agreed to embark on this peer-tutoring plan together. The peer-tutoring framework incorporated the use of two reading interventions; repeated readings following the precision reading principles and levelled reading.

Precision reading is a trademarked, one-minute repeated reading intervention, which involves counting the total number of words read per minute and the total number of errors per minute with the same passage for seven to ten consecutive readings. The other is levelled reading, where the tutee was given a selection of texts that are “just right” for his/her reading ability and the tutor has a selection of reading strategies on a prompt card. The primary teachers at our school determined the “just right” reading levels for every term and every grade level by referring to the curricular expectations and to the GB+ commercial levels. It was my hope that I would equally benefit from this study by learning how to help implement new reading strategies to help struggling readers in FI. “Beneficence in special education research can be observed in terms of
both direct benefits to participants in particular studies and the contributions that published research makes to the professional knowledge base” (Rumrill, 2011, p. 75).

**Precision reading.** The procedures for the first intervention were very specific. “Precision reading is a research-based, short, daily reading activity designed to improve sight word recognition and the reading fluency and comprehension of students with low reading achievement” (Freeze, 2002, p. 8). This program, developed by Freeze, a former professor of mine from the University of Manitoba, is comprised of five components.

**Repeated readings.** The first component includes the core strategy; a combination of the methods of repeated reading and precision teaching. In essence, this intervention consists of rereading a short, meaningful passage until a satisfactory level of fluency is reached. The repeated readings are measured using a precise, direct, daily method derived from precision teaching. Precision teaching refers to corrective feedback and individualized instructions following the reading and before the passage is reread the next day. The total number of words read and the total number of errors made in one minute of oral reading by the tutee are tallied and graphed each day for seven to ten days for each passage (Appendix C). In my study, I have shortened this to four times a week for each passage for the purposes of time and interest. In effect, students read the same passage from Monday to Thursday then start a new passage the following week. Freeze explains the advantages of precise measurement. First, student learning is said to be authentic because learning is measured directly and frequently during a real learning experience. The focus is on increasing accuracy and decreasing errors resulting in active engagement in the measurement process. Tutors provide immediate corrective feedback following the reading, giving the tutee the opportunity to practice and improve on errors.
Finally, results are easily understood and interpreted. Results are easily communicated with teachers, parents and students. (Freeze, 2002).

Formatting procedures are necessary in adapting reading materials. This second component of Precision Reading requires teacher preparation, especially in FI as there are no available PR passages in French. Passages are generally drawn from grade level materials on topics related to curricular topics, should be an appropriate reading level and should include a variety of genres. For students in primary grades, passages should be 100-200 words in length. They must be accessible to struggling readers. For the purposes of this study, I chose to use levelled readers for three of the weeks and for the other two weeks I adapted social studies resources so that each child worked within his or her instructional reading level. Precision reading requires specific formatting of passages but does not necessarily require any adaptations in content. Fonts are increased in size, spacing between lines is increased, margins are narrowed, sentence structure may be simplified, paragraphing may be restructured, pictures are removed and a running word count in the right margin is added for easy tallying (Appendix J). A level three formatting involves the font being enlarged to size 16, 18 or higher. Compound or complex sentences are broken into simple sentences and if dialogue is present, it may be placed on separate lines. Paragraph headings may be added and difficult vocabulary may be replaced with easier words. Formatting modifications are at the discretion of the teacher (Freeze, 2002). Passages for first graders for example, will have larger font sizes compared to students in Grade 3.

The third component of this program includes a variety of supportive strategies. While all students will benefit from the corrective practice of their prior sight word errors
immediately before each passage reading, some students will require additional support strategies. The two that I have selected for the first graders includes echo pre-reading and silent pre-reading for second graders. Echo pre-reading involves the tutor pre-reading the passage slowly to the tutee once or twice before the one-minute reading the first two days of reading a new passage. This strategy benefits struggling students who are emergent readers and who have very minimal sight word vocabularies. Second graders will take a minute or two to review their passage before the timed repeated readings.

The two last core components of Precision Reading are comprised of complementary strategies, which are whole class activities used to complement and balance the reading program. This will not be used in my study as this is a broad topic and it involves activities the classroom teacher uses to balance literacy in the classroom. This includes such activities as DEAR (Drop Everything And Read), personal dictionaries, reading challenges and home reading to enhance reading skills and motivate students. Finally, comprehension strategies are addressed including story retelling, questioning and reciprocal reading. I have chosen to provide students with a prompt card with a series of decoding strategies on the left hand side, for example, chunking words into syllables, looking at the first letter and sounding it out. On the right hand side of the prompt card are comprehension strategies which include retelling the passage and questioning the tutee to explain: who, what, why, how, and when in describing elements from the passage (Appendix O). I feel that the small changes I made maintained the integrity of the program and are valid.

This intervention requires the organization of materials. This includes:

- Two copies of the passage per tutee, properly formatted and appropriately
levelled. One copy with the running number of words in the right margin for the
tutor to underline errors with the colour of the day and one copy for the tutee to
read from. (Appendix J)

- A graph for recording the number of total words read and the number of errors
  over the course of 4 days. Three graphs of varying maximum number of words
  were available: 90, 160 and 190 words (Appendix C)

- A timer (either a whole class timer on the interactive white board or individual
timers.)

- Four different coloured pencils or markers for tutors. Tutors will underline errors
  made with the color of the day and then mark a hard line at the end of a minute.
  Then it is easier to tell which day the tutor made which error.

- An “error words from passage record” form (Appendix C).

- A folder for each tutee containing the passages, a strategies prompt card
  (Appendix O) and a list of steps to follow as reminders (Appendix N).

I organized individual student folders with the names of the tutees and the tutors on them.
On the left hand side of the folder I placed all the documentation for the tutor including a
copy of the passage for the week, a graph and a form for recording the error words from
the passage each day. Coloured highlighting markers were used to record errors on the
tutor’s copy as the tutee reads aloud. Then, the tutor marked with a long dash where the
tutee completed the one-minute read. By using different coloured markers every day, it is
possible to record and reuse the same text for the tutor. This allows the tutor to know
which day the error was made. To maintain consistency, the same colour was used
according to the weekday, from one passage to the next. The legend was written inside
the pocket of the student folder as a visual reminder.

Tutor training was imperative in the success of this intervention. I first spent an hour with tutors explaining and modeling the steps to follow. Tutors then practiced with partners using all the materials and prompts. The classroom teacher and I then followed up with a review session the morning before the first intervention session. I also included a copy of the steps to follow as a reminder inside the folder (Appendix N). To begin a session, tutors and tutees were provided with their folder, which contained 4 highlighters, a pencil and the appropriate passages, forms and strategies prompt cards. The tutor removed the copy for the tutee and gave it to him/her and removed his or her copy and the appropriately coloured marker. Tutors paired with first graders first pre-read the passage slowly to their tutee once on Monday and Tuesday. Tutors placed with second graders asked him/her to silently pre-read for two minutes on Monday and Tuesday. Then he or she set their timer at one minute and asked the tutee to read, from the beginning, as clearly and as best they can. During the intervention, we ended up using a large visual timer on the interactive white board that we found on the Internet. The tutor (or teacher) said: “On your mark, get set, go” and started the timer. As the tutee reads, the tutor underlines errors using the colour of the day. When a tutee gets stuck on a word, the tutor can provide the correct answer without delay. It’s important to point out that if a teacher were administering this, codes would be used to explain the type of miscue made; for example, a word omission would be represented as WO. However, for the purpose of this student-run intervention, underlining errors is age-appropriate and codes are not necessary. At the end of the minute, the tutor stops the tutee and marks the end. The tutor congratulates the tutee for his/her effort then records the word errors on
the error passage record form. These errors are discussed, addressed and practiced with the tutee. The last step involves the graphing. The tutor, with the tutees help, calculates the total number of words read, using the running number count on the right margin. He or she adds this to the graph then tallies and graphs the number of errors, as well as the corresponding date. When time permits, the tutor uses the strategies prompt card to look over reading strategies and comprehension strategies to make sure the student understands the text. The following day, the same process is repeated, however, students start by reviewing and practicing the previous errors made then follow the rest of the steps as described above. This repeated reading process should take five – ten minutes. Tutees read five different passages over the course of the five-week intervention.

**Levelled reading.** The second intervention was much simpler. Tutees used their book bag of levelled readers and chose a levelled book to read to their tutor. Tutors were instructed to follow the strategies prompt card. If a student came to a word that was difficult to read, the tutor first asked after several seconds: “Would you like more time or help?” This strategy is recommended by Boushey and Moser, (2006). If the tutee preferred receiving help, rather than saying the word, the tutor was instructed to point to an appropriate strategy on the prompt card like: cut the word and sound it out (Appendix O).

Once the tutee finished reading his or her little book, the tutor prompted the tutee by following the cues on the prompt card and asked the student to retell the story (Appendix O). If time permitted, the tutor asked the tutee to answer the remaining comprehension prompts such as who is in the story? What happened? When? Why? Where did it happen? The tutor did not have to write anything down with this
intervention.

**Data Analysis**

Throughout and following the intervention study, reflections were made, data sources were collected, read, organized, and interpreted. Themes were identified and data was coded in terms of these themes. Before the intervention began, all first and second graders reading skills were assessed using the benchmarking levelled system GB+. I also administered the pre-study survey to the class of tutees.

**Data management.** Since my data was varied and came from several sources, organization and management was necessary. Raw materials such as pre-study surveys and reading assessment benchmarks were kept in their original form, in a file folder. Artefacts such as my researcher journal and field notes clipboard were typed out nightly on my electronic device and stored on a password protected USB device. These documents were filed according to date. Focus group transcriptions were also typed out and stored electronically. Unfortunately, there was an iPad malfunction with the audio recording during the actual session therefore all my notes were written by hand in point form. All of the reading materials and the graphs from individual student folders were organized and filed in raw form in a locked filing cabinet. Finally, I developed a spreadsheet with student names, their codes and their peer tutors’ codes to identify partnerships and help track information. The spreadsheet included a bird’s eye view of student Pre-study reading levels, the levelled texts they were reading for the week as well as the Post-study reading levels.

**Interpreting.** Interpretation and reflection were ongoing throughout the study. All of the data collected from my own researcher journal and field notes provided
evidence that contributed to the planning phases in the inquiry cycles. This data also guided the emergence of themes throughout the study. As the intervention study came to a close at the end of the five weeks, I opened the consent letters from the sealed envelope in the principal’s office filing cabinet. Students with authorization to participate in the project were cross-referenced with my coding of student partnerships. Ineligible data was removed. Twenty students from the primary class had consent including the students with whom I give extra support on a regular basis. The intermediate class included 18 students who had been given consent to participate. Accessible information was sorted to interpret data using pre and post study surveys, pre and post reading assessments as well as the researcher journal, critical reflections and focus group findings.

The data was sorted and displayed to facilitate analysis and interpretation. “Descriptive statistics do what they say: they describe, so that researchers can then analyse and interpret what these descriptions mean” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 622). Raw data such as total number of words read and total number of errors per day, during the course of the week were displayed in tables. Then, line graphs were useful in showing trends, especially when focusing on particular students. Bar charts displayed overall reading growth to compare Pre-study and Post-study reading levels. Data was also converted into percentages for ease of comparison.

My aim was to triangulate the data, in other words, to obtain information from multiple sources to use as evidence to support my explanations. This is an important step to validate the claims to knowledge (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). Action research is about learning in order to inform new thinking and new practices.

I compared the descriptive data looking for trends and themes. “Look first for
those data that show how your learning has improved. This means that you understand or know things better than before. You can gather data about your improved learning from other people’s feedback, as well as from your own reflections” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010, p. 134). Using coding strategies to pull out the main ideas and look for common themes in my data helped in the analysis.

These specific pieces of data become evidence because they relate to your research question. This strong evidence transforms into your knowledge claim which is grounded and informed by your values. This evidence explains the validity of your claims to knowledge. (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010, p. 183)

The developing themes related to the research question were: Confidence in reading abilities, willingness to read and actual reading level ability. “When you interpret your data, you identify those pieces that show the transformation of what you are looking for and what you value into action. This is the basis of making judgments about the quality of your action research” (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010, p. 177). My role as the special education teacher includes me in the justification of this intervention.

**Potential Application of Knowledge Created**

I have learned how to implement a peer-tutoring program and will share what I have learned from the process with my peers. I have reflected critically on my learning, my actions and the influence this will have on others. I will certainly try peer-tutoring again using variations from what I have learned. As I share my findings with colleagues I will help them create their own peer tutoring programs if they are interested. “Action research is about how you can improve your learning to influence new actions, and then bring your learning and actions to influence the learning of other people so that they can
use their learning, in turn, to inform their new actions” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010, p. 143). I aimed to triangulate that data from a number of sources as evidence to support my explanations and show a well-rounded perspective of the cycles in my study.

This is important in getting other people to validate your claims to knowledge. You need to show how the findings from your research can be useful for other people, because action research is about learning to improve learning in order to inform new thinking and new practices. (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010, p. 104)

I tested the evidence against my initial concern and research question, articulating the significance of what I claim to have done, and will present my work for others to judge and for myself to personally validate my knowledge claim. Finally, professional validation will come from my two teacher colleagues who embarked on this project with me.

**Limitations**

The biggest limitation of this action research is that these findings will not be generalizable due to the fact that I am working with a specific group of students and the project is centered on my personal knowledge creation. The findings are limited to my experience with this specific group of students.

**Value or Significance of Potential Findings, Based on Method**

My report communicates my overall experience during my action research. I followed the cycles of inquiry in which I planned, acted upon these plans, reflected and repeated the process, which was beneficial to my own learning and has influenced my professional actions (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). Through my observations and the
data gathered, I have gained new insights into creating more support for struggling readers in French immersion. With increasing budget cuts to services directly helping struggling students, educators need to find creative ways to support our most vulnerable student population.

An action research project of this kind places focus on naturalistic teacher inquiry. The project took place during the school day, for a short amount of time four days a week, over the course of five weeks. This study may benefit teachers who wish to implement a similar peer-tutoring program in their practice. Additionally, this study may suggest the value in further research in the field of struggling readers in French immersion.
CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

French immersion educators need to develop and implement effective research based interventions that are inclusive and differentiated in order to promote literacy skills development in the primary French immersion classroom (Arnett & Mady, 2010; Bournot-Trites, 2008; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). Topping et al., (2016) describe how there is an increasing body of evidence proving that peer-tutoring can meet a variety of needs in a regular classroom setting. These authors explain how teachers can design a learning environment that fosters student success through a structured peer-tutoring framework. Through action research, I learned how to implement two specific reading interventions using peer tutoring as an important strategy. I worked alongside a primary Grade 1-2 class and an intermediate Grade 4-5 class who were already buddy classes. My intent was to strengthen our Tier 1 reading support in a primary French immersion class by increasing the frequency of their visits and by adding two structured reading interventions.

Using Freeze’s (2002) precision reading methods, as well as practicing levelled reading, my objective was to gain a better understanding of peer tutoring as a methodology to improve the outcome of French reading skills with primary students in an inclusive way. In particular, I was interested in seeing what would happen to the struggling students’ reading skills and confidence.

As discussed in the previous chapter, this research project was designed as action research allowing me to reflect and make changes as I went through the cycles of planning, acting on plans, observing, reflecting and making decisions for the next cycle. The goal was for me to improve my practice in the area of literacy development with
primary students in French immersion through peer tutoring. This research went through several cycles throughout the course of the five-week intervention. New knowledge was gained and data was collected about how to best implement a peer-tutoring framework to improve reading skills with Grade 1 and 2 students.

At the end of the intervention study, I opened all of the consent forms. Eleven students had consent in Grade 1 and nine students had consent in Grade 2 for a total of 20 students in the primary class. Eighteen students from the intermediate class were given consent and provided assent to participate in this study. Upon completion of the five-week intervention study, I read and organized the data that I collected during the study. The data was reduced and displayed in a variety of ways to facilitate interpretation. Then, the data was reread and coded for common themes. Data included qualitative and quantitative sources for triangulation purposes.

McNiff and Whiteheads’s (2010) description of action research shows its cyclical nature, where the educator is in a continuous process of acting, reflecting on the action, and then acting again in new ways continuously improving actions during research. Cycles evolved during each of the following phases.

Cycle one - Getting ready (Organizing resources for the two reading interventions)

Cycle two - Training tutors

Cycle three - The first week

Cycle four - Weeks 2 & 3
Cycle five - Weeks 4 & 5

Cycle six - A closer look at data

**Cycle one - Getting ready**

First, I had to ensure that I knew my primary students well. I had already worked with four students in Grade 1 and one student in Grade 2 who had reading difficulties so I knew these students and their literacy abilities well. I helped the primary classroom teacher administer GB+ reading assessments to all of the primary students before embarking on the intervention. These reading levels were also used to inform parents of student progress as part of the reporting process in December. Armed with this information, I set out to find appropriately levelled books that I could adapt and reformat for the precision reading intervention.

In preparation for the reading interventions, I went to my local Dollar Store to purchase a pocket folder for each primary student, four different colours of highlighting markers (24 of each colour) and 10 timers in case I could not find enough timers at school. I then spent several hours selecting reading material at the appropriate reading levels for each primary student. For the first two weeks, I chose to use adapted French fiction, high interest readers for the one-minute reading intervention (precision reading). I adapted and formatted the texts appropriately (Appendix J) and saved them according to reading levels. This took a fair bit of time and I was feeling a sense of remorse about the preparation time needed for this particular reading intervention. However, as I saved approximately 20 different levelled texts, I realized that I could re-use the texts as students increase in level without having to start over. This was good consolation.
In order to provide visual reminders and steps for tutors and tutees, I typed out the steps and stapled this guide inside the right hand side of the folder (Appendix N). I also added in a coloured legend on the left hand side to guide students to use the right coloured highlighter of the right day of the week. If I were a classroom teacher, this would have been a good task for the students but since I had limited time with students, I prepared this myself. I went through my list of students and printed off two copies of the right levelled text for each primary student. I kept track of their reading levels and of the text for week one. I also developed a spreadsheet to track students, partnerships, reading levels, and which texts they read during the course of the intervention.

![Figure 2. Getting resources ready.](image)

The Grade 1 folders were either pink or red and I kept them in a red cardboard box holder. The Grade 2 folders with either green or orange and were kept in a green cardboard box holder. The coloured highlighters were separated and placed in a box with separate compartments (see Figure 2). This was kept in the classroom from Monday–Thursday and, on Fridays I restocked all of the folders with new texts.
As for preparing for the second reading intervention, I selected a list of reading strategies cue card that had pictures and words to describe word decoding strategies as well as comprehension and retelling strategies (Appendix O). I copied and pasted the strategies on coloured card stock to make it visually appealing and easier to handle. I placed the card inside the folder as well. This preparation process required much frontloading by formatting levelled texts and organizing folders. I differentiated materials and strategies to meet diverse needs of all learners. My reflections after this process showed that I felt good about differentiating material and meeting the needs of my students despite the time required in preparing materials.

**Cycle 2 – Training tutors**

Taking the time to properly train our Grade 4 and 5 tutors to further develop our students’ reading skills was an important step in ensuring a successful peer tutoring program. The first step was to set up a training session in their classroom with their teacher, which lasted approximately 45 minutes. The classroom teacher later retaught the main steps for an additional 20 minutes the day before we started the intervention. For this training class, I organized training texts in the actual folders their own tutees would use. I first talked about the importance of their role as a tutor. They each have an important responsibility in guiding the reading skills of their tutees. I then displayed all the necessary documents on the interactive white board in their classroom. This allowed me to explain the steps and processes to follow during the one minute reading sessions as well as with the levelled reading with their partners. The classroom teacher and I modeled what a session might look like, and the steps taken while demonstrating this on the white board. I played the role of the tutor and I underlined errors as the tutee read
during the one-minute reading. I then modeled how to write the errors on the error record form and I practiced them with my tutee. We then tabulated the correct number of words and the number of errors and graphed them. We made sure to explain and re-explain these steps several times over. Students then chose partners and took turns being the tutor and the tutee. The classroom teacher and I walked around the classroom and observed students as they practiced. I immediately regretted providing each of the pairs with their own electronic timers as all we heard were random “beeps” around the classroom. Most students were able to follow all of the required steps but several had difficulty charting the total numbers of words read and the total number of errors on the graph. The classroom teacher I and walked this students through the steps.

After looking through my reflections during this stage, I made the decision to remove the timers because the noise was much too distracting. Instead, I decided that I would use a visual timer on the interactive whiteboard and that all students could do the one-minute read simultaneously. Students seemed quite excited about the activities. Once the students each had a chance to practice, we discussed any challenges we experienced as we practiced the steps. Several students indicated that the noise from other timers was distracting. My overall impression was that students were ready to take their role as tutors for these two interventions seriously. Here is a reflection from my journal following the training phase:

*I learned today that individual timers were a bad idea. I suppose students could use them out in the hallway but for now, I will simply use one larger time on the interactive white board. The beeps were much too distracting for everyone in the class. I was also surprised to see such student engagement. Most students were*
very keen to practice the steps with a partner. Some students had to be reminded to play the role of a younger tutee as they were reading the text flawlessly. We needed to practice how to react to errors and how to chart and graph using the data collected. I noticed a few pairs of students were not underlining errors and they seemed confused about the graphing process. I made a mental note of repeating those instructions to the whole class.

It was interesting to observe these students learn how to follow the structured steps of the one-minute repeated reading intervention and then how to use the reading strategies card to help students with decoding or comprehension while reading levelled books. I was relieved that everything went well, with the exception of two groups of students who were side-tracked and seemed confused. Once I regained all of their attention, we reviewed the process again and I answered questions. I had a good feeling about this.

**Cycle three – The first week**

Before commencing the reading interventions with peers, I spent one period of 30 minutes with the younger students explaining to them the activities we would be doing together with their big buddies. The first activity with the primary students was the pre-study survey to get an overall feel about their feelings toward reading in French and reading with a buddy. This survey was comprised of 10 questions in the format of a pictorial scale (Appendix D). I read through the questions for the students since most of them were non-readers in English. Students were asked to circle one of the three-point pictorial scale with response of *Always* (Happy face), *Sometimes* (So-so face), or *Never*
I will compare the results of several questions from the pre and post survey later during cycle six.

I was definitely a little nervous the first morning we brought the two groups together for this study. Keeping in mind they had already done several activities together throughout the year, these partnerships had already been formed so my study was building on the relationships that had already been formed. Many eyes lit up when we mentioned that their “big buddies” would be spending more time with them.

The first week of our peer-tutoring program entailed very structured steps where I stopped activities, explained the process then allowed them to carry on, one step at a time to ensure that all groups were on task and clearly understood the necessary steps. For the first week, it took the full 20 minutes to walk the students through the steps of the one-minute repeated reading intervention. We didn’t get around to doing the second intervention; the levelled reading.

My researcher journal captured an overall feeling of excitement. Students were engaged and excited about the activities but required some scaffolding to get them from one step to the next. I realized when walking around the room that I could not assume that everyone understood the correct processes because we had practiced it once before. Perhaps we should have practiced a little more, I thought to myself. Three groups needed assistance with graphing. This is an excerpt from my researcher journal:

Some students are sitting around tables, others are sitting on the carpet, everyone seems happy to be with their buddy and I can feel positive energy in the classroom. Several tutors run to one of the teachers asking for clarification on
word pronunciation or whether to count a hyphenated word as one or two words, for example. I am happy I am not alone with 45 or so students! The noise level is a bit louder than I would like but it’s a new intervention and I will review this next week. I see tutors counting the numbers of words read in a minute and congratulating their little buddy. I see smiles and some little buddies looking bashful. I love seeing students really excited about their results and I also love seeing students encouraging one another.

Being the last session of the week, I feel like this will probably be a success though I can tell this is interrupting classroom schedules a bit. The intermediate teacher had to cut a lesson short to make it to our session on time and this makes me wonder if four times a week is a bit too much. The primary teacher seems very excited and engaged about this intervention.

At the end of the first week, I flipped through individual student folders to review student progress. Freeze (2002) suggests that if there are more than two errors for every 10 words, the passage may be too difficult. If there are less than two errors in every 50 words, the passage may be too easy. In addition, a good goal is to double or triple the number of words read at his or her first reading by the tenth reading. We’ve decided to stop at four readings of the same text so I would expect that coming close to doubling the words would be a feasible goal. The general trends I observed by looking at the graphs of the first graders were positive. Over the course of the first four days of one-minute repeated readings, most students increased the total number of words read and all students decreased their error rate. For several first grade students, the text I had selected for them was likely a little too easy. I took note of changes needed for week two and
charted the results for a quick bird’s eye view. The following graph (Figure 3) represents the raw data collected during week one of the one minute reading intervention. The number on the left hand side represents the total number of words read. The second number in the shaded column represents the total number of errors made. The third lightly shaded column for each day represents the error rate. Error rates are calculated by dividing the number of errors by the total number of words read in one minute giving an error rate percentage. For ease of reading, I will refer to every student as he.

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<th>Day 1</th>
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<td><strong>Student B</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Student G</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Student I</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Student J</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Student K</strong></td>
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Figure 2. The total number of words read per minute, the total number of errors per minute and the error rates during week one for the Grade one students.

For the purpose of highlighting trends, I selected two struggling students and one non-struggling student from the Grade 1 class to examine progress a little more closely. If we look specifically at a struggling reader, Student J’s progress as depicted in the line graph below (Figure 4), Student J doubled the amount of words per minute while decreasing his error rate from 4% to 2% in four sessions. This is a good example of the kind of results we aimed for. Every student read a text that was within his or her reading level and experienced success.

Student D (Figure 5), as depicted in a line graph below, is another struggling reader. This student started by reading 12 words per minute and ended the week by
reading 33 words per minute. Student D more than doubled his words per minute and decreased his error rate from 25% to 6%. This is good, steady improvement.

![One minute reading graph](image)

Figure 4. Student D, a struggling reader in Grade 1 during week 1.

Student E (Figure 6) as shown below, reads slightly above grade level. He displayed quite an improvement. Session 1 yielded 50 words per minute with an error rate of 8%. He finished the 4th session of the first week by almost doubling the number of words read to 95 without any errors at all.
Figure 5. Student E, an above average reader in Grade 1 during Week 1.

Figure 7, below, represents the data collected during week one with all the Grade 2 students who received parental consent to participate in the study. The number on the left hand side represents the total number of words read. The second number in the shaded column represents the total number of errors made. The third lightly shaded column for each day represents the error rate. Error rates are calculated by dividing the number of errors by the total number of words read in one minute giving an error rate percentage. As one can see, nearly all students, with the exception of Student T, increased the total number of words read in a minute and all of them except for Student T, decreased their error rates. I suspect there may have been a recording error with Student T’s results. This reminded me that children record these results after all, and data
could be skewed or misrepresented due to human error or manipulation both favourably and unfavourably. Overall, I was feeling very pleased with the results of the one-minute readings but more importantly, I was happy that students seemed engaged and happy to be working together.

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Figure 6. The total number of words read per minute, the total number of errors per minute and the error rates during week one for the Grade two students.

Looking at the numbers in figure 7, Student R is a struggling reader. Student R started the week with 21 words per minute and an error rate of 14%. On the fourth session, he more than tripled his words per minute to 74 while reducing his error rate to 3%. Student R’s improvement is represented visually, below in figure 8. These results
are excellent demonstrating continual growth and improvement in the total number of words read in a minute over the course of the week. Conversely, the number of errors and more importantly, the error rate, decreased as well. As I observed the students, I noticed that Student R was quite engaged and motivated to read to the best of his ability. I noticed that he immediately opened his folder and wanted to practice his errors right away. He responded well to the encouragement from his big buddy and again from a teacher passing by, noticing the positivity.

![Graph showing one minute reading progress](image)

Figure 7. Student R, a struggling reader in Grade 2 during week one.

In preparing for week two, I selected the reading genre of fiction due to its success during week one. I carefully chose new passages to meet the needs of individual readers. It was obvious, for example, that Student K (Figure 3) was given a text in week
one that was too easy. I found a text that was two levels higher, hoping it would provide him with the perfect challenge. I found that since I already had a good collection of levelled texts saved, it was less time consuming choosing texts, printing them off and adding them to student folders than the initial start-up.

In reviewing my researcher journal notes, I also decided that I should allow students to move a little more quickly through the repeated reading steps during week two because we did not have the time to do the second reading intervention at all. I was stopping activities and reminding students of next steps, which took a lot of time. By talking less and using short visual cues, I would allow pairs to move through the one-minute reading process more quickly thus allowing for more time to read levelled books and use the reading strategies card. Lastly, some students were exceeding 90 words per minute therefore I added a 160 word graph to their folders for subsequent weeks.

**Cycle four – Weeks two & three**

During week two, I noticed that students, tutors in particular, were becoming independent and they were able to move from one step to another without instructions. The reading results from week two were very similar to week one. My observations were that students were happy, engaged and overall, student volume levels were increasing slightly. I also had to remind students to use the strategies cards for prompting purposes during the levelled reading of books. In hindsight, I should have spent more time explaining each strategy explicitly instead of assuming that students understood them after one discussion. Here is an excerpt from my field notes:

> Looking around, I see many students looking comfortable and HAPPY! I see positive interactions happening all around. Facial expressions indicate that this
tutoring intervention is a great thing. At the completion of the one-minute reading, I saw one big buddy give his little buddy a high five and a primary student hugs a stuffed animal in excitement. Peer tutors are so proud that they are reporting results to their teachers in amazement. Faces are beaming. It is getting a little loud in here though once they begin the levelled reading. I have noticed only a few tutors referring to the reading strategies card when helping students with decoding or comprehension. I am also noticing that tutees are getting up to get levelled texts and they are getting distracted in their coming and goings...

To add student voice to my observations, I interviewed several primary students as they were graphing their results.

Teacher: How do you feel about these reading activities we are doing?

Student: This is fun because I’m learning new French words and I’m getting better every time. I like being with my big buddy.

Another student responded: It is fun and I’m learning to read words. It is challenging to read more words every day and make less mistakes.

Looking through my researcher journal, I reminded myself to talk explicitly about voice volume next time because it was getting loud and I was afraid this might distract students. I also noticed that students were getting up to find levelled texts once the repeated reading sessions were over. Students were getting up to get one book at a time, and often, they would get distracted and start chatting with another student who was also in
transition. I decided I had to do something about that as it was a waste of our precious reading time and it was increasing the noise level in class.

In preparing for week three, I asked students to get three levelled books at the beginning of each session to avoid students having to get up and move around. I re-introduced the reading strategies card and pointed out the common strategies we could use when we get stuck. I also selected a visual poster (Appendix P) to share with students that showed exactly which noise level was appropriate when reading together, characterized as whisper talking. I also explained to students that if they were only speaking to the person next to them, I should not be able to hear their voices travel past the length of their arm. The noise should remain within their “bubble.”

In selecting the texts for week three, I decided that I should use a non-fiction text that reflects subject matter that was being discussed in social studies because it was relevant to what they were studying in class. I wrote a passage and differentiated it in four levels of varying difficulty. I was well aware that this might be more difficult because it introduced specific vocabulary that students may not yet have learned in class. The subject matter was about community.

As we began the third week, my suspicions were right, this text was definitely harder for most students. Tutors had to spend a bit more time reviewing vocabulary before and after the one-minute readings. The teacher had wanted to spend some class time exploring this subject matter but did not develop the unit as much as she had planned, which meant that the vocabulary was only being used in this context for the time being.
My researcher journal and field notes point to the same situation: students were struggling with this text. Since I had levelled it myself, it was harder than a general levelled fiction book that students were accustomed to reading in class. I made a mental note to decrease the level of difficulty for week four. One student said to me: “Madame, this story is hard!” However, reviewing the results from week three, all students continued to improve in the number of words per minute and they all decreased their error rates. I paid particular attention to student J and noticed that he was really stuck on this passage and was not improving as he had with the other texts. I also noticed that he seemed to be rushing and would guess at words rather than take the time to decode and make sense of it. I decided that I would go back to a levelled fiction text for week four to see what would happen.

**Cycle five – Weeks four & five**

I believe students were relieved to open their folders and find fiction passages. They were so much more comfortable with this genre. To compare end results with week one, I chose to focus on week four results instead of on week five because we had two snow days and a professional development day the fifth week. In Figure 9 below, the number on the left hand side represents the total number of words read. The second number in the shaded column represents the total number of errors made. The third lightly shaded column for each day represents the error rate. Error rates are calculated by dividing the number of errors by the total number of words read in one minute giving an error rate percentage. Even though I had developed a great non-fiction text about Canada in four varying levels, we were not able to use this data due to the two-day school week. I did not feel that week five results were valid.
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Figure 8. The total number of words read per minute, the total number of errors per minute and the error rates during week four for the Grade 1 students.
It is evident that all Grade 1 students, shown above in Figure 9, decreased their error rates over the course of the four sessions of the fourth week. In addition, all students increased their total number of words read which demonstrates the efficacy of this reading intervention. Student E’s passage (Figure 9) was likely too easy for him as he read 65 words per minute flawlessly on day one then read 97 words per minute on the last day without any errors. Picking the right text for all of these students meant I had to take notes and make adjustments the following week.

If we look specifically at Student J, a struggling reader (Figure 10), he started the week with 40 words per minute with an error rate of 20%. Although he didn’t increase the number of words over the course of the week, he did decrease his error rate from 20% to 11%. I suspect he would have benefitted from an extra week of practice with the same text. His progress can be viewed below (Figure 10).

![Graph showing reading progress](image)

Figure 9. Student J, a struggling reader in Grade 1 during week four.
Figure 11, below, contains the data for week four with second grade students. Evidently, all students experienced success. The number on the left hand side represents the total number of words read. The second number in the shaded column represents the total number of errors made. The third lightly shaded column for each day represents the error rate. The trend over the course of the four weeks was consistent. Students increased their total number of words read and decreased their error rates, thus increasing fluency and accuracy. Student R (Figure 11), a struggling student, went from 48 words to 76 words by the end of the week. I do wonder though about the lack of errors. I wonder if he read without any errors or if his tutor did not underline the errors for this week. I had a closer look at his individual folder and it was not evident to me.

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<th>Day 2</th>
<th>Day 3</th>
<th>Day 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student L</strong></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student M</strong></td>
<td>64</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student N</strong></td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student O</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Student P</strong></td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Q</strong></td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student R</strong></td>
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**Cycle 6 - A closer look at data**

After the completion of the five-week study, I wanted to have a closer look and compare the results of the quantitative data of both Grade 1 and Grade 2 students who participated in the research. This includes the Pre and Post Reading levels and the data collected from individual reading information graphs from repeated readings. The results of the Pre and Post surveys (Appendices D & E) are described in percentages. First, I examine the Pre-survey results. I selected four survey questions that best capture the data I was seeking. Essentially, my goal through this action research was to find out how I could improve the reading skills of struggling readers in a primary FI class through peer tutoring. Emerging themes from various data included: confidence in reading abilities, willingness to read and overall improvement in French reading level ability. This survey was comprised of 10 questions in the format of a pictorial scale (Appendix D). Students were asked to circle one of the three-point pictorial scale with response of *Always* (Happy face), *Sometimes* (So-so face) or *Never* (Sad face). Question one referred to feelings of ability in reading French independently: How do I feel about my ability to read French books on my own? (Appendix D). With this question, I was searching for information on confidence levels. The pre-survey was filled out by 18 students. Results show that 89%
of students (16/18) indicated they *Always* feel happy (or confident) about their ability to read French books on their own. Only 11% (2/18) indicated that they sometimes felt happy about their ability.

In the Post-survey (Figure 12), 18 students filled out the survey, though two of those students were different. This time, 83% of students (15/18) reported feeling happy or good about their ability to read in French, 16% of students (3/18) reported feeling so-so about their abilities (Figure 12). The difference could be attributed to different students filling out the survey before and after the intervention. They were not all the same students as in the pre-study survey. I was surprised by these results because I was expecting an improvement in feelings of confidence when reading independently. Perhaps the peer-tutoring framework may have given students the idea that in order to read successfully, a peer tutor must be nearby.

![Figure 11. Students’ feelings towards ability to read by themselves in French.](image)
The bar graph (Figure 12) shows a slight decline in the students’ feelings towards the ability to read by themselves in French though I think the discrepancy is nominal due to the fact that two of the students surveyed were different in the pre and post study surveys. This was surprising to me because it was not consistent with what I observed in class during the reading sessions. Another possibility for this less positive feedback could be due to the fact that primary students were feeling more successful when they read with their peer tutor, as opposed to when they read alone. This would be understandable, given the peer-tutoring framework we had put in place for these reading interventions.

Question three of the survey (Appendix D) related to ease of reading in French independently (Figure 13): I can read all by myself. In the pre-study survey, 83% (15/18) primary students selected the happy face and 17% (3/18) indicated feeling so-so about being able to read independently. In the Post-study survey, the results were identical despite a slightly different batch of students. Results are depicted below in Figure 13.
The next group of questions related to feelings regarding reading with a friend or a big buddy. I chose to focus on question seven: I enjoy reading with a big buddy. In the pre-study survey, 72% of students (13/18) indicated they were happy to read with a big buddy. Only 11% (2/18) felt so-so about it and 17% (3/18) didn’t enjoy reading with their big buddies. In the post-study survey, 83% (15/18) reported enjoying their experience whilst 17% (3/18) felt so-so about it. None of the students circled the sad face in the post-survey study indicating that there was an overall increase in the enjoyment.
and social aspect of working with a peer tutor. Please refer to Figure 14.

![Pre-study and post survey - I enjoy reading with a big buddy](image)

*Figure 13. Question seven. Enjoyment of reading with a peer tutor.*

Finally, the last question I focused on was feelings of pride when reading to a friend or to a big buddy (Figure 15). In the Pre-study survey, 56% (10/18) of students reported feeling happy and proud when reading to their peer tutor, 22% (4/18) reported feeling so-so and 22% reported feeling sad or unhappy when reading to a friend or big buddy. In the Post-study survey, 61% (11/18) reported feeling happy and proud, 33% (6/18) reported feeling so-so and 6% (1/18) circled the sad face when asked about feeling proud reading to his big buddy. Although I was hoping to see more of an increase in student reactions to feeling proud and happy when reading to a big buddy, there was an overall
increase in all areas and a significant decrease with three less students who chose sad faces. Please refer to Figure 15.

Figure 14. Question ten. Feeling proud when reading to a peer tutor.

I was most interested in the reading assessment results. Before commencing the peer reading interventions, all primary students’ reading levels were benchmarked using GB+ levelling system. From my experience, Grade 1 students typically increase one reading level every two months depending on the time of the school year. Improvements generally accelerate the second half of the school year. By the end of June, our goal is to have students reading in French in the level 5-7 range. Figure 16 shows the Grade 1 Pre and Post intervention reading levels. Every student increased his or her reading level except for Student I. It is fairly evident which students have reading difficulties.
Students B, D, I and J (Figure 16) all received extra learning support in the form of guided reading four times a week. Student B, D, and J all increased by one level, which is good progress. I would like to note that I was paying particular attention to these students during the different cycles. I noticed their confidence levels increase and a definite improvement in engagement and self-motivation. They definitely benefitted from the peer-tutoring program. Evidently, some students, notably Students C, E, F, H and K increased more than two reading levels, which is quite remarkable for such a short period of time. In other words, 91% of Grade 1 students increased their reading level by at least one level. Forty five percent of these students increased their reading levels by at least two levels. Student H increased by five levels, far exceeding my expectations.

Figure 15. Grade 1 Pre and Post intervention reading levels.

Figure 17 shows the same data for the Grade 2 students. In terms of reading level goals, at this time of year (January) we would expect students to be reading in the level 9-
11 range. By the end of June, we hope that students are in the level 12-14 range. As one can see, 89% of students are currently meeting expectations. Eighty-nine percent (8/9) second graders increased by at least one reading level during this intervention. Only one student, Student M, maintained the same reading level. Seventy-eight percent of students increased by more than two reading levels. The highest increase range can be observed with Students L, M, and T who all increased by three reading levels. Student R, a struggling reader, increased by one level. I was hoping to see more of an increase but suspect that this student will require more time and individualized practice. An increase in confidence and motivation was observed during field notes and in my researcher journal. Student R always greeted his buddy with a hug and a smile. He was always willing to do his best and was proud of his achievements.

Figure 16. Grade 2 Pre and Post intervention reading levels.
Following the five-week intervention, I conducted a short focus group with seven of the intermediate peer students who had consent. Their classroom teacher chose the participants by drawing names from those who had consent. All seven students were willing to come spend their lunch with me in my classroom to discuss the following questions.

**Researcher:** *Do you feel your little buddy benefited from the repeated readings with you and the “just right reading” sessions?*

**Probe:** *Did your little buddy improve in any way?*

**Students:**

- *Yes, mine did, overall. Sometimes he rushed a little bit though.*

- *Same with mine. He did improve.*

- *I observed that the number of words went up and the number of errors went down each time.*

**Researcher:** *So you noticed a trend then?*

*(All students are nodding in agreement).*

**Students:**

- *Yes, our buddies improved in their reading.*

- *Yes, but mine got distracted by fidget toys sometimes.*

- *Yes, it helped and she got a little bit better every time she read.*
-My buddy had a little more trouble reading the small books – I guess the words were smaller and they were new words. He did better when he practiced the one-minute readings.

-My buddy slowed down when he was reading the little books too, she was less happy because it was harder.

-When she read little books, she read slowly and there were hard words. We didn’t practice them like we did with the repeated reading.

**Researcher:** Would you say your little buddy enjoyed himself/herself during your reading sessions?

**Probe:** How can you tell?

-My little buddy paid less attention and got more distracted when we read little books.

-Mine was better at reading the little books because the levels were easier.

-Sometimes the kids were competitive after the one-minute reading and they all wanted to compare their total number of words read. Sometimes my buddy was super happy and sometimes she was sad because she didn’t get the number she wanted.

-Mine was happy generally, but sometimes she got upset if her results were not amazing. I encouraged my buddy when she got down.

-My buddy was sometimes unfocused but usually happy to read with me.

-Mine was happy most of the time, but she read with a little voice if she couldn’t read a word properly.
Researcher: Did you see an improvement in his or her reading skills?

Probe: Did you notice an improvement in the reading fluency? Comprehension?

-Yes, definitely with fluency and the amount of words he could read in a minute.

(They all nodded yes).

Researcher: How would you describe your little buddy’s confidence level at the beginning of the study? How would you describe his/her confidence level at the end of the study?

Probe: Would you have an explanation as to why?

-At the beginning, my buddy was more confident, she stood up tall and towards the end of the sessions, she got upset about her scores sometimes.

-Mine was more confident at the end but she was affected by her number of words.

-My buddy was fine all the way through but I noticed that he was distracted when I would underline a word that he read wrong. Then he would try to reread that part and I had to check it off that he got it. He was watching my pen.

-Yeah, mine would watch too and she read slower when I underlined errors.

Researcher: How did you feel about being a big buddy?

Probe: Do you feel you benefitted in any way? If so, how? Were there any drawbacks? Please explain?

(They all nodded and enthusiastically said YES)
-I love being a big buddy! I love helping little kids and making things better for them and helping them learn.

-I love being a big buddy – I love seeing her learn and improve. I liked doing the one-minute reading; I thought that was fun. It was neat seeing what she did and how she improved and that I could help.

-I liked being with my little buddy but it was difficult because there was a lot of them in the room and sometimes it was difficult because it was noisy. I’d say it was a good experience. I feel more comfortable, better around little kids.

-I like helping kids learn, it was really fun helping her get more words right.

-I feel better now, when she was learning and improving, I felt happy, like I did a good job and I was happy for her. It felt good when she was doing well.

Researcher: Were there any drawbacks?

-I sometimes get upset if we have to do something and my buddy is not listening or following instructions. It’s stressful.

-Yeah, it was annoying that she was so focused on the timer too.

-Sometimes I was distracted by other groups.

Researcher: Would you be willing to help a little buddy with a similar program again in the future?

(All students nodded and responded with a YES)

Probe: Why or why not?
-Yeah, but it might be hard to do it after school because I’m busy.

-Yeah, I would do it again!

-Yes, it was fun.

Overall, the results from my quantitative and qualitative sources show positive responses to the peer-tutoring method used to implement two reading interventions. My action research cycles focused on the natural cycles of implementation during the course of the five-week peer-tutoring intervention. During week one, my research focused on the preparation required in order to implement these reading strategies. Cycle two focused on appropriate training of tutors to ensure successful interactions and implementation of reading interventions. Cycle three examined the first weeks of the peer-tutoring and cycles four and five focused on the four remaining weeks of the intervention. Cycle six explored and analyzed the data a little further, especially by comparing before and after results.

By referring to my researcher journal, my field notes, weekly results from the one-minute reading intervention, as well as comparing pre and post intervention reading levels, and finally, by referring to the data derived from the focus group, I was able to draw conclusions on my ability to implement a peer-tutoring program to improve reading skills with French immersion primary students. In the last chapter, I will discuss my conclusions from the study and suggest recommendations for any teachers who would like to implement such interventions to help improve reading outcomes with primary French immersion students.
CHAPTER 5 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In Chapters 1 and 2, I discussed the importance of providing effective, research based interventions on a Tier 1 level to retain as many struggling students in French immersion as possible because research indicates that with proper support and differentiated instruction, all students can benefit from a French immersion education as long as they are happy to be in the environment (Bruck, 1978, Genesee, 2008; Sauvé, 2007). This research also confirms that students learn at the same rate as they would in their first language. Thanks to recent studies, we also know that students transfer knowledge and skills from one language to another, known as cross-linguistic transfer (Genesee & Jared, 2008; Harper, 2010; Sauvé, 2007). Parents and teachers can rest assured that learning a second language will not jeopardize the first language, in fact, this phenomenon is known as additive bilingualism benefiting a child by enhancing student learning and cognitive development (Bourgoin, 2014; Genesee & Jared, 2008; Sauvé, 2007; Wise & Chen, 2015; Wiss, 1989).

I also discussed the importance of being proactive in putting appropriate models in place for struggling students due to possible budget cutbacks. Although the BC government is currently increasing funding for education for the next school year, it is important to keep this possibility in mind due to historical occurrences (BCTF, 2016).

French immersion. As a French immersion Learning Support Teacher, I felt it was important to research the suitability of French immersion as an appropriate choice for struggling students since this is a recurring question I receive from parents and is an ongoing debate with colleagues. In addition, with French immersion’s growing popularity as an education choice for parents (Canadian Parents for French, 2015),
students in the French immersion program are more and more diverse (Bourgoin, 2014; Sauvé, 2007; Wise & Chen, 2015).

This raises questions of suitability leaving some parents and educators unsure about best practice when supporting struggling students in FI (Wise & Chen, 2015). In fact, this is the reason why I started my Master’s program in Special Education. I can state with fidelity that based on current research, learning in a second language is beneficial to diverse learners and does not affect the development of a child’s first language (Cummins, 1984; de Courcy, 2002 as cited in Sauvé, 2007). The last 40 years of Canadian research has demonstrated that an immersion education enhances academic abilities despite learning difficulties (Genesee & Jared, 2008). By analyzing the data from provincial assessments in Ontario, researchers confirmed that FI students reached parity with their English only peers within two years of English language instruction and that by Grade 6, most Canadian FI students surpassed their English only peers in reading and math tests (Bourgoin, 2014; Genesee, 1987; Genesee & Jared, 2008; Lapkin et al., 2003; Sauvé, 2007; Swain & Lapkin, 1982). We can conclude that all students have a place in French immersion.

Method

The reflective and cyclical nature of action research was a valuable method for investigating and exploring new ways of increasing Tier 1 reading skills of primary French immersion students. This narrative, reflective process followed cycles of inquiry consisting of planning, acting (implementing plans), observing and reflecting then making decisions (plans) for the next cycle through various phases (Cohen et al., 2003). This process allowed me to reflect on the impact of chosen teaching strategies and
interventions on my students’ reading skills. By implementing such a program, I observed, first-hand, the effectiveness of peer tutoring using levelled texts with specific reading strategies and prompts as well as peer tutoring using Precision reading™ a one-minute repeated reading intervention program developed by Freeze (2002).

The study was centered on my knowledge creation with the goal of improving my professional practice. My goal was to improve my effectiveness as a learning support teacher and to strengthen the provision of quality literacy support in my school by exploring the following research question: *How can I implement a peer tutoring program to support reading development of struggling Grade 1 and 2 French immersion students?*

I enjoyed this process greatly, as this gave me the opportunity to research an area that means a lot to me both personally and professionally.

**Limitations**

It is important to consider the limitations of this action research. These findings are not generalizable due to the fact that I worked with a specific group of students and the project was centred on my personal knowledge creation. The findings are limited to my experience with this specific group of students. Teachers wishing to implement similar interventions would have to adapt, as the process would undoubtedly unfold differently in different scenarios with different student populations.

**Discussion and Recommendations**

Based on the conclusions and experiences during my study, there are some recommendations I can make for other educators who may be interested in implementing peer-tutoring and the two reading interventions I selected during the course of my study. Analyzing the findings from Chapter 4 helped uncover emerging themes as well as
important considerations and recommendations for the implementation of a successful peer tutoring reading intervention program for students with reading difficulties in a FI classroom. My recommendations are based on my professional experiences as a teacher and reflect my learning and knowledge gained during this particular study. Results may vary due to many factors; however, I can offer these suggestions to any colleagues who may be interested in implementing such strategies in their primary classrooms.

Peer tutoring. Numerous studies have confirmed the benefits of peer tutoring (Bournot-Trites, 2008; Burns, 2006; Ezell, Kohler & Strain, 1994; Topping et al., 2016). Peer tutoring is an important collaboration between students where one student provides the other with individual instruction or assistance in actively acquiring skills or knowledge. In using peer tutoring to help improve reading skills, this method increases student exposure to reading and communicating in their second language. This is particularly meaningful since student exposure to French reading and communication is generally minimal after school hours for FI students (Genesee, 1981b; Romney et al., 1995 as cited in Genesee & Jared, 2008, p. 141). A positive side effect of this type of collaboration includes non-academic gains as well. Students develop confidence, a sense of academic efficacy and they improve social and communication skills (Burns, 2006; Topping et al., 2016). This method relies heavily on social interactions and depends on the diversity of learners. Most importantly, peer tutoring is a high order strategy for promoting inclusive education (Burge et al., 2008; Carter and Hughes, as cited in Cobb, 2015).

In this research, I set out to learn how to implement a cross-age peer-tutoring methodology by providing students with opportunities to learn by teaching, and to receive
individualized feedback on a consistent basis to improve their French reading skills. This allowed me to differentiate materials and strategies to meet the varying needs of our primary learners. Peer tutoring allowed me to challenge high functioning students at their zone of proximal development just as it allowed me to scaffold and differentiate material and reading strategies to target the needs of struggling students (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005; Moore, 2016). After all, learning to read is one of the most important skills and it can be improved with practice and feedback (Allington, 2001; Allington, 2007; Therrien, 2004; Topping et al., 2016).

My aim through this action research was to improve my effectiveness as a learning support teacher and to strengthen the provision of quality literacy support in my school. I wanted to find cost effective ways of providing support for struggling readers in primary French immersion in an inclusive way. Additionally, my hope is to influence parents, teachers, school staff and administration. Primary students were observed interacting positively with their peer tutor, in their second language. I do feel that my goal in implementing a peer-tutoring framework was met because 95% of the primary students who participated in the study increased by at least one reading level over the course of the five-week intervention. In other words, 19 out of 20 students experienced an improvement in overall reading skills when assessed with the GB+ levelling system. This is significant improvement and I, along with the primary classroom teacher, am pleased with the reading results. These results corroborate with Bournot-Trite’s (2008) and Burn’s (2006) research that students not only improve reading skills, but also benefit from the social process and gain confidence as well. Regarding students with learning
challenges, this is an appropriate research based intervention that can help to improve reading skills (Bournot-Trites, 2008; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005; Topping et al., 2016).

**One-minute repeated readings with peer tutors.** This research-based intervention, also known as Precision Reading (Freeze, 2002), contributed to significant increases in French reading levels for all primary students by providing that one-on-one experience students may require. Students were highly engaged and motivated by monitoring their daily progress in the form of a graph (Appendix C). Based on my observations, I would say that primary students were motivated by internal and social positive reinforcement from their peer tutors. Every student experienced increases in total words per minute and decreases in error rates (Figures 16 & 17). However, the struggling students did not appear to increase their reading levels to the same degree as the other students, indicating that further interventions and supports are still required for these students (Allington, 2009).

With that in mind, all but one of the struggling students increased their reading level by at least one level, which in my experience is typical for Grade 1. The other students experienced atypical progress – increasing by *more* than one reading level during a five-week period. The same types of results were observed with second grade students, however, their increases were not quite as high, relatively speaking.

A struggling second grade student, Student R, as discussed in Chapter 4 (Figure 7), tripled his words per minute and reduced his error rate by 11% in the first week alone of the intervention. The fourth week of the intervention, Student R (Figure 11), doubled his words per minute and had no errors, although I wonder if that’s an accurate account or if the tutor was protecting the student from disappointment.
During the focus group discussion, tutors indicated to me that their little buddies were sometimes disappointed in their results. This made me wonder if tutors turned a blind eye to errors toward the end of the intervention. In general terms, based on my experiences, we typically expect first graders to increase one reading level every two months and second graders increase at a rate of one level per month. With the exception of one student who remained at the same reading level, all others moved up and 65% of students increased by more than two reading levels.

In effect, I would recommend this intervention as a whole class peer-tutoring activity. I would advise teachers to assess individual reading levels prior to commencing. The start-up involves formatting appropriately levelled texts and may be time consuming in the beginning (Freeze, 2002). The steps must be explicitly taught to students, especially to tutors (Topping et al., 2016). With the information I gathered, I believe that this intervention was quite motivating for tutors and tutees alike.

The data from this intervention indicated that all primary students experienced success by increasing their total words per minute while decreasing their error rates. Word automaticity increased as well as reading fluency. Research stresses the importance of developing reading fluency and accuracy; which directly affects text comprehension (Allington, 2001; Fountas & Pinnel, 1996; Topping et al., 2016). Alternatively, this intervention could be used for specific, struggling students rather than as a whole class activity. I would also recommend that teachers refer to Freeze’s (2002) books for further information.

**Levelled reading – books of choice with peer tutors.** This intervention was much less structured than the one-minute repeated reading intervention. Levelled reading
is a recommended strategy for reading improvement because the more students read at their “just right level” the more exposure they have to print and the more they improve their reading skills (Allington, 2001; Allington, 2009; Boushey & Moser, 2006; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). This particular intervention only started being implemented during week two because I wanted to make sure students were following proper procedures for the first intervention. I noticed that the noise volume increased in class when this intervention was occurring. Students were more distracted and wanted to move around the class to get different books. I had to set limits to minimize this distraction by asking students to select three books from their book boxes and to have them on hand before working with their peer tutors. I also had to remind students of using appropriate voice volumes by referring to a visual chart (Appendix P). This helped; however, I would recommend teachers to pick one intervention or the other. I would not attempt to implement both interventions in one session. The transition from one intervention to the other was not always smooth and efficient.

**Reading strategies.** In terms of the strategies cue card (Appendix O) for prompting students when encountering decoding or comprehension difficulties, I didn’t see students using them on a regular basis. I would often remind students to pull them out to refer to, but this did not increase its usage. In hindsight, I should have spent more time explicitly teaching each strategy to all students, or I could have asked the classroom teachers to pre-teach these strategies, one at a time (Boushey & Moser, 2006). I did rush that part because of a lack of time and I do believe this was a contributing factor. This is something I would definitely change the next time I implement this intervention.
**Time allotted for the intervention.** Another aspect I would change is the amount of time we spent together. These two classes came together four times a week for 20 minutes. I realize the teachers were being accommodating for my research but I think in reality, this is too much time to ask. A more realistic goal would be twice a week for 15-20 minutes. I do believe these interventions could be effectively implemented with less time, however, if a teacher chose to implement the one-minute reading intervention, doing so over the course of two weeks instead of one week might be more fruitful in seeing progress. In general, I cannot rely specifically on quantitative data to judge the value of this intervention, however, qualitative data would suggest that the interaction and positive feedback from a peer tutor benefits students.

**Relationship building.** My intent was to strengthen our Tier 1 reading support in a primary French immersion class by increasing the frequency of buddy visits and by adding two structured reading interventions. From the results of this study, it can be concluded that peer-tutoring can help improve reading skills with primary, French immersion students because it increases exposure to print, it provides individualized feedback, and the social rewards are motivating. Students experienced an increase in feelings of pride and happiness when reading with their big buddies. Additionally, all peer tutors from the focus group indicated that they definitely enjoyed their experience, they witnessed benefits to the intervention and they would do it again. Based on my first hand experience, I believe in the value of peer tutoring in French immersion classrooms as a first order inclusive methodology to help students improve their French reading skills, build confidence and strengthen relationships. I have witnessed the trust and camaraderie that have blossomed not only in class during our sessions, but outside in the
hallways and on the playground. Peer tutoring has definitely strengthened bonds and helped create attachment between students of varying ages (Bournot-Trites, 2008; Topping et al., 2016). Peer tutors have gracefully accepted their roles as leaders in this regard.

**Confidence in reading.** Another emerging theme from this research was confidence in reading abilities and the support given by tutors. Through student surveys, field note observations and research journal, I can conclude that student confidence in reading abilities did increase, though not as much I had expected. In fact, question one of the survey indicated a slight decrease with the following question: How do I feel about the ability to read French books on my own. Eighty-nine percent of students during week one said they felt happy while 11% said they felt so-so. At the close of the study, 83% selected “Happy” while 16% selected “So-so”. I can attribute this difference to the fact that there were two different students in the pre and post survey. When investigating whether students feel that reading is easy, pre and post intervention survey results were identical. Again, judging by the results of this survey, I cannot conclude that confidence in reading abilities increased, however, by judging my observations and field notes, I feel that their confidence in reading abilities was positively impacted. I admit that researcher bias exists and could be perceived as impacting my judgment in this situation, however, I was careful to be as objective as possible. In investigating enjoyment of reading with a big buddy, there was a definite increase indicated in the post-survey. There was an 11% increase in happiness, a 6% increase in feeling so-so, and 17% decrease in the sadness category. In the last question of the survey: I feel proud when I read to my big buddy, again, there was an 11% increase in feeling of happiness, an 11% increase in feeling so-
so and a 16% decrease in the sadness category. This data suggests that student happiness in reading with a tutor and willingness to read in French increased. It is very difficult to tease apart such criteria as confidence in reading, which is why I am relying heavily on researcher journal and field notes to make this judgment.

**Issues for Further Investigation**

Current research focusing on the subject of student attrition from FI is still lacking, explaining why most notable French immersion researchers such as Wise and Chen (2015) still refer to Bruck’s work from 1979. Studies dealing with reasons for switching out of immersion and providing preventative suggestions would strengthen the FI program and its provision of adequate support to struggling students.

As for peer-tutoring, it is one of the most frequently implemented formats of collaborative learning in schools today yet very few studies have specifically studied its effectiveness with intervention programs in the French immersion setting (Desrochers & Major, 2008). Current research proves that peer-tutoring models are positive and beneficial to all students involved, but more research is clearly needed in measuring how effective they are with varying reading abilities, specifically with students having severe reading problems or language impairments (Topping et al., 2016).

To my knowledge, there is no research on specific reading strategies such as repeated readings with students learning to read in a second language. Many of the studies I explored identified similar gaps in regards to best practices in French immersion reading intervention strategies and their impacts on struggling readers. A large portion of research so far has concentrated on the suitability of French immersion for struggling students and has confirmed that all students can participate in and benefit from second
language education (Bourgoin, 2014; Bruck, 1979; Genesee & Jared, 2008; Lapkin et al., 2003; Sauvé, 2007; Wise & Chen, 2015; Wiss, 1989). We also know that early intervention is key (Wiss, 1989), however FI educators need to learn more about research based best practices to help struggling students learn to read in French (Genesee & Jared, 2008). More research will help teachers plan appropriately for struggling FI students in an inclusive and differentiated way.

**Implications for my own teaching**

Armed with research, we know that with appropriate support and a willing attitude, all students can benefit from learning in a French immersion program (Bourgoin, 2014; Bruck, 1979; Cummins, 1984; Genesee, 1976; Genesee, 2007; Genesse & Jared, 2008; Lapkin, Hart & Turnbull, 2003; Sauvé, 2007). Through this action research project and from the research that I explored, I can confidently implement a peer tutoring framework to supplement a classroom reading program to help improve reading skills and confidence levels. Students learned how to follow the structured steps of the one-minute repeated reading intervention within one week. They learned that by practicing errors, and by rereading passages, reading fluency and the ability to read new words (automaticity) increased. Students also learned from each other, and encouraged one another. The social emotional benefits were difficult to assess and quantify, but my observations and student surveys indicated that all parties were benefitting from this intervention, in a variety of positive ways.

As a special education teacher, I cannot reach all struggling readers in my small groups nor can I address all the needs in the regular classroom due to limited time and resources. This action research study allowed me to investigate the possibility of helping
students on a Tier 1 level. Indeed, peer tutoring allowed all students and particularly, those who struggle, to benefit from individualized feedback during meaningful reading activities. Through this action research, I was able to explore my research question: *How can I implement a peer tutoring program to support reading development of struggling Grade 1 and 2 French immersion students?*

This process allowed me to reflect critically on my learning, my practice, and the influence this will have on others. I will certainly try peer-tutoring again using variations from what I have learned. I am not sure that I would allocate as much time for peer tutoring as I did because it was a stretch for the classroom teachers. As I share my findings with colleagues I will help them create their own peer tutoring programs if they are interested. As McNiff and Whitehead (2010) explain, action research is about how you can improve your learning and how this can influence the learning of other people. I aimed to triangulate that data from a number of sources as evidence to support my explanations and show a well-rounded perspective of the cycles in my study.

My report communicates my overall experience during my action research. I followed the cycles of inquiry in which I planned, acted upon these plans, reflected and repeated the process, which was beneficial to my own learning and has influenced my professional actions (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). Through my observations and the data gathered, I have gained new insights into creating more support for struggling readers in French immersion. Due to the history of budget cuts to services directly helping struggling students, educators need to find creative ways to support our most vulnerable student population.
Every year, parents want to meet with me, as their child’s learning support teacher, to discuss whether to leave their child in French immersion or to move him or her to the English stream. This has always caused me much anguish, because I just didn’t know the right answer. Thanks to action research, and in particular, to the literature review, I was able to formulate a strong stand supported by evidence-based research. Indeed, French immersion can benefit all learners (Bourgoin, 2014; Genesee & Jared, 2008; Sauvé, 2007; Wise & Chen, 2015; Wiss, 1989). Learning a second language will not negatively impact their first language. I feel confident, armed with this knowledge, that I can help parents make the right decision for their child. I also feel like I can influence and help teachers meet the needs of their diverse students by accepting an inclusive mindset, by getting to know their students and by differentiating instruction (Katz, 2013; Moore, 2016).

An action research project of this kind places focus on naturalistic teacher inquiry. The project took place during the school day, for a short amount of time four days a week, over the course of five weeks. This study may benefit teachers who wish to implement a similar peer-tutoring program in their practice. Additionally, this study suggests the value in further research in the field of struggling readers in French immersion.

Conclusion

Through this action research project, I was able to explore effective strategies and interventions educators can implement in order support struggling students in French immersion. I selected two effective research based reading interventions to help all students increase their reading skills in primary French Immersion through a peer-
tutoring framework. This experience was professionally enriching, as I was able to reflect and make adjustments as I gained knowledge and as my students learned as well. Keeping in mind that the results of my study are specific to my group of students and to my experiences, I would encourage French immersion educators to expand their repertoire of effective teaching practices and to explore the value of peer-tutoring in a variety of ways to improve student skills and confidence. The reading interventions I selected were effective and I would advise any educator to make the necessary adjustments to fit the needs of their classroom. My research may help contribute to informing the practice of other FI educators and to unlocking the world of written text for many struggling students by providing that one-on-one experience students may require.

Based on research and my experiences through action research, it is safe to conclude that struggling readers have a place in French immersion if they want to continue learning in French and as long as appropriate support services are available (Bourgoin, 2014; Bournot-Trites, 2008; Genesee, 2007; Genesee & Jared, 2008; Mannavarayan, 2002; Sauvé, 2007). FI educators have a responsibility in continuing to explore research based evidence and best practices in order to provide struggling readers with the most effective instruction in an inclusive way.
REFERENCES


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http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/administration/legislation-policy/public-schools/special-education


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http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/151119/dq151119d-eng.htm


APPENDIX A RESEARCHER JOURNAL

Date: __________________________

Observations of facts, events, behaviours:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical setting:</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human setting:</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interactional setting:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program setting:</th>
<th></th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Student voice:
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
Self-reflection

What I did:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Why I did it:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

What I learned from what I did:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

The significance of my learning:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
# APPENDIX B SAMPLE OF COMMERCIAL GB+ READING BENCHMARK

## Fiche d’appréciation du rendement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nom:</th>
<th>Date de naissance:</th>
<th>Age:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>École:</td>
<td>Niveau scolaire:</td>
<td>Date de l'évaluation:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Texte: Les plants de haricots | Niveau: | Genre: Texte narratif | Nbr. de mots: 146 |

### Observation individualisée - Sommaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compréhension littérale</th>
<th>Assimilation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taux de précision:</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niveau de lecture:</td>
<td>Facile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taux d'assimilation:</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Comportements de lecture observés - Sommaire

1. Connaissances et compétences - Lecture débutant
   - Consulter les conventions de l'écriture.
   - Reconnaître les mots fréquents dans le texte.
   - Utiliser sa connaissance des relations entre les lettres et les sons pour élaborer des mots avec justesse.

2. Connaissances et compétences - Lecture débutant
   - Utiliser les stratégies de lecture suivantes pour élaborer le texte:
     - Prédictions
     - Recherche d'indices dans le texte
     - Associations de mots
     - Reconnaître

3. Compréhension - Lecture débutant
   - Lire le texte avec un débit et une intonation naturelles qui reflètent une bonne compréhension.
   - Lire le texte avec le débit et les intonations naturelles qui reflètent une bonne compréhension.
   - Lire le texte avec des intonations inhabituelles qui reflètent une compréhension limitée.
   - Lire le texte à un débit d'une façon qui ménage une compréhension lisible ou une absence de compréhension.

### Indicateurs du rappel du texte - Sommaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date de l'évaluation:</th>
<th>Date de l'évaluation:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Recommandations

1. Analyse du rappel du texte
   - Rétro-écrire les principaux faits de l'histoire, sans assistance et sans l'aide du livre.
   - Inclure des détails qui ne sont pas les principaux faits.
   - Intégrer l'information visuelle.
   - Rétro-écrire l'histoire de façon cohérente en utilisant le vocabulaire approprié.

### Questions de vérification de la compréhension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compréhension littérale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Quel est le but de la petite poule?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Qu'est-ce que Justin a vu dans le jardin?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Qu'est-ce que Justin a vu dans le jardin?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Compréhension déductive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compréhension déductive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Qu'est-ce que Justin a vu dans le jardin?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Qu'est-ce que Justin a vu dans le jardin?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Commentaires

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beauchemin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Fiche d'observation individualisée

| Texte: Les plants de haricots | Niveau: 8 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Texte</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>1. La petite poule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. La petite poule</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Justin aime aider sa maman dans le jardin.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Justin, dit maman, voici des graines de haricots pour ton jardin.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Une petite poule entre dans le jardin.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Je vais les mettre dans le jardin.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Justin dit: - Je vais les mettre dans le jardin.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Observation individualisée (suite)

| Nbre de mots: 146 |

### Comportements de lecture observés au cours de l'observation individualisée

1. Connaissances et compétences - Lecture débutant
   - Consulter les conventions de l'écriture.
   - Reconnaître les mots fréquents dans le texte.
   - Utiliser sa connaissance des relations entre les lettres et les sons pour élaborer des mots avec justesse.

2. Connaissances et compétences - Lecture débutant
   - Utiliser les stratégies de lecture suivantes pour élaborer le texte:
     - Prédictions
     - Recherche d'indices dans le texte
     - Associations de mots
     - Reconnaître

3. Connaissances et compétences - Lecture débutant
   - Lire le texte avec un débit et une intonation naturelles qui reflètent une bonne compréhension.
   - Lire le texte avec des intonations inhabituelles qui reflètent une compréhension limitée.
   - Lire le texte à un débit d'une façon qui ménage une compréhension lisible ou une absence de compréhension.
Appendix C

Sample of reading information graphs in individual student duotang and error words form
APPENDIX D PRE-STUDY SURVEY FOR TUTEES

Please circle the face that best represents you.

1. How do I feel about my ability to read French books on my own?
   - 😊
   - 😐
   - 😞

2. I think reading is fun.
   - 😊
   - 😐
   - 😞

3. I think reading is easy.
   - 😊
   - 😐
   - 😞

4. I can read all by myself.
5. I choose to read if I have free time in class.

6. I enjoy reading or looking at books with a friend.

7. I enjoy reading with a big buddy.
8. I learn new tricks that help me read better when I read with my big buddy.

9. When I'm at home, I read:

   - All the time
   - Some of the time
   - Never

10. I am proud of myself when I read a French book to a friend or to my big buddy.
Appendix E

Post-Study Survey for tutees

Please circle the face that best represents you.

1. How do I feel about my ability to read French books on my own?

2. I think reading is fun.

3. I think reading is easy.
4. I can read all by myself.

5. I choose to read if I have free time in class.

6. I enjoy reading or looking at books with a friend.

7. I enjoy reading with a big buddy.
8. I learn new tricks that help me read better when I read with my big buddy.

9. When I’m at home, I read:

All the time  some of the time  never

10. I am proud of myself when I read a French book to a friend or to my big buddy.
APPENDIX F FOCUS GROUP FOR INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS (TUTORS)

Guiding Questions

Participants: 6-7 intermediate students (tutors)
Moderator: Michelle Mowbray
Assistant Moderator: [Name Redacted] Grade 1-2 teacher—will help take notes & Ipad audio recording

Time allotted: 35 minutes

Introduction

Good afternoon. Thank you for attending this group today. A focus group is a relaxed discussion so that we can learn how you feel about your experiences as big buddies and your observations and feelings throughout the 5 week reading experience. [Name Redacted] will be taking notes today. Everything you say today will be confidential, that means that no one will know who said what. I want this to be a group discussion, so feel free to respond to me and to other members in the group without waiting to be called on. However, I would appreciate it if only one person did talk at a time.

You all know each other so let’s begin.

Interview

Question: Do you feel your little buddy benefitted from the repeated readings with you and the “just right reading” sessions?
Probes: If so, why? If not, why? What did you notice?

Question: Would you say your little buddy enjoyed himself/herself during your reading sessions?
Probes: How can you tell?
Question: Did you see an improvement in his or her reading skills?
Probe: Did you notice an improvement in the reading fluency? Comprehension?

Question: How would you describe your little buddy’s confidence level at the beginning of the study? How would you describe his/her confidence level at the end of the study?
Probe: Would you have an explanation as to why?

Question: How did you feel about being a big buddy?
Probe: Do you feel you benefitted in any way? If so, how? Where there any drawbacks? Please explain?

Question: Would you be willing to help a little buddy with a similar program again in the future?
Probe: Why or why not?

Closure
Provide a recap of the discussion and general trends.
Is there any other information regarding your experience with or following the workshops that you think would be useful for me to know?

Thank you very much for coming this afternoon. Your time is very much appreciated and your comments have been very helpful.
APPENDIX G ACCESS LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Superintendent

DATE, 2016

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I am a registered Master’s student in the Department of Special Education at Vancouver Island University. My supervisor is Ana Vieira.

The proposed topic of my research is “Peer tutoring reading interventions for students with reading difficulties in a French Immersion classroom.” The objectives of this action research are:

(a) To learn how I can implement a cross-age peer-tutoring framework to help all students, specifically those who struggle with their French reading skills.

(b) To experience the effects of two different reading interventions that peer tutors will learn how to use. I will teach students to use a one-minute repeated reading program followed by an interest driven “just right” reading session.
I am hereby seeking your consent to ask parents or guardians and students of 2 classes; one primary class and one intermediate class, to give consent and assent to participate in my 5 week study. As an extension of our “big buddy” program, these 2 classes will get together 4 times a week for 15 minutes daily to carry out the above reading interventions. To assist you in reaching a decision, I have attached to this letter:

(a) A copy of an ethical clearance certificate issued by the University  
(b) A copy of the research instruments which I intend to use in my research

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact my supervisor or me. Our contact details are as follows:

Michelle Mowbray  
Master’s student at VIU

Ana Vieira  
Faculty advisor at VIU

Upon completion of the study, I undertake to provide you with a copy of the thesis paper.

Your permission to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated.
Yours sincerely,

Michelle Mowbray  
Learning Support Teacher
Dear Families,

As a primary learning support teacher, part of my role is to support all students in the primary grades, especially those students struggling with literacy skills. Soon, I will be commencing a special project with grade ½ class and Grade 4/5 class as an extension of the buddy class system we foster in our school.

I am currently working towards my Master of Education in Special Education degree through Vancouver Island University. As part of my program, I have designed a research project to study how I can best support all student’s growth in their French reading skills by having older students paired with younger ones and having them follow a structured reading method four times a week, every day for 15 minutes for a period of 5 weeks. This framework allows each student to work at his or her own reading level and to receive direct feedback from his or her peer tutor. Research indicates that younger students will likely benefit from a structured peer tutoring system with positive social, emotional and academic gains. The older peer tutors stand to benefit from this method as well by boosting their confidence, leadership skills and reading strategies as well.

At the beginning of the study, all Grade 1-2 students will be asked to fill out a short survey about their feelings in regards to their reading abilities, their confidence with books, their willingness to read as well as the overall enjoyment of reading with a big buddy. Questions will be read aloud and students will simply circle the face that best describes their feelings. At the end of the study, primary students will be asked to fill out the same survey.
As per our usual assessment practices, each of the younger students will be assessed for their current reading level/skills before and again at the end of the study. Throughout the study, I will be using self-reflective journals to collect observational data. During this time, your child will not be asked to do anything out of the ordinary, as this will be part of the regular routine in the classroom. Grade 4-5 students will be given a short training class prior to the study and then they will be invited to meet with me following the study to share their thoughts and observations about the peer-tutoring experience. If you agree to let your child participate in the study, you would be allowing me to use information that your child provides through their work, behavior and verbal dialogue, for my final thesis paper. To help maintain confidentiality, I will identify participants by student 1, student 2 etc. instead of their name. I will not include details that will directly identity any of the students nor will I mention if I work with them in a learning support context.

Your child’s participation in this study is completely voluntary, however, regardless of consent, your child will be participating in these reading activities. Your consent gives me the ability to use the data in my research paper. Besides the focus group meeting for older students at the end of the study, students will not be asked to do anything out of the ordinary, regardless of consent. The focus of the study is on myself, as well as my own effectiveness as a French immersion learning support teacher. I will make every effort not to disclose the identity of participants in the products of this research however; participants may be indirectly identifiable by the quotes or by the contextual information I use in the research products. Your consent allows me to use any information I may have learned from your child’s experience. This is entirely voluntary and there will be no negative consequences if you choose not to give me permission to use the data collected from this intervention study. I will not know, except in the case of the focus group at the end of the 5-week reading intervention study, who is participating in the research until the completion of the 5-week intervention.

I’m inviting you all to a short information session on (date) in our school library. The session will last approximately 15 minutes. Following the session, you are welcome to fill out the consent form and put it in the sealed envelope provided. You may hand this in directly to the school office where they will be kept in a locked filing cabinet until the completion of the 5-week study. You may also hand in the consent forms to your child’s classroom teacher until the end of this week. The classroom teacher will forward it directly to the office to add to the locked filing cabinet in the principal’s office. You will be provided with a copy of the consent form for your records. If you have any questions or concerns at any point in time, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,
Michelle Mowbray
Primary learning support teacher

Please contact the VIU Research Ethics Board at (250) 740-6631 or reb@viu.ca for more information.
Dear families,

Thank you all for taking the time to come meet with me today. I truly appreciate it.

As some of you may know, I’m Michelle Mowbray, the primary learning support teacher here at [Redacted]. My role here primarily consists of supporting struggling students from kindergarten to Grade 3 in and out of the classroom.

As my recruitment letter indicated, I’m currently working towards my Master of Education in Special Education degree through Vancouver Island University. As part of my program, I have designed a research project to study how I can best support all student’s growth in their French reading skills by having [Redacted] Grade 4-5 students paired with [Redacted] Grade 1-2 students and having them follow a structured reading method four times a week, every day for 15 minutes for a period of 5 weeks. This framework allows all students to work at his or her own reading level and to receive direct feedback from his or her peer tutor. Research indicates that younger students will likely benefit from a structured peer tutoring system with positive social, emotional and academic gains. The older peer tutors stand to benefit from this method as well by boosting their confidence, leadership skills and reading strategies as well.

Prior to the study, Grade 1-2 students will fill out a short paper survey to indicate to me how they see themselves as French readers. This is an example (smart board). Questions will be read aloud to them and they will select the face that best represents their feelings. Grade 4-5 students will be given a training session in class on the proper steps to follow during the reading sessions.

Following the 5-week study, Grade 1-2 students will fill out the same survey. Grade 4-5 students will then be invited to meet with me for a 35-minute discussion to share their thoughts and observations about their experience during the study. (at lunch time?)

Basically, students will be paired with the same partner for the duration of the study. Students will practice “repeated readings”, which is based on a book called “Precision Reading” by Dr. Rick Freeze. Each Grade 1-2 student will be given a duotang containing a French leveled text (a copy for the tutor as well), and a graph to track progress. The Grade 1-2 student will read for the duration of 1 minute while the tutor underlines any errors on his/her personal copy. At the end of the minute, the tutor will stop the student and will note the number of words read correctly in one minute by charting it on the graph as well as counting the numbers of errors. The same text will
be read over the course of the week (using different colored pencil crayons) and the progress will be evident on the graph. Progress will be celebrated. Errors will be practiced before the one-minute reading session. The student will receive a new text the following week.

The remainder of the reading session will consist of the younger student picking a “just right” book from his or her book bag. The Grade 5 tutor will have a list of reading prompts to use in the event of any reading difficulties. He or she will also follow up with some comprehension questions to help the younger child synthesize the text.

As per our usual assessment practices, each of the younger students will be assessed for their current reading level/skills before and again at the end of the study. Throughout the study, I will be using self-reflective journals to collect observational data. During this time, your child will not be asked to do anything out of the ordinary, as this will be part of the regular routine in the classroom. Grade 4-5 students will be given a short training class prior to the study and then they will be invited to meet with me following the study to share their thoughts and observations about the peer-tutoring experience. If you agree to let your child participate in the study, you would be allowing me to use information that your child provides through their work, behavior and verbal dialogue, for my final thesis paper. To help maintain confidentiality, I will identify participants by student 1, student 2 etc. instead of their name. I will not include details that will directly identity any of the students nor will I mention if I work with them in a learning support context.

Your child’s participation in this study is completely voluntary. Besides the focus group meeting for older students at the end of the study, students will not be asked to do anything out of the ordinary, regardless of consent. The focus of the study is on myself, as well as my own effectiveness as a French immersion learning support teacher. I will not know, except in the case of the focus group at the end of the 5-week reading intervention study, who is participating in the research until the completion of the 5-week intervention. I will not open the letters of consent until the 5-week reading intervention implementation has been completed.

I’m inviting you now to please take a letter of consent. You may sign it now, put it in the sealed envelope provided and hand it in to the school office which will be kept in a locked cabinet in the principal’s office until the end of the study, at which point I will open the letters and find out which students are participating in the study and which information I can use for my thesis. I am also providing you all with a copy of the letter of consent for your reference. Alternatively, you may hand the signed consent forms in to your child’s classroom teacher by the end of the week. She will then hand it to the principal and it will be added to the locked cabinet.

Does anyone have any questions or concerns? Remember, you can withdraw your consent at any point in time before the end of the 5-week reading intervention study. You child will participate in the 5-week buddy reading intervention regardless of parents/guardian consent, as this will be part of the regular classroom activities. However, your consent will give me the ability to use information like my observations of students, their potential progress, their survey results etc. as part of my final thesis paper. I will make every effort not to disclose the identity of participants in
the products of this research however; participants may be indirectly identifiable by the quotes or by the contextual information I use in the research products. Your consent allows me to use any information I may have learned from your child’s experience. This is entirely voluntary and there will be no negative consequences if you choose not to give me permission to use the data collected from this intervention study. Grade 4/5 students are also asked to fill out an assent form, which allows me to use their data in my research study.

Thank you all for taking the time to meet with me today.
APPENDIX J SAMPLE OF FORMATTED PASSAGE.

Mon village.

Voici mon village. Mon village s’appelle Comox.

Voici ma maison.

Ma famille est dans ma maison.

Voici mon école.

J’aime jouer dans le gymnase.

Voici mon parc.
APPENDIX K RESEARCH CONSENT FORM FOR
PARENTS/GUARDIANS OF PRIMARY STUDENTS

“Peer Tutoring Reading Interventions For Students with Reading Difficulties in a French Immersion Classroom”

Principal Investigator

Michelle Mowbray, Master’s student, Faculty of Education, Vancouver Island University and French Immersion Learning Support Teacher. Contact phone number: (250) 339-6864

Research Supervisor: Ana Vieira, PhD, Faculty of Education, (250) 753-3245 Ext. 3565

Purpose of the study

Dear parents/guardians,

In addition to being the primary learning support teacher at Ecole Robb Road, I am also a graduate student in the Master of Special Education Program at Vancouver Island University in Nanaimo. As part of the requirements of my Master of Education in Special Education, I am conducting a study to explore the use of peer tutoring as a way to support struggling readers in French immersion. I am interested in finding out how I can implement a program so that Grade 1-2 students can benefit from reading with their Grade 4-5 buddies in a structured way.

In my research, I have become interested in finding meaningful, research based strategies that fit a student’s reading level and increases at their own pace. Research has demonstrated that repeated readings increase reading fluency and confidence. My goal would be to find out how the students feel about their reading abilities, their confidence and their willingness to read. I hope that implementing a peer-tutoring framework will be beneficial to all students, even to the tutors.
The results will be presented in my Master’s thesis and possibly during a workshop with my colleagues.

**Study procedures**

At the beginning of the study, Grade 1-2 students will fill out a short paper survey indicating their feelings about their reading abilities, their confidence and their willingness to read in French. Questions will be read aloud to them and they will select the face that best represents their feelings. They will be then asked to fill out the same survey at the end of the study, to note any differences in their feelings toward reading and the buddy experience. During a 5 week period, Grade 1-2 students will be paired with Grade 4-5 students and will meet 4 times a week for 15 minute sessions. During these sessions, tutees (primary students) will be asked to read a text for one minute. The tutor (intermediate students) will track the number of words read in a minute as well as the number of errors. The tutor will provide direct feedback and practice errors. They will then read a “just right” book from the child’s reading bag. The tutor will provide guidance and reading prompts, as instructed by a visual aide. The following day, the tutee will begin the session by practicing the previous day’s errors from the one-minute reading. Then, he/she will reread the same passage for one minute. The tutor will again track and chart the number of correct words per minute as well as errors. Students will repeat this sequence using the same text for up to 5 sessions in a row. Books read following the repeated reading will change from day to day, as long as they are an appropriate reading level.

Students’ reading levels will be assessed prior to the study and at the end of the study using the regular GB+ reading assessments. I will also keep a researcher journal and will note any observations pertaining to class participation, interest, motivation, confidence, and strategies tried. The activities outlined above will be part of the regular class routine and no additional activities are required for participation in the research, except for Grade 4-5 students, who will be invited to participate in a focus group at lunch time once the study is completed. During the focus group, I will initiate a conversation with students and get some feedback about their feelings and observations from the perspective of a tutor.

All students in this class will participate in this class peer reading activity for the 5-week duration regardless of parental or guardian consent. I am, however, asking for your consent to use the data from the 5-week reading intervention study. This includes the survey data, the observational data and the reading assessment data created in class. I will make every effort not to disclose the identity of participants in the products of this research however; participants may be indirectly identifiable by the quotes or by the contextual information I use in the research products. Your consent allows me to use any information I may have learned from your child’s experience. This is entirely voluntary and there will be no negative consequences if you choose not to give me permission to use the data collected from this intervention study. Please note you cannot withdraw consent from your child’s participation in this reading intervention, as it is a classroom activity. You may withdraw your consent for me to use data at any time before the end of the 5-
week reading intervention study for any reason without explanation and without penalty. There are no known harms associated with your child’s participation in this research. The potential benefits are that tutees (primary students) may experience a boost in their reading abilities or in their confidence and or enjoyment levels. Similarly, tutors may also experience confidence in their leadership role and consolidate reading strategies as they prompt their younger partners. I will not know who is participating in the research for data analysis purposes until the completion of the 5-week intervention.

All records of participation will be kept strictly confidential, such that only my supervisor and I will have access to the information. Data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet within the school’s office. I will not have access to the consent letters until the end of the 5-week reading intervention study. Data will be shredded approximately 2 years following the study by September 10th, 2019. Electronic files will also be deleted at that time. The results from this study will be reported in a written research report and an oral report possibly during a workshop for colleagues.

Contact information about the study:

If you have any questions or concerns about your child’s treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the VIU Research Ethics Board at (250) 740-6631 or by email at reb@viu.ca

If you have any questions about this research project, or would like more information, please feel free to contact me at the email addresses below:

Respectfully,

Michelle Mowbray

VIU Student Researcher

French Immersion Learning Support Teacher
I have read the above form, understand the information read, and understand that I can ask questions or withdraw at any time. I consent for my child to participate in today’s research study.

I consent for my child to being quoted in the products of the research in an unidentifiable way.

Yes          No

____________________
Child’s name

_________________________  __________________________
Parent/guardian signature    Date
APPENDIX L RESEARCH CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS OF INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS

“Peer Tutoring Reading Interventions For Students with Reading Difficulties in a French Immersion Classroom”

Principal Investigator

Michelle Mowbray, Master’s student, Faculty of Education, Vancouver Island University and French Immersion Learning Support Teacher at [redacted], contact phone number: [redacted].

Research Supervisor: Ana Vieira, PhD, Faculty of Education, (250) 753-3245 Ext. 3565

Purpose of the study

Dear parents/guardians,

In addition to being the primary learning support teacher at [redacted], I am also a graduate student in the Master of Special Education Program at Vancouver Island University in Nanaimo. As part of the requirements of my Master of Education in Special Education, I am conducting a study to explore the use of peer tutoring as a way to support struggling readers in French immersion. I am interested in finding out how I can implement a program so that Grade 1-2 students can benefit from reading with their Grade 4-5 buddies in a structured way.
In my research, I have become interested in finding meaningful, research based strategies that fit a student’s reading level and increases at their own pace. Research has demonstrated that repeated readings increase reading fluency and confidence. My goal would be to find out how the students feel about their reading abilities, their confidence and their willingness to read. I hope that implementing a peer-tutoring framework will be beneficial to all students, even to the tutors.

The results will be presented in my Master’s thesis and possibly during a workshop with my colleagues.

**Study procedures**

At the beginning of the study, Grade 1-2 students will fill out a short paper survey indicating their feelings about their reading abilities, their confidence and their willingness to read in French. Questions will be read aloud to them and they will select the face that best represents their feelings. They will be then asked to fill out the same survey at the end of the study, to note any differences in their feelings toward reading and the buddy experience. During a 5 week period, Grade 1-2 students will be paired with Grade 4-5 students and will meet 4 times a week for 15 minute sessions. During these sessions, tutees (primary students) will be asked to read a text for one minute. The tutor (intermediate students) will track the number of words read in a minute as well as the number of errors. The tutor will provide direct feedback and practice errors. They will then read a “just right” book from the child’s reading bag. The tutor will provide guidance and reading prompts, as instructed by a visual aide. The following day, the tutee will begin the session by practicing the previous day’s errors from the one-minute reading. Then, he/she will reread the same passage for one minute. The tutor will again track and chart the number of correct words per minute as well as errors.

Students will repeat this sequence using the same text for up to 5 sessions in a row. Books read following the repeated reading will change from day to day, as long as they are an appropriate reading level.

Students’ reading levels will be assessed prior to the study and at the end of the study using the regular GB+ reading assessments. I will also keep a researcher journal and will note any observations pertaining to class participation, interest, motivation, confidence, and strategies tried. The activities outlined above will be part of the regular class routine and no additional activities are required for participation in the research, except for Grade 4-5 students, who will be invited to participate in a focus group at lunch time once the study is completed. During the focus group, I will initiate a conversation with students.
and get some feedback about their feelings and observations from the perspective of a tutor. This discussion will be audio recorded for data analysis purposes and your consent is required.

All students in this class will participate in this class peer reading activity for the 5-week duration regardless of parental or guardian consent. I am, however, asking for your consent to use the data from the 5-week reading intervention study. This includes the observational data created in class as well as the focus group discussion. I will make every effort not to disclose the identity of participants in the products of this research however; participants may be indirectly identifiable by the quotes or by the contextual information I use in the research products. Your consent allows me to use any information I may have learned from your child’s experience. This is entirely voluntary and there will be no negative consequences if you choose not to give me permission to use the data collected from this intervention study. Please note, you cannot withdraw consent from your child’s participation in this reading intervention, as it is a classroom activity. You may withdraw your consent for me to use data at any time before the end of the 5-week reading intervention study for any reason without explanation and without penalty. There are no known harms associated with your child’s participation in this research. The potential benefits are that tutees (primary students) may experience a boost in their reading abilities or in their confidence and or enjoyment levels. Similarly, tutors (intermediate students) may also experience confidence in their leadership role and consolidate reading strategies as they prompt their younger partners. I will not know who is participating in the research for data analysis purposes until the completion of the 5-week intervention.

All records of participation will be kept strictly confidential, such that only my supervisor and I will have access to the information. Data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet within the school’s office. I will not have access to the consent letters until the end of the 5-week reading intervention study. Data will be shredded at the end of the project, approximately by April 30th, 2017. Electronic files will also be deleted at that time. The results from this study will be reported in a written research report and an oral report possibly during a workshop for colleagues.

Contact information about the study:

If you have any questions or concerns about your child’s treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the VIU Research Ethics Board at (250) 740-6631 or by email at reb@viu.ca
If you have any questions about this research project, or would like more information, please feel free to contact me at the email addresses below:

Respectfully,

VIU Student Researcher
French Immersion Learning Support Teacher

I have read the above form, understand the information read, and understand that I can ask questions or withdraw at any time. I consent for my child to participate in today’s research study.

Yes  No

I consent for my child to being quoted in the products of the research in an unidentifiable way.

Yes  No

I consent to my child being audio recorded during a focus group discussion for data analysis purposes only.

Yes  No

____________________  ______________________
Child’s name  ____________________________

____________________  ______________________
Parent/guardian signature  Date
APPENDIX M ASSENT LETTER FOR TUTORS

“Peer Tutoring Reading Interventions For Students with Reading Difficulties in a French Immersion Classroom”

Principal Investigator

Michelle Mowbray, Master’s student, Faculty of Education, Vancouver Island University and French Immersion Learning Support Teacher at [redacted], contact phone number: [redacted]

Research Supervisor: Ana Vieira, PhD, Faculty of Education, (250) 753-3245 Ext. 3565

Purpose of the study

Dear students,

In addition to being the primary learning support teacher at [redacted] I am also a graduate student in the Master of Special Education Program at Vancouver Island University in Nanaimo. As part of the requirements of my Master of Education in Special Education, I am conducting a study to explore the use of peer tutoring as a way to support struggling readers in French immersion. I am interested in finding out how I can implement a program so that Grade 1-2 students can benefit from reading with their Grade 4-5 buddies in a structured way.

In my research, I have become interested in finding meaningful, research based strategies that fit a student’s reading level and increases at their own pace. Research has demonstrated that repeated readings increase reading fluency and confidence. My goal would be to find out how the students feel about their reading abilities, their confidence and their willingness to read. I hope that implementing a peer tutoring framework will be beneficial to all students, even to the tutors.
The results will be presented in my Master’s thesis and possibly during a workshop with my colleagues.

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At the beginning of the study, Grade 1-2 students will fill out a short paper survey indicating their feelings about their reading abilities, their confidence and their willingness to read in French. Questions will be read aloud to them and they will select the face that best represents their feelings. They will be then asked to fill out the same survey at the end of the study, to note any differences in their feelings toward reading and the buddy experience. During a 5 week period, Grade 1-2 students will be paired with Grade 4-5 students and will meet 4 times a week for 15 minute sessions. During these sessions, tutees (primary students) will be asked to read a text for one minute. The tutor (intermediate students) will track the number of words read in a minute as well as the number of errors. The tutor will provide direct feedback and practice errors. They will then read a “just right” book from the child’s reading bag. The tutor will be provide guidance and reading prompts, as instructed by a visual aide. The following day, the tutee will begin the session by practicing the previous day’s errors from the one-minute reading. Then, he/she will reread the same passage for one minute. The tutor will again track and chart the number of correct words per minute as well as errors.

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Students’ reading levels will be assessed prior to the study and at the end of the study using the regular GB+ reading assessments. I will also keep a researcher journal and will note any observations pertaining to class participation, interest, motivation, confidence, and strategies tried. The activities outlined above will be part of the regular class routine and no additional activities are required for participation in the research, except for Grade 4-5 students, who will be invited to participate in a focus group at lunch time once the study is completed. During the focus group, I will initiate a conversation with students and get some feedback about their feelings and observations from the perspective of a tutor. This discussion will be audio recorded for data analysis purposes and your consent is required.

All students in this class will participate in this class peer reading activity for the 5-week duration regardless of parental or guardian consent. I am, however, asking for your consent to use the data from the 5-week reading intervention study. This includes the observational data created in class as well as the focus group discussion. I will make every effort not to disclose the identity of participants in the products of this research however; participants may be indirectly identifiable by the quotes or by the contextual information I use in the research products. Your consent allows me to use any information I may have learned from your experience. This is entirely voluntary.
and there will be no negative consequences if you choose not to give me permission to use the data collected from this intervention study. Please note, you cannot withdraw consent from your participation in this reading intervention, as it is a classroom activity. You may withdraw your consent for me to use data at any time before the end of the 5-week reading intervention study for any reason without explanation and without penalty. There are no known harms associated with your participation in this research. The potential benefits are that tutees (primary students) may experience a boost in their reading abilities or in their confidence and or enjoyment levels. Similarly, tutors (intermediate students) may also experience confidence in their leadership role and consolidate reading strategies as they prompt their younger partners. I will not know who is participating in the research for data analysis purposes until the completion of the 5-week intervention.

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**Contact information about the study:**

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If you have any questions about this research project, or would like more information, please feel free to contact me at the email addresses below:

Respectfully,

VIU Student Researcher

French Immersion Learning Support Teacher

I have read the above form, understand the information read, and understand that I can ask questions or withdraw at any time.
I would like to participate in Mme Mowbray’s research study.

Yes  No

I consent to being quoted in the products of the research.

Yes  No

I consent to being audio recorded during a focus group discussion for data analysis purposes only.

Yes  No

____________________                                   ____________________________  
Child’s signature                                      Date
APPENDIX N STEPS TO FOLLOW DURING REPEATED READINGS

La lecture répétée

Matériaux: Minuterie
- Surligneurs de différentes couleurs
- Carte de stratégies
- Texte pour le petit ami et un texte pour le grand ami

Les étapes à suivre:

- **1ère année:** Lundi et mardi, le grand ami doit lire le texte au petit ami avant de commencer. (lentement et clairement)
- **2ème année:** Lundi et mardi, le petit ami a la chance de lire le texte silencieusement avant de commencer. (une fois suffit)

- Pratique les erreurs sur la fiche d’erreur (pas lundi).
- Sors la minuterie et les textes.
- Sors le surligneur avec la couleur appropriée pour le jour de la semaine.
- Encourage ton petit ami à lire clairement.
- Prépare la minuterie et dis: “3, 2, 1, commence”
- Lorsque le petit ami lis, tu soulignes les erreurs. Tu peux aider le petit ami s’il a de la difficulté.
- Quand la minuterie sonne, tu dis “arrête” et tu fais une ligne verticale après le dernier mot lu.
- Félicite ton petit ami.
- Revise les erreurs avec le petit ami. Tu peux utiliser la carte de stratégies de décodage pour l’aider.
- Écris les erreurs sur la fiche d’erreurs. Vous aller pratiquer ces mots avant la lecture la prochaine fois.
- Inscris sur le graphique le nombre de mots lu en total et le nombre d’erreurs. N’oublie pas d’écrire la date.
Appendix O

Reading strategies cue card

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French Question</th>
<th>French Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Veux-tu de l'aide ou du temps ?</td>
<td>Je vais faire le rappel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retourne et relis.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sauté le mot et reviens.</td>
<td>Quoi ?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coupe le mot et recolle les syllabes.</td>
<td>Quoi ?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f ou</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pense et devine.</td>
<td>Oui ?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regarde l'illustration.</td>
<td>Quand ?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Je vais dire les syllabes avec toi.</td>
<td>Pourquoi ? Comment ?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ba na ne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Je vais te dire le mot.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX P VOICE VOLUME METER

Voice Volume Meter

1. Whisper
2. Talking Voice
3. Loud