WHY AIM? – EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVES AND IMPLEMENTATION OF AN INSTRUCTIONAL METHOD FOR TEACHING CORE FRENCH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN ONTARIO.

by

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Doctor of Philosophy, 2012
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Abstract

Since 2003, the Canadian government has repeatedly called for research into innovative ways to teach Core French (CF) – a non-immersion program, where French as a Second Language (FSL) is taught on a daily basis, or a few times per week. This exploratory study investigates the driving forces behind the widespread popularity of a CF method called the Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM), which combines target language use with gestures, high-frequency vocabulary, and drama to accelerate the development of fluency from the onset of classroom instruction.

In order to learn more about the “meaningfulness” of this growing trend (Fullan, 2007), this mixed-method inquiry attempts to shift the focus from product to process, comparing educator perspectives and AIM implementation within two Ontario contexts: (a) where AIM was mandated for elementary (Grades 4-6) FSL instruction, and (b) where AIM was an optional method for FSL teachers to use (or not).

Survey and interview data were collected from and triangulated across a variety of educators from both contexts, including FSL consultants \((n = 18)\), principals \((n = 8)\), CF teachers \((n = 9)\), and one Ontario Ministry of Education representative. Four semi-structured interviews and multiple observations were also conducted with those CF
teachers who were using AIM ($n = 8$). An additional CF teacher who had attempted to use AIM, and had subsequently rejected it, was also interviewed.

Findings showed that AIM implementation and educator perspectives did not vary significantly based on whether AIM was mandated or optional for CF instruction. A clear preference emerged towards using AIM and the accompanying resources during the beginning stages of CF instruction. Discussion about the growing popularity of AIM was positive; however, it also exposed a range of emotions about when and how AIM should be used. In terms of implementation, while some AIM routines, activities, and strategies were used by all, each AIM teacher exercised their agency while using the method, supplementing and adapting for different reasons. Implications include the need to reexamine the objectives of micro-level AIM policies, recognize the adaptability of AIM, and consider including detailed observations in future research linking AIM to student achievement.
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AIM Accelerative Integrated Method
CF Core French
C-SCT Critical Sociocultural Theory
L2 Second Language
MM Mixed-Methods
QUAL Qualitative Methods
quan Quantitative Methods

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Chapter 1 - Context

Status of Core French in Canada

The majority of Canadian students are currently enrolled in Core French (CF) - a program where French as a Second Language (FSL) is taught on a daily basis or a few times a week (Canadian Parents for French, 2007, 2010). While beginning and end grades for CF vary across Canadian provinces and school boards, general characterizations of the program remain consistent – in CF, students learn about French, while attempting to acquire basic communication skills, language knowledge and an appreciation of Francophone culture practiced in Canada and around the world.

In 2003, the Canadian federal government set a goal to double the proportion of high school graduates with a functional knowledge of their second official language by 2013 (Government of Canada, 2003). While this objective has since been abandoned (c.f. Government of Canada, 2007), federal and provincial policy initiatives continue to characterize CF as a program that should be able to retain students and produce graduates with a functional knowledge of French. However, the debate continues as to whether the quality of CF programming is generally adequate to its task. Research has shown that students are emerging from years of CF instruction with limited basic oral communication skills (Netten & Germain, 2005), and are feeling dissatisfied with their overall progress (Canadian Parents for French, 2006). According to the Canadian Parents for French (CPF) (2004, 2006, 2007, 2010), enrollment numbers for CF are seeing a steady decline in most provinces and territories, particularly when French is no longer a mandatory subject. French teachers also remain in short supply across Canada (CPF, 2006; Lapkin, Mady & Arnott, 2006), and the majority of practicing CF teachers are struggling to teach functional communication skills given the time and resources made available to them (Lapkin, McFarlane & Vandergrift, 2006; Mollica, Phillips & Smith, 2005).

Despite the chronic reappearance of these types of issues on Canadian FSL research agendas, people have not entirely given up on making the program more effective. Innovations continue to emerge and generate conversation about improving CF. Over the last fifteen years, FSL researchers have focused primarily on the effectiveness of CF innovations that vary the scheduling of classes (c.f. Mady, 2008), investigating such delivery models as compact Core French (Hays, 1998; Hilmer, 1999; Lapkin, Harley &
Hart, 1995a, 1995b; Marshall, 2011) and Intensive French (Germain & Netten, 2004; Germain, Netten & Movassat, 2004; Netten & Germain, 2004a, 2004b, 2005; see MacFarlane, 2005 for a summary). While this research has led some provinces to pilot these delivery models for CF, Canadian school boards have been known to be unwilling to manipulate scheduling for CF, particularly when doing so would threaten to take time away from English programming (Evaluation Plus, 2002). This dilemma underlines the pressing need to investigate innovations being used by CF teachers that adhere to these scheduling constraints.

Goals of the Study and Research Questions

This study investigates the driving forces behind the widespread popularity of one such innovation – an instructional method being used for CF instruction called the Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM), otherwise known simply as AIM. Generally, AIM is a language-teaching methodology that combines target language use with gestures, high-frequency vocabulary and drama to accelerate the development of fluency from the onset of classroom instruction (see Chapter 2 for a more detailed description of AIM).

The creator of AIM, Wendy Maxwell, has claimed (2001, 2004) that teachers employing this method are able to boost students’ oral fluency to previously unattainable levels from the beginning stages of second language (L2) acquisition. Thus far however, research into the validity of Maxwell’s predictions has yielded inconsistent results. Despite this, teachers and decision makers across Canada continue to recommend the use of AIM for CF instruction. In fact, AIM is presently being used in 4,000 schools across Canada, 600 schools in Australia, and in other international contexts such as the Netherlands and Japan (AIM Language Learning, 2012a; Hearsay Language Learning Downunder, 2010). A growing number of school boards across Ontario have also made it mandatory for CF teachers to use AIM for FSL instruction at specific grade levels, while others have elected to let CF teachers decide for themselves what methodology they wish to use.

In order to learn more about this growing trend in the Ontario context, this study addresses the following research questions:
1. What are the present practices of Ontario school boards with respect to supporting different methodologies, including AIM, for CF instruction?

2. How do elementary-level educators in AIM-mandated and AIM-optional contexts feel about the method in regards to its:
   - utility for CF instruction?
   - instructional materials?
   - growing popularity across Canada?

3. How are elementary-level CF teachers in AIM-mandated and AIM-optional contexts implementing the method?

**Positioning of the Researcher**

My rationale for conducting this study is rooted in my experience as an FSL teacher and as an FSL researcher. I believe that, as the use of AIM grows across Canada, so does the imperative for studies that track and assess its impact, not only on students, but also on teachers and other FSL educators. This conviction is both the impetus for this study, and the original motivation behind my Masters of Education research. In my master’s study (Arnott, 2005), analysis of teacher and student interviews, as well as classroom observations, led me to contend that teachers play an integral role in the launch and ultimate success of AIM for beginning FSL learners. Extending my master’s research findings (see page 23 for a detailed description), as well as those related to L2 instructional methods in general, is a major objective of this study. Consequently, I elected to move beyond the comparison of AIM and non-AIM student outcomes that has dominated the AIM research to date, and instead compare teacher experiences and AIM implementation across different elementary-level CF classroom contexts.

I am also interested in ascertaining the reasoning behind board- and school-level decisions related to instructional methods, and understanding how these important decisions influence teacher practice and teacher agency. During my own FSL teaching experience, my school had decided to pilot AIM for Grades K-8, requiring that I seek AIM training, and structure my lessons according to what the AIM resources had prescribed. As a beginning CF teacher, I found this to be an enriching experience for my developing practice. However, I also noticed that it was not made clear what other factors contributed to this decision being made. Undoubtedly, other Ontario CF teachers are
faced with similar uncertainty. For this reason, I am interested in examining the logic behind these types of decisions, and the extent to which teachers are made aware of the reasoning behind them. Furthermore, I am confident that hearing the voices of FSL consultants will give the second language community a glimpse into what is guiding those who preferentially recommend or adopt AIM in the absence of consistent student-outcome data, and the extent to which they are considering other methodologies besides AIM for CF instruction.

Overview of the Dissertation

In this section, I provide a brief overview of how this dissertation is organized. Chapter 2 reviews relevant research and offers a more detailed description of AIM. It begins by introducing a short history of how methodological trends in second language teaching have developed over the last century, then moves on to review existing research on instructional methods used for teaching CF, including AIM. Then, in order to establish whether the term “method” is a suitable label for AIM, its characteristics are analyzed using Richards and Rodgers’ (1982, 1985, 1986, 2001) conceptual framework for describing language teaching methods. Finally, I briefly discuss the ongoing debate related to the viability of the concept of method altogether, and its relevance to the present study.

Chapter 3 introduces the theoretical lens for this study, namely the integration of two frameworks: the Sociocultural Theory (SCT) notion of mediated agency, and Michael Fullan’s model of educational change. I start the chapter by describing important terminology related to agency (e.g., mediation), and then move towards presenting theory and research related to mediated agency and L2 methodology and instruction. From there, I illustrate the facets of Fullan’s educational change framework that are relevant to this study, in particular the factors related to effective change implementation. To conclude this chapter, I merge both of these frameworks and present an integrated theoretical lens that I use to ground the study, interpret my data and offer findings.

In Chapter 4, I describe the methods I used to answer my research questions. I begin by presenting the context and important aspects of the study design, and then I introduce the participants and each procedure related to data collection and analysis. Finally, I clarify some potential issues surrounding validity, ethics, limitations and my
influence as the researcher.

The findings of this study are presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. In Chapter 5, I start by reporting results from the survey data to provide a macro-level perspective on the methods being used in the participating Ontario school boards. Then, in an effort to explain the bases for decisions and recommendations to mandate AIM or keep it optional, I introduce relevant findings from my analysis of the FSL consultant survey and focus group data. To conclude this chapter, I report on themes that emerged following my analysis and triangulation of multiple data sets (i.e., survey, focus group, interviews) in order to present a comprehensive representation of participating educator perspectives from AIM-mandated and AIM-optional contexts (i.e., consultants, principals, Ontario Ministry of Education representative, AIM and non-AIM teachers). Moving to AIM implementation, in the other two findings chapters I describe in detail how teachers in AIM-mandated (Chapter 6) and AIM-optional (Chapter 7) contexts put the method into action, drawing from observation and interview data that I gathered and analyzed following four visits to their CF classrooms, as well as interview data from each teacher’s principal where relevant. At the end of each of these chapters, I consolidate the data to propose Mandated and Optional case typologies.

In the first half of Chapter 8, I briefly consider the findings from the previous three chapters to examine the overall influence that the Mandated and Optional policies has on AIM implementation in this study. Following this analysis, I propose a consolidated representation of AIM implementation that takes into account the overlapping features and distinct characteristics of the Mandated and Optional contexts. I then discuss the amalgamated representation of AIM implementation in more detail considering the theoretical framework guiding this study, and offer reflections on the implications of the discussion for the theoretical concepts and frameworks involved.

In the final chapter, I draw on the findings and interpretations to (a) formally answer my original research questions; (b) suggest implications for policy development, instructional practices, teacher education and L2 theory and research; and (c) make recommendations for future studies focusing not only on AIM, but also on second language pedagogy more generally.
Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Introduction

In this section, I begin by offering a brief account of how L2 methodological trends have developed to the present day. I then proceed to summarize the research on instructional methods and techniques used for French as a Second Language (FSL) instruction in Canada, including the Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM).

Since the mass production of AIM materials, many educators (including AIM representatives) regularly refer to AIM as a ‘program’, ‘method’, and/or ‘approach’. For this study, I have elected to acknowledge its original characterization as a language teaching method. Accordingly, I introduce AIM in detail using a framework devised by Richards and Rodgers (1982, 1985, 1986, 2001) to systematically describe and analyze methods in language teaching. I then conclude this section, and segue into the next, with a synopsis of the literature on the present status of the concept of ‘method’ in the field of L2 teaching.

Development of L2 Methodological Trends

Over the last century, the majority of methodological innovation has borrowed from scientific research on language and learning, and taken into account the social, economic, political and educational demands of the times. As societies and research progressed, so did language teaching methods, often evolving out of the application of new theoretical findings. With each new method came a rejection of the one(s) that preceded it; however, in hindsight, we can see that central philosophies of earlier methods did not disappear entirely.

Looking at the development of methods over the last century, it would seem that methods tend to “go on living, the new one superimposing on the former” (Sierra, 1995, p. 112). For instance, until the late nineteenth century, the most popular method of L2 teaching was the ‘Grammar Translation Method’. At this time, the goal of L2 instruction was to get learners reading and writing in the target language by having them memorize grammar rules and translate sentences that exemplified those rules. By the end of the nineteenth century, studies in psychology and linguistics led reformists to advocate for methods that emphasized the development of oral fluency in the target language, and that reflected the naturalistic principles of first language acquisition. Out of that grassroots
movement emerged the Direct Method. While this method was eventually scrutinized – referred to as a product of “enlightened amateurism” (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 13) – many of the underlying principles of this method, and others that came after it, have tended to reemerge in different disguises. For example, the inductive principles of the Direct Method were given a “behaviorist twist” (Danesi, 2003, p. 10) with the design of the Audiolingual Method during post-World War II. As well, both the Total Physical Response method (TPR) (Asher, 1969, 1977) and the Natural Approach (Terrell, 1977) espouse a theoretical view similar to that of the Direct Method, that second language acquisition and first language acquisition are similar processes.

Instead of viewing the history of language teaching methodologies as a pendulum, swinging back and forth between different paradigms of thought and understanding, Mitchell and Vidal (2001) proposed the metaphor of a river to illustrate the forward progress of methodological innovation. They portrayed each new method like a new river, always flowing and being fed by many other sources of water. Others have also warned against thinking that each new method is independent from its predecessors. Some have claimed that the evolution of methods is not be marked by clear lines in the sand, but is better characterized as an eclectic mix of existing methods (Sierra, 1995) or a designed crossbreeding of “disciplined eclecticism” (Danesi, 2003, p. 3). This view is echoed by Brumfit (2001) who suggests that new methods tend to highlight different features of old methods more than they might have originally, saying that “the significant point for history of language teaching may not be these features in themselves so much as the justifications that have been produced in support of them” (p. 48). He uses the recent widespread adoption of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) for L2 instruction to exemplify his position, insisting that the characteristics of CLT are not inherently unique to CLT alone. The major point to take from these characterizations is that methods rarely get created out of thin air. While new methods might suggest new techniques or look different in practice, most frequently they are derived from understandings and/or philosophical foundations that are common to methods past. Although much has been done in the field of second language education to ascertain how second languages are learned and how best they should be taught, some still have reservations about whether
these innovations have positively impacted learners’ proficiency at all. In 2003, Danesi nicknamed this quandary the “Second Language Teaching Dilemma”, asking:

Why is it that, despite considerable research on second language acquisition in classroom environments in the last 125 years, and despite the many pedagogical advancements that such research has made possible, students rarely achieve high levels of proficiency, no matter how long they have been studying a language and no matter how they have been taught the language? (p. 3)

Research suggests that students emerging from years of Core French (CF) instruction are victims of the same predicament (e.g., Netten & Germain, 2005). In the next section, I outline what existing methods and techniques have been examined by researchers in classroom FSL teaching contexts to address this dilemma. Afterwards, I introduce the research that has been conducted on AIM to date. Observing teaching in action is particularly important if, as Danesi (2003) insists, the insights and techniques needed to make second language teaching truly effective already exist in classrooms.

**Research on FSL Methods in Canada**

Teachers have been known to use a variety of different instructional methods and techniques to implement the same CF curriculum (Calman & Daniel, 1998; Vandergrift, 1995). Over the years, researchers have investigated the effectiveness of some of these instructional strategies and methods in an effort to identify best CF teaching practices. While the search continues for the best delivery model and instructional method for CF (c.f. Mady, 2008), feedback from graduates of the program suggests that teachers need to experiment more with different approaches and activities that offer students more opportunities to produce French (Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation, 2004).

Accordingly, it is not surprising that maximized target language use has been identified as a desirable teaching strategy in contexts such as Canada where learners’ exposure to French is generally limited outside of the classroom context (Lapkin, Harley & Taylor, 1993; Turnbull, 2001; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002). However, studies have shown that CF teachers and students do use a great deal of English for classroom communication (Calman & Daniel, 1998), and that teachers find it challenging to maintain French as the language of instruction in the CF context (Howard, 2006; Salvatori, 2007). Researchers have explored the effectiveness of other fundamental teaching strategies used in CF contexts, including cooperative learning (Comeau, 2002; Davis, 1998); group-based
drama techniques (Dicks & LeBlanc 2005; Masson, 1994); and the use of technology like email (Lawrence, 2002a, 2002b; Turnbull & Lawrence, 2001) and bimodal video (Baltova, 1999). Considered collectively, findings suggest that these types of instructional strategies have the potential to facilitate peer collaboration, and provide opportunities for learners and teachers to develop their oral and written production skills. This research is especially poignant given the aforementioned findings documenting CF graduates’ desire for instruction that emphasizes French production and communication (Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation, 2004).

Following the National Core French Study (NCFS), FSL stakeholders advocated a curricular and instructional shift away from the teacher-centred, grammatically focused Core French pedagogy, towards a more student-centred, project-based, communicatively-oriented practice called “multidimensional project-based” teaching (MPB) (LeBlanc, 1990). While it has been used selectively across Canada for CF instruction and curriculum development (c.f. Vandergrift, 1995), provinces that are adopting a multidimensional project-based approach have claimed that it effectively balances oral and literacy approaches to FSL instruction (Rehorick, Dicks, Kristmanson & Cogswell, 2006). Other Core French studies focusing on secondary students in multidimensional project-based contexts have highlighted the utility of grammar activities that involve form- and communicatively-focused drills for facilitating accuracy and fluency in French (Jean, 2004, 2005), and proposed that teachers generally find the implementation of this approach to be a very rewarding experience (Porter, 1996). In terms of student outcomes, Turnbull (1998, 1999a, 1999b) found that students in “more MPB-like” settings significantly outperformed students in “less MPB-like” contexts on a number of test components. However, he cautioned that the use of multidimensional project-based teaching could not entirely account for students’ superior performance, primarily because of the highly variable implementation styles observed.

To date, only a limited number of method comparison studies have been conducted in the CF context. Included in this group are a large majority of the existing studies focusing on AIM. However, of the four studies that compared AIM and non-AIM student outcomes, only one included observations of teacher implementation (Mady, Arnott & Lapkin, 2007, 2008, 2009). Similar to Turnbull’s findings (1998, 1999b), Mady et al.
Ascertained from one observation that AIM teachers were not uniform in their implementation of the method, making it difficult to attribute student outcome results solely to the use of the approach or method under study. According to Larsen-Freeman (2000b), this is a challenge that is often encountered in quantitative studies where student proficiency is measured following a particular methodological intervention. Despite this, the AIM research conducted to date has offered interesting insights into the dynamics of method implementation and its impact on students and teachers alike.

**AIM Research**

At the request of an Ontario school board, Mady, Arnott and Lapkin (2007, 2008, 2009) conducted a comparative evaluation of AIM. In this study, statistical comparisons of Grade 8 students from six AIM classes \(^1\) \((n=125)\) and six non-AIM classes \((n=135)\) showed no differences in achievement on any of the listening, speaking, reading or writing tests of a Grade 8 Core French test package (Harley, Lapkin, Scane, Hart, & Trépanier, 1988). Qualitative findings revealed that students and teachers in both instructional contexts were quite positive about their experiences. The research team also surveyed the same cohort of students one year later to see if they had decided to pursue the study of French beyond the obligatory Grade 9 year. Findings indicated that the continuation rate was the same for both AIM and non-AIM groups.

The researchers observed a wide range of full and partial implementation of resources and elements that are central to AIM across both instructional contexts. Data related to target language use showed that AIM teachers were using considerably more French in their classrooms. In terms of students’ L2 use, a larger proportion of AIM students claimed that they spoke French in class, and expressed higher levels of confidence in their listening and speaking skills than their non-AIM counterparts. Some AIM students also commented on how elements of the method (e.g., gestures) might be more suited for a younger age group. Based on their findings, the authors suggest that the presence or absence of AIM elements in the classroom does not appear to be a key factor in explaining the testing outcomes, and caution that these elements should not be considered as being entirely exclusive to AIM classrooms. As well, they suggested that

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1 Students in the AIM group had experienced two years of non-AIM instruction from Grades 4-6, followed by two years of AIM instruction from Grades 6-8.
more research be conducted at the elementary level where AIM is being implemented from the onset of FSL instruction.

The majority of the remaining AIM studies are predominantly qualitative and Ontario-based, with many focusing exclusively on elementary student outcomes related to oral proficiency. Wendy Maxwell (2001), the creator of AIM, conducted diagnostic interviews in French with two groups of Grade 2 students from an all-girls school in Ontario. The objective of the study was to assess and compare the relative oral fluency levels of one AIM group \( (n=9) \), and one non-AIM group \( (n=9) \). Each interview contained a sequence of scaffolded questioning, and participants were also prompted to produce sustained speech by spontaneously creating a story. Interview findings showed that the AIM group displayed significantly higher oral fluency levels than the non-AIM students.

Michels (2008) found similar results in her comparative AIM study that employed the same scaffolded interview from Maxwell’s study, coupled with the speaking test from the national French contest of the American Association of Teachers of French (AATF). She tested and compared the oral fluency levels of male students in Grades 4-6 from an all-boys school in Ontario that had been exposed to AIM \( (n=8) \) and non-AIM\(^3\) \( (n=6) \) instructional contexts for a variable number of hours. Statistical analysis of audio samples and transcriptions showed that AIM students significantly outperformed non-AIM students on all oral proficiency measures. Although Michels acknowledged some important limitations to her study (e.g., small sample size, all male participants, etc.), she also noted a trend throughout the speaking data for AIM students to outperform non-AIM students who had experienced significantly more hours of FSL instruction.

In Eastern Ontario, Bourdages and Vignola (2009) compared a larger sample of AIM \( (n=18) \) and non-AIM \( (n=16) \) Grade 3 students’ oral linguistic and grammatical accuracy. Similar to the results yielded by Mady et.al., and contrary to others (Maxwell, 2001; Michels, 2008), statistical analyses of semi-structured interview data revealed no significant differences between the two groups on any measures of linguistic or

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\(^2\) A recent study by Carroll (2011) has been excluded from this review as important details are missing from the published article (i.e., descriptions of instruments, sample sizes, procedures, etc.)

\(^3\) Students in the non-AIM sample had been exposed to a variety of instructional contexts: French Immersion \( (n=1) \); core French \( (n=2) \) and Extended French \( (n=3) \)
grammatical accuracy. However, similar to other AIM findings (Maxwell, 2001; Mady et al., 2007, 2009, Michels, 2008), on average, AIM students produced significantly more French than non-AIM students, while non-AIM students produced significantly more English than their AIM counterparts. Interestingly, Bourdages and Vignola also made observations related specifically to AIM learners, claiming that they produced more incomplete utterances and a wider variety of verbs than non-AIM students during the interviews. They interpreted these particular finding as indicative of AIM students’ willingness to take risks with French and not revert to English, even if they were unable to communicate their thoughts completely or retrieve the appropriate vocabulary.

In my master’s research (Arnott, 2005), I also noted a great deal of risk-taking with the target language during observations of an all-boys class of Grade 3 students in Ontario who were new to FSL instruction, and new to AIM. In their interviews, students described how they were able to cope with the French-only environment, offering explanations for observed student engagement. My contention that the success of AIM is very teacher-dependent mirrored earlier findings from a multi-method study conducted by Carr (2001) that focused on the use of AIM in an all-girls school in British Columbia. After observing AIM in action in several primary classrooms (Grades 1-3), Carr highlighted the demanding nature of AIM, stating that it “requires 100% participation” (p. 2) from both teachers and students. Based on diagnostic interviews conducted with a small number of Grade 1 students who had only learned French with AIM, Carr found that AIM student oral language production exceeded British Columbia introductory CF expectations, and paralleled those of first year French immersion. However, these same students found it challenging to transfer these oral skills to spontaneous speech contexts. These results led Carr to recommend, “this highly effective approach should continue as part of an overall FSL program” (p. 3).

Considering the findings from all of the research on AIM (see Table 1 for a summary), it is difficult to either confirm or refute the validity of Maxwell’s original predictions about the effectiveness of AIM. While small-scale research comparing oral fluency levels has yielded significant differences favoring the AIM group, larger-scale quantitative research has yet to find statistical differences between AIM and non-AIM groups related to oral linguistic and grammatical accuracy, or achievement on listening,
speaking, reading and writing French tests. Some AIM studies have highlighted other advantages related to its implementation, including an observed difference in AIM students’ ability to produce a wide range of verbs, and a stronger inclination for students to take risks with the target language. Other observational findings suggested that AIM teachers were able to sustain French as the primary language for communication in the CF classroom, which speaks to earlier references to studies documenting CF teachers’ inability and reluctance to do so (e.g., Salvatori, 2007).

While the body of research on AIM is growing, similar to MPB, clear conclusions cannot be drawn about its overall effectiveness based on the limited number of studies available. It is worth noting that some researchers are vehemently opposed to what AIM research to date has tried to do (i.e., objectively test a method). Both Brumfit (1984) and Prabhu (1990) caution that attempts to objectively evaluate methods in relation to learning outcomes are futile, highlighting concerns with these types of studies related to theoretical assumptions (e.g., questioning the objectivity of attributing learning directly to teaching) and methodology (e.g., controlling contextual features, only assessing quantifiable language attributes). Performing these types of evaluations yields more complications than answers, as Prabhu emphasized when he said:

Such an objective evaluation is so difficult to implement that all attempts at it in the past have resulted in a wider agreement on the difficulties of doing an evaluation than on the resulting judgments on methods (1990, p. 168).

In summary, CF research to date has documented some instructional strategies, techniques and methods used by elementary and secondary teachers across Canada. These studies have shown more differences than similarities in how teachers implement their chosen method. Student proficiency outcomes also appear to be affected as much by the teacher as by the method they are using. It appears, as Stern (1983) points out, that “much more is included under the name ‘method’ than the feature that has given it its name” (1983, p. 451). Keeping this in mind, I now move to describing AIM in more detail through a well-established lens used for analyzing and explaining language-teaching methodologies.

**Describing AIM**

In the 1980s, Richards and Rodgers (1982, 1985, 1986, 2001) proposed a
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<th>Focus</th>
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<th>Participants</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Notable Findings</th>
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AIM (n = 125)  
non-AIM (n = 135) |  ● Classroom Observation  
4-skills Test Package  
Student Interview  
Teacher Survey  
Student Survey (post-study) | ✓ No differences between AIM and non-AIM groups in achievement on any of the listening, speaking, reading or writing tests  
✓ No between-group differences on continuation rate for CF enrollment beyond Grade 9  
✓ Majority of all students felt a positive connection to their French class  
✓ Range of full and partial implementation of AIM across both instructional contexts. |
| Oral L2 Proficiency           | Maxwell (2001)                | Grade 2 N = 18  
AIM (n = 9)  
non-AIM (n = 9) |  ● Scaffolded Student Interview | ✓ AIM group displayed significantly higher oral fluency levels than non-AIM group |
|                               | Bourdages & Vignola (2009)    | Grade 3 N = 34  
AIM (n = 18)  
non-AIM (n = 16) |  ● Semi-Structured Interview | ✓ No significant differences between AIM and non-AIM groups on any measures of linguistic or grammatical accuracy.  
✓ AIM students produced wider range of verbs |
|                               | Michels (2008)                | Grades 4, 5, 6 N = 14  
AIM (n = 8)  
non-AIM (n = 6) |  ● Scaffolded Student Interview  
(same as Maxwell, 2001)  
Speaking Test from the American Association of Teachers of French (AATF) | ✓ AIM group significantly outperformed non-AIM group on all oral proficiency measures, often outperforming non-AIM students with more hours of FSL instruction. |
| Multi-Method Studies (Qualitative) | Carr (2001)                | Grades 1-3 Six AIM classes N = 36 (Grade 1s) |  ● Classroom Observation  
Student Interview Test  
(Grade 1s only)  
Document Analysis | ✓ AIM requires 100% participation from both teachers and students.  
✓ AIM student oral fluency exceeded introductory BC expectations, and paralleled those of Year 1 French immersion; still challenging for them to transfer skills to spontaneous speech contexts. |
|                               | Arnott (2005)                | Grade 3 AIM class (N = 18) Teacher (x 1) |  ● Classroom Observations  
Teacher Interview  
Student Interview | ✓ Success of AIM is highly teacher-dependent.  
✓ Observed student-engagement (e.g., taking risks with the L2; adopting strategies for French-only) |
framework that extended earlier conceptualizations of language teaching analysis (i.e., Anthony, 1963; Mackey, 1965) in an effort to identify general principles that could be used to better understand the developments and innovations in language-teaching methodologies that were taking place. They suggested using the following three elements to distinguish the organization upon which particular language-teaching practices were founded: approach, design, and procedure. Richards and Rodgers felt that other models failed to address the influence of theories of language and theories of language learning (i.e., the approach level), and also disregarded the role that teachers, learners and instructional materials played in the realization of a method. By identifying these limitations, Richards and Rodgers asserted that methods could be more comprehensively described by emphasizing the “difference between a philosophy of language teaching at the level of theory and principles, and a set of derived procedures for teaching a language” (1986, p. 19). In simple terms, they declared that methods need to be theoretically related to an approach, organizationally determined by a design, and practically realized in a procedure. While Richards and Rodgers maintained that a language-teaching methodology could develop out of any of these three categories, they strongly argued that descriptions must be possible at all three levels in order for it to attain the official status of ‘method’.

In the following section, I define each of these three levels, and describe AIM in relation to each of them (see Figure 1 on page 44 for a summary description). Materials at my disposal include instructor manuals, professional publications, information posted on the AIM website (AIM Language Learning, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d), and other teacher resources that have been generated by Wendy Maxwell, the creator of the AIM method (c.f. Maxwell, 2004, 2006, 2008). As well, where relevant, findings from AIM research will be presented. While these materials are cited as much as possible, it may be necessary to infer from what AIM developers have written to determine precisely what criteria are being used for each of the three levels. According to Richards and Rodgers (1985), this practice is common due to the reality that the approach, design and

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4 The materials I consulted for this section are AIM teacher manuals, and information posted on the AIM website. At present, there are limited holdings of AIM materials in the OISE/UT library; most resources are only available by purchase directly from AIM Language Learning Incorporated. Although I am confident that this analysis is representative of all AIM materials due to the repetition between resources for different levels, it is possible that analysis of the entire corpus of AIM materials could reveal different results.
procedural elements of a method are rarely all made explicit from its inception. In fact, this appears to be the case with AIM, as with other established methods like Suggestopedia (Bancroft, 1978; Lozanov, 1978) and Community Language Learning Method (LaForge, 1979), it originated at the procedural level and attempts have since been made to establish its design and articulate a theoretical approach to explain its procedures.

**AIM at the approach level**

Richards (2001) posits that the distinction between ‘method’ and ‘approach’ is most usefully seen as “defining a continuum of entities ranging from highly prescribed methods to loosely described approaches” (p. 1). In other words, an approach can be realized using many different methods. Bell (2003) takes this one step further, contending that the degree of application of a method across grades may be a better guide to the so-called distinction between approach and method, meaning that the more a method is applied beyond one specific context, the more it could be considered to be an approach rather than a method. Bell uses the fact that CLT has prompted numerous interpretations and spin-offs (e.g., Natural Approach, Task-based Instruction, Content-based Instruction, Cooperative Language Learning) for a range of grade levels to support his claim that CLT could be considered to be more like an approach than a method.

In any case, it is clear that the concepts of approach and method are mutually and theoretically related (Sierra, 1995). Equally clear is the idea that inherent to any method is a coherently defined vision of learning and an underlying set of linguistic, psycholinguistic and/or sociolinguistic principles (Tudor, 2001). According to Richards and Rodgers, describing a language-teaching methodology at the level of approach requires particular consideration of its theoretical foundation in relation to language, as well as language learning. Some methods have drawn from both, while others were derived primarily from a theory of language learning. For example, Audiolingualism is considered to be a method built on a theory of language (i.e., structuralism) and a theory of language learning (i.e., behaviorism). Alternatively, mainly learning theory is central to the Total Physical Response method, which is based primarily on the beliefs that L1 and L2 learning involve a process and that language learning occurs as the result of teacher-directed motor activity. The AIM method is not based on one specific assumption
about language or language learning, but a combination of many different theories. Some links to language-learning theories have been made explicit in the AIM literature, whereas AIM’s theory of language appears to be more implicit.

**Theories of learning in AIM**

The most recognized theory of language-learning related to AIM is the Gesture Approach. In her master’s thesis, Maxwell (2001) originally stated that the AIM method was designed based on the belief that learners need to experience language visually and kinesthetically in order for internalization of meaning to take place. This eventually led to the creation of a distinct system of gestures representing each unit of vocabulary presented in the AIM instructional materials, as well as grammatical markers (e.g., masculine, feminine, past-tense, etc.). The gestures themselves are most times fairly straightforward. For example, the verb “*manger*” (to eat) is the motion of bringing food to one’s mouth; opening and closing your hand beside your mouth quickly means “*dire*” (to say); and putting your index finger above your lip simulating a moustache is the gesture to indicate masculine articles and adjectives. Similar to TPR (Asher, 1969, 1977), this learning theory of AIM is based on the belief that language is learned through motor activity. This belief also relates to the Theory of Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1983, 1993, 1999, 2006), which states that supporting the visual and kinesthetic intelligences of learners can empower the acquisition of symbolic competence, and eventually enable them to “mobilize bodily capacities in order to communicate diverse messages” (p. 221).

While research has shown that gestures do carry a significant communicative load, particularly in contexts like L2 classrooms where the language has not yet been acquired proficiently (Acredolo & Goodwyn, 1988; Brekinridge Church, Ayman-Nolley, Mahootian, 2004; Kendon, 1994), kinesics in general continues to be somewhat overlooked in the empirical discourse on teaching and learning languages (Orton, 2007). After analyzing a video excerpt of the gesturing and speech production that typically occurs in AIM, Orton (2007) suggested that while target language delivery appears slightly slower than normal spoken pace, learners may have a better chance of noticing the “little words of grammatical structures” (p. 11) occurring between lexical items because of the gestures attached to them.

The AIM method also assumes that the development of word concepts will
“naturally occur” when teachers provide “substantial amounts of comprehensible input through a content-based approach” from the beginning stages of classroom-based L2 acquisition (Maxwell, 2001, p. 2). This claim is similarly central to Krashen’s “comprehensible input hypothesis” (1981), which highlights the importance of maximizing L2 input (“i + 1”) to ensure learner intake of the target language, as well as that put forth in the Natural Approach (Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Terrell, 1977), which assumes that SLA mimics naturalistic first language learning in young children. According to Krashen, the L1 can only really hold restrictive value in relation to the role it plays in interlanguage rules – the main hurdle that limits learner intake of comprehensible L2 input. The AIM method’s persistent focus on exclusive use of the target language at all times reflects a similar theoretical assumption. However, AIM does not overlap with the belief of the Natural Approach that language learners require a prolonged period of attention to what they hear before they should try to produce language. The basic premise behind AIM rests on the belief that the more students produce the language from the very beginning of L2 learning, either chorally, with gestures or spontaneously with teacher support, the more likely they are to become fluent and accurate in their production of the target language. In AIM, functional oral skills are expected to be fostered from the initial stages of SLA (Maxwell, 2001, 2004), and research has shown that AIM teachers do spend the majority of beginner-level class time prompting and encouraging learners to produce the target language chorally, and then more independently as time progresses (Arnott, 2005).

**Theories of language in AIM**

The model of language competence, linguistic organization and language use associated with AIM indicates that it assumes a functional perspective on language. According to Richards and Rodgers, a functional view of language is one that “emphasizes semantic and communicative dimension rather than merely grammatical characteristics of language” (1986, p. 21). Central to AIM is a functional lexicon containing verbs, nouns and expressions developed through Maxwell’s own action research on language required for classroom life and interactions, and research on corpuses of high frequency vocabulary used for teaching French as a foreign language (Gougenheim, Michéa, Rivenc & Sauvageot, 1964), and corpuses collected from native
speakers of the French language (Clarke, 1985; O’Connor DiVito, 1991). The corpus of vocabulary used in AIM is also organized around grammatical structures that are thought to arise most frequently in spontaneous communicative situations. In the AIM literature, this lexicon is referred to as “Pared Down Language”, or PDL for short (Maxwell, 2001, 2006, 2008). In AIM, learners progress through a sequence of plays and stories containing PDL vocabulary. This meaningful contextualization of the lexicon is thought to offer students the opportunity to learn to communicate in the target language by communicating about the stories they are learning, and linguistically prepare them to participate in more spontaneous, open-ended communicative situations. As with the communicative approach to language assumed in CLT, it can be inferred that AIM views language as a system for the expression of meaning. Although AIM “content” does not include curricular subject matter (i.e., science, geography etc.), these assumptions are similar to content-based approaches in that the selection and sequence of language items arises from communicative needs, and the target language is viewed as a medium to convey informational content that is of interest to students (Larsen-Freeman, 2000b).

**AIM at the design level**

In the previous section, I described the explicitly-stated and implicitly-inferred language and language-learning theories that have been associated with AIM. It has been said that approaches are the more flexible aspects of a method (Danesi, 2003) and that approaches should neither specify nor dictate procedures, but rather the design elements of a method should be what links theory with practice (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Accordingly, Richards and Rodgers suggest describing methods using the following categories in order to “specify the relationship of theories of language and learning to both the form and function of instructional materials and activities in instructional settings (1985, p. 17).

**Objectives**

Richards and Rodgers maintain that there is a purpose inherent in any method, but whether its purpose is linguistic-, process- and/or product-oriented is method-specific. The linguistic-oriented objective of AIM is to attain a “critical level of fluency” (Maxwell, 2001), which is described as being an awareness of how the language works, and an ability and readiness to learn and use high-frequency target language words and
grammatical structures. Acquiring this language base is achieved by learning the PDL vocabulary and the corresponding gestures in order to internalize the high-frequency vocabulary on three levels: (a) kinesthetically, (b) auditorily, and (c) visually. This could also be regarded as a product-oriented objective of the method. Based on multiple observations of a beginner-level AIM classroom (Arnott, 2005), and a review of some AIM instructional materials (Maxwell, 2006, 2008), I would argue that the process-oriented objectives of AIM focus primarily on the development of oral skills before reading and writing with the expectation that L2 literacy skills will materialize as a result of transfer from L1.

Taking into account the research on AIM, it is unclear as of yet whether the aforementioned linguistic, process and product-oriented objectives of the method are being met. While small-scale research comparing oral fluency levels has yielded significant differences favoring the AIM group (Maxwell, 2001; Michels, 2008), larger-scale quantitative research has yet to find statistical differences between AIM and non-AIM groups related to oral linguistic and grammatical accuracy (Bourdages & Vignola, 2009) or achievement on listening, speaking, reading and writing French tests (Mady et al., 2007, 2008, 2009). In terms of PDL acquisition, Bourdages and Vignola did find an observed difference in AIM students’ ability to produce a wider range of verbs than their non-AIM counterparts. However, while the tendency may be to continue advocating for more research investigating how the use of AIM impacts learners’ linguistic outcomes, inconclusive quantitative results will most likely prevail, as is most often the case in studies comparing language-teaching methodologies and student proficiency (Larsen-Freeman, 2000b; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). In fact, Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008) argue that language classrooms are indeed quite complex and interconnected with other dynamic systems inherent to the school environment (e.g., students, school). Considering language classrooms in this way calls into question the simplistic notion of cause and effect, making it “much more difficult, if not impossible, to isolate independent variables that act in causal ways” (p.232). In this sense, while the use of a method like AIM is seen to influence student learning, methods alone are not the single cause; rather, “there are likely multiple and interconnected causes underlying any shift or outcome” (p.232).
In the beginning, AIM was designed to be “an initial step [italics added] providing students with a language base that will allow them to communicate with a basic level of fluency in the language” (Maxwell, 2004, p. 8). Many of the methods that have been created to date have been similarly geared towards beginning-level learners (e.g., Bell, 2003; Brown, 1997), with their distinctive characteristics eventually becoming “less visible because advanced learners may have special, well-defined needs, such as learning how to read and write academic texts (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p.7). However, AIM is no longer seen as a method that is used only at the beginning stages of classroom-based SLA. Across Canada, AIM is being implemented at various grade levels, making it possible for students to receive FSL instruction in AIM and non-AIM environments throughout their primary (Grades K through 3), junior (Grades 4 through 6), intermediate (Grades 7 through 8) and senior (Grades 9 through 12) CF learning experience. While instructional materials have recently been developed that are appropriate for older learners, research has suggested that older AIM learners who are developmentally capable of reading and writing feel that certain inherent elements of the method (e.g., gestures) may not be age-appropriate (Mady et al., 2007, 2008, 2009). Therefore, it could be said that the objectives of the AIM method are limited in the same way that all methods are limited - that they often deal only with the first lessons of lower level courses and “cover far too narrow of a band of possibilities to suffice for a whole curriculum” (Brown, 1997, p.15). The objectives as they currently stand also coincide with an absolutist view of methods, where one method is considered best for all age-levels, all levels of language study, and every possible social context. Many have warned against this point of view (e.g., Danesi, 2003; Holliday, 1994; Nunan, 1991), including Larsen-Freeman (2000b) who says that, in their descriptive stage, methods are idealistic and highly decontextualized and “cannot be a prescription for success for everyone” (p. 182).

Syllabus

A method’s design typically refers to what language and subject matter are seen as being relevant, and the principles used in sequencing content. It is clear that AIM adopts what Richards and Rodgers call an ‘a priori syllabus’, in that it is determined in advance of teaching as opposed to being co-constructed with the students during instruction. In
order to determine the AIM syllabus focus, I followed Richards and Rodgers’ (1986) recommendation to examine lesson protocols, teacher manuals and texts derived from the AIM method (Maxwell, 2006, 2008).

In the AIM syllabus, proficiency is the major emphasis, with listening and speaking skills always preceding the reading and writing activities in order to ensure that meaning is acquired and a correct accent is developed (Maxwell, 2006). All of the texts in the AIM syllabus are either original fictional works created for non-native speakers, or adapted fairy tales or fables that are assumed to be recognizable to learners.\(^5\) Ideally, students become familiar with the vocabulary they interact with in the AIM plays, as each one is sequenced to include only the PDL vocabulary they would have learned up until that point. The AIM syllabus typically progresses through units of ‘years’ that do not correspond directly to specific grade levels. Accordingly, while the linguistic complexity of the stories remains consistent across levels of competence (i.e., beginner, intermediate, advanced), the content of the stories is sequenced to remain age-appropriate for AIM learners. For example, a beginner-level story for Grade 1 AIM learners and Grade 4 AIM learners differs in age-appropriate content (i.e., characters, storylines, etc.); however, the linguistic content (i.e., lexical and grammatical items) contained within both stories is chosen from the same sequenced PDL list.

In all instances, high-frequency verbs that are complicated to conjugate, and often relegated to the later years of traditional CF curricula (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1998, 1999), are introduced very early in SLA by initially presenting all verbs using a “regularized stem” (Maxwell, 2001, p. 17). To elaborate, verb forms become phonetically consistent whether they are singular or plural (i.e., “nous” → on, “vous” → tout le monde). While more complex verb conjugation is explicitly taught after Year 1 of AIM, the hope is that teaching verbs in this form in the beginning will reduce the linguistic complexity of the content in the AIM plays and stories. Teacher-led analyses of the texts also become more analytic in nature, looking closer at elements of the grammar (e.g., verb tense, gender in French) and syntax present in the linguistic structuring of the text. These activities are called “language refinements” (Maxwell, 2006, 2008).

\(^5\) Although copies of the plays are not publicly available, see AIM Language Learning (2012d) for a description of the text(s) and/or play(s) in the resource kit(s) for each year and level.
Compared to the multidimensional project-based approach to CF curriculum programming recommended following the National Core French Study (NCFS) (c.f. LeBlanc, 1990), the AIM syllabus also seems to comply with the NCFS recommendations by starting from the communicative-experiential syllabus and attempting to implement the other three syllabi (i.e., culture, language and general language education syllabi). However, one noteworthy difference between the AIM syllabus and Stern’s “multidimensional curriculum model” that framed the NCFS recommendations (1982, 1992) is AIM’s minor emphasis on knowledge and other objectives associated with the L2 cultural syllabus. The AIM stories and plays, while appropriate for the CF context, cannot be considered as completely authentic representations of francophone culture. Carr (2001) also found that the AIM syllabus lacked an emphasis on the lives and interests of Francophone culture in authentic settings. This limitation certainly calls into question the assertion made by Maxwell that AIM can provide students with a “holistic curriculum that would meet, and, for that matter, exceed [italics added] requirements of the NCFS” (2001, p. 1).

Tasks and teaching activities

Richards and Rodgers maintain that methods are often distinguishable from each other based on the activity types that they advocate. Looking at the resources at my disposal, AIM appears to follow a similar sequence of tasks and activities through each unit of study. Table 2 summarizes the central guidelines and strategies that are promoted for all AIM classrooms (AIM Language Learning, 2012a; Maxwell, 2008). Following the recent resurgence of interest in literature as a major source of content in language teaching (Richards, 2001), the central content of each AIM unit is a play or a story. Students begin by learning how to use (in oral and written activities) the vocabulary words, gestures and structures unique to each play or story. To do this, AIM teachers are expected to implement scaffolded language manipulation activities where the vocabulary is studied primarily in context, and sometimes out of context, but always completely in the L2. According to Maxwell (2006), a comprehensible context can be as small as introducing verbs using relevant verb-noun associations (e.g., using the verbs “mettre” and “enlever” with clothing nouns), and as large as play or song practice. The AIM teacher in my master’s study (Arnott, 2005) was observed using 12 types of
Table 2
Summary of Key AIM Strategies (AIM Language Learning, 2012a; Maxwell, 2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Make sure that students speak exclusively in French.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Never allow silence – there should be constant interaction among students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>At least 50% of the program should be spontaneous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ensure variety – change whole class activities every ten minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Increase time allotted for partner/group work (up to 30% of class time) and make it a priority as you progress through the program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gesture for the students to speak so that there is constant oral language practice during whole-class activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ensure pleasant repetition and maximum practice with the Pared-Down Language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Teach grammar inductively (use recasts, students learn what sounds right)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Use suggested verbal and nonverbal communication techniques to ensure connection with students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Students only gesture during (a) introduction of a new word, and (b) kinesthetic reviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Encourage peer support and interaction (e.g., if error made during spontaneous interaction, ask fellow students to help with correction).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Help achieve mastery for your students by spending the recommended time on the kit (i.e., 50 hours per kit).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Be flexible, be creative and customize – this is an in-process, adaptable approach (e.g., modify your speed and speech to accommodate vocabulary that students know; talk about what interests the students you have).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Context-embedded activities used in the AIM classroom with beginner learners of French: choral play recitation, song practice, calculating group points, review of numbers, partial questioning about the play and teacher-led self-expression (TLSE) activities involving questioning and discussions related to students’ lives and the classroom that were initiated and scaffolded by the teacher. During choral activities, the participating teacher gestured and recited the play orally, while the students were only expected to recite along with her, using the gestures as visual cues to understand the meaning of the vocabulary. During these observations, the participating teacher never directly introduced a new vocabulary word or gesture out of context from what was being done in class at the time. However, she did practice gestures and vocabulary with students out of context on
numerous occasions, predominantly during targeted gesture teaching activities (i.e., class rehearsal of isolated word-gesture associations).

After mastering the story orally, AIM dictates that learners should then embark on a variety of written activities and creative story extension activities that focus on developing comprehensive and productive L2 skills. Most of these activity options, and the groupings associated with them (e.g., individual, partner, and/or group) depend on the learners’ proficiency and developmental readiness to complete more complex activities. For example, primary-level AIM students will likely not be developmentally ready for a written activity involving story retelling; therefore AIM teachers are encouraged to initiate an oral story retelling if possible. On the other hand, older students who have typically had a chance to develop their L1 literacy skills are more likely to have the tools to try completing more complex end-of-unit activities. At the end of a unit, language refinement activities become more analytic in nature, looking closer at elements of morphology and syntax present in the linguistic structuring of the text under study. Students are also invited to share their play presentation with their family at home, during school assemblies, or during a Café Theatre organized by the teacher where parents are invited into the school to see the play presentations and eat French food (AIM Language Learning, 2012a).

While students in Year 1 go through a similar activity sequence as students in Year 3, the expectation is that older students will simply accelerate faster. The following recommendation to AIM teachers describes the reasoning behind this progression:

Once you have completed one unit and understand the flow of the program, you will find that the basic flow remains similar, with a slow shift from one unit to the next toward increased IPG [individual/partner/group] work time and more creative work with the language (increased time spent on creative story telling activities and refinement of language skills). The most important shift that happens from one unit to the next is the increased opportunity for spontaneous interactions as students develop fluency. If you do not allow for this and continue to control the language output of your class as is necessary during the initial stages of the program before fluency develops, then your students will never attain the higher levels of communicative competence that are possible with this program. (AIM Language Learning, 2012c, p. 10)

Although this consistency across plays and units is meant to provide learners with repeated exposure to promote higher levels of communicative competence, the
communicative activities in the AIM syllabus do run the risk of becoming more and more predictable over time, and possibly losing their initial appeal. According to Stern (1992), familiarity with the style of delivery can be helpful in classroom-based SLA contexts; however, it is equally possible that without some variety in the delivery of content, students can become less motivated the longer they continue learning in such a familiar and predictable L2 learning environment. More research is needed to ascertain whether or not this is happening with AIM students.

*Learner roles*

This category relates to the types of contributions that learners are able to make to their own learning process while a particular method is being implemented. It would seem obvious that both learner and teacher roles in the language classroom are determined to a large extent by the methodology being used. With respect to students, Tudor (2001) attests that it is in fact the “methodology and the learning activities that it generates which define the nature of students’ participation in the classroom” (p. 109). To this end, as stated earlier, AIM learners are not consulted regarding the L2 syllabus. In the beginning, learner speech tends to consist mainly of choral or individual repetition of teacher utterances (Arnott, 2005). Similar to Audiolingualism, learners are viewed as responders who have limited control over what is said.

New Canadian students who are learning English as well as French are singled out in the AIM materials as being primed for language learning, or “in language-learning mode” (2012c, p. 26). At the same time, the L1 communicative skills and knowledge that all learners bring to their L2 learning are not recognized as valuable tools in the AIM classroom. At one point, the claim is made that learners enter the classroom with blank slates:

[Learners] are like babies with no communicative ability and are totally dependent on you [the teacher] if they are to learn to communicate with each other exclusively in the second language. (AIM Language Learning, 2012c, p. 18).

While the emphasis in AIM is primarily receptive in the beginning stages, AIM teachers are strongly encouraged to spend about one-third of class time in their L2 classes engaging in spontaneous communication, perhaps by inquiring into such things as the date, the weather, student moods or upcoming holidays (Maxwell, 2006). The AIM
method stresses that this kind of context-embedded, spontaneous language use invites the personal involvement of students, facilitates an emotional connection to the L2, and is key to the success of the program. Whether or not students are able to make regular use of their L2 for personal expression outside of the context of the plays is not entirely clear, as Carr (2001) observed with younger AIM students who were not able to make regular use of their L2 for personal expression outside of the context of the text under study. Similarly, most partner and group work is meant to be focused exclusively on the text under study, and students are expected to communicate with each other using only the L2. However, observations of beginner-level AIM classes suggest a lower occurrence of student-student interaction, due in large part to the amount of choral language work that the teacher facilitates during those initial stages (Arnott, 2005).

It remains unclear what kind of communicative relationship the AIM method assumes should develop between learners, or the role they should play in their own or their peers’ SLA beyond that of receiver, repeater, or responder. Richards and Rodgers (1986) explain that “learner roles in an instructional system are closely linked to the teacher’s status and function [in the L2 classroom]” (p. 28). I describe AIM’s expectations of the teacher in the next section.

**Teacher roles**

Teachers are commonly held responsible for implementing methods according to how they are described, and manipulating procedures to point students in the right direction toward SLA. Some methods are very prescriptive in how they are to be implemented (e.g., Audiolingualism, Total Physical Response, The Silent Way) while other approaches, like Communicative Language Teaching, recommend that teachers adhere to some key principles and select or develop their own ways (e.g., materials, tasks, etc.) of implementing the method.

Research has shown that AIM is generally very demanding of teachers (Carr, 2001) and is extremely teacher-centred at the start with the expectation that teachers will eventually scaffold learners towards independent spontaneous use of the L2 (Arnott, 2005). According to the literature, the AIM syllabus is characterized as being very “front-end loaded” because teachers are responsible for teaching 700-900 gestured vocabulary items in order for learners to gain a basic functional fluency (AIM Language Learning,
In terms of specific roles, research has shown that the beginner-level AIM teacher can typically play six predominant roles: (a) communicate expectations, (b) consistently and constructively model the L2, (c) scaffold L2 learning using gestures, (d) facilitate vocabulary acquisition, (e) correct student errors and prompt L2 refinement, and (f) create a positive atmosphere and cultivate a positive attitude toward the L2 (Arnott, 2005). Certainly one of the primary roles of an AIM teacher at any level is to model the target language. In an online AIM document targeted for teachers, it is made clear the powerful role they play in this respect when they are reminded that “as a teacher of a foreign language to students who are not yet fluent, [teachers] have all the linguistic power and they have none” (AIM Language Learning, 2012c, p. 18). Beyond the initial stages of SLA, an AIM teacher is required to continue modeling the L2, correcting errors and cultivating a positive attitude toward the L2; however AIM teachers are also expected to prompt more L2 refinement, and gesture less of the basic PDL vocabulary that learners should have already internalized (Maxwell, 2006, 2008).

While teachers appear to have many opportunities to gain knowledge and become skilled at how AIM is implemented effectively (e.g., summer institutes, workshops, online support), they are consistently cautioned not to use the method partially or “say that they are doing AIM if they are not doing it in full [italics added], as this is an unfair representation of the program” (AIM Language Learning, 2012c, p. 27). An AIM teacher’s role is clear - to become trained to implement the method and its activities as prescribed in the instructional materials (Maxwell, 2006, 2008), which I will now introduce in more detail.

**Instructional materials**

Richards and Rodgers contend that materials associated with particular methods vary in the degree to which they define, suggest or merely imply the following: (a) subject matter content, (b) the intensity of coverage for syllabus items, and (c) day-to-day learning objectives that collectively constitute the goals of the syllabus (1986, p. 29). The resources created and designed to accompany the implementation of the AIM method are referred to as “Histoires en action! – Pour les tout petits” (Stories in Action for Toddlers/Primary” for the primary levels), “Histoires en Action!” (HEA) (Stories in Action) for junior levels (typically Grades 4-6) and “Jeunesse en Action!” (Youth in
Action) (Grades 7 and up) (AIM Language Learning, 2012d). Each program kit corresponds with a specific year of the method’s syllabus, and contains the following resource materials for each of the three plays contained in one kit: teacher guide, program guide, student workbook, student DVD, posters, image cards and teacher DVD with raps and songs that are meant to support implementation of the method. In the teacher guide, there are specific daily lesson templates, calendar templates, as well as a proposed sequence and descriptions of different activities created to help teachers plan and organize their implementation of the method. Most of the materials are available to teachers only as a package, and not in individual parts. The AIM resources are grouped as such based on the conviction that most of the materials (e.g., the student DVD) are not easy to use without the guides and other support material.

As stated earlier, a successful AIM teacher is characterized in the literature as one who can implement the method “in full”, as prescribed by the accompanying materials. In essence, this implies that AIM students will only become fluent if AIM teachers abide by the activities and procedures specified in the materials. In this view, as Prabhu (1990) would agree, AIM is seen as a set of procedures that carries a prediction of results, similar to how replicating a procedure in the chemistry lab is expected to yield a predicted result. I will now describe the specific procedures of AIM in more detail.

**AIM at the procedure level**

As stated earlier, the AIM method originated at the procedure level as a result of Maxwell inventing a set of procedures that she experienced success with, and then later reflecting on a design and theoretical approach to justify these particular procedures. The procedural aspects of a particular method are encompassed in the way it manages the presentation, practice and feedback phases of L2 instruction. Richards and Rodgers (1982, 1985, 1986, 2001) contend that a method is in fact most obviously characteristic at the level of procedure, as is the case with AIM.

Certainly, one of AIM’s defining characteristics are the gestures representative of

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6 The AIM raps are meant to be recited chorally so that students practice speaking the target language aloud. Some common raps get students to assert their commitment to an L2-only classroom environment, while others act as mnemonic devices for remembering grammar rules. See AIM Language Learning (2012b) for some audio-recorded exemplars of the AIM raps.
target language vocabulary. An ideal portrayal of presentation-related AIM procedures in the L2 classroom would involve presentation of the L2 curriculum using the target language 100% of the time, and substantial gesture use by the teacher in the beginning stages, decreased gesture use as students become more fluent, and then gesturing by the teacher later on for new vocabulary only or to remind students of a word that they already know (Maxwell, 2006, 2008). In terms of practice, target language practice is also often teacher-directed, with students manipulating the PDL vocabulary, expressions and grammatical structures in context (e.g., using the play or story) or during TLSE activities, especially during the beginning stages of SLA with AIM (Arnott, 2005). As shown earlier, many of the tasks in each AIM unit are repeated within the unit itself and across grade levels. With regards to feedback, a teacher would be expected to reinforce and praise students whenever they took risks with the L2 or if they conducted themselves entirely in the target language over the duration of a class. The AIM method offers a variety of procedures to help teachers create an L2-only learning environment, including entrance routines where students leave their L1 at the door and commit to speaking only the target language during the class, as well as positive reinforcements (i.e., tickets) offered in exchange for a chance at winning a prize if students speak only in the target language.

On the other hand, with respect to corrective feedback, initially individual student errors are allowed and not corrected. However, the AIM method dictates that student errors made during teacher-led activities must be corrected. Maxwell (2006) stresses that choral language work is considered to be modeled speech and the model must be correct if students are to transfer properly what they learn via the model to spontaneous application. This feedback procedure, and observations of AIM in action (Arnott, 2005), appear to follow closely the procedure outlined in the Audiolingual approach, in that it demonstrates the expectation that student errors made during group activities be corrected quickly, and the correct form be repeated by the individual or the class chorally at the prompting of the teacher.

While the procedures and activities associated with AIM appear to be quite scripted, Richards and Rodgers admit that “classroom observations often reveal that teachers do not necessarily follow the procedures a method prescribes” (1986, p. 32).
Considering the AIM research to date, it may be the case that AIM teachers are inclined to do the same. As mentioned earlier, Mady et al. (2007, 2008, 2009) assigned classes to AIM or non-AIM groups for their comparative research study based on one classroom observation, and results showed that the central tenets of AIM were not used to the same extent across participating teachers (e.g., target language use, choral work, spontaneous speech, individual/partner/group work, etc.). The participant teacher in my master’s study also deviated somewhat from the method’s prescriptions by adding activities that she believed complemented the regimen of the method (e.g., gesture tests) (Arnott, 2005). Carr (2001) also claimed that AIM should only constitute one component of an overall CF program, recommending that teachers need to at least consider supplementing AIM materials with additional French resources to balance the curriculum and expose students to more authentic and culturally-rich texts. Based on this evidence, it is problematic to view teachers as technicians whose sole responsibility it is to implement packaged teaching methods, not only for method implementation, but also for method comparison research, as I explain in further detail in the next section.

Overall, in light of this analysis, it is clear that AIM can be described at each of the levels conceived by Richards and Rodgers (see Figure 1 for summary). By their definition, this would mean that AIM is worthy of the status of ‘method’. As Sierra (1995) predicted, it is equally interesting to note how salient techniques and philosophies of methods past live on in AIM (e.g., choral repetition of the Audiolingual Method; the idea that L2 learning should be considered the same as L1 learning in the Natural Approach; value of kinesthetic movement for language learning in the Total Physical Response method). Nonetheless, this analysis has certainly highlighted some strengths and weaknesses of AIM and of methods in general. In the next section, I introduce some of the recent literature scrutinizing the concept of ‘method’, and then connect the implications of this kind of skepticism to second language teaching and to the present study.

**Concept of ‘Method’**

Over the last couple of decades the second language education literature has increasingly condemned the idea that language teaching can be conceptualized in terms of teaching method alone. According to Sierra (1995), all methods have at least two things in common: (a) their belief to be the best, and (b) a set of prescriptions that
**APPROACH**

**Theory of Language**
- Functional View
  - L2 as a system for the expression of meaning
  - Pared Down Language (PDL) lexicon

**Theories of Language Learning**
- Gesture Approach (Maxwell, 2001)
  - necessary to experience language visually and kinesthetically to internalize meaning
- Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1983)
  - supporting visual and kinesthetic intelligences facilitates learning
- Comprehensible Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1981)
  - importance of maximized L2 input ("i + 1") to ensure learner intake of the target language
- Natural Approach (Krashen & Terrell, 1983)
  - SLA mimics naturalistic language learning

**PROCEDURE**

**Presentation**
- Vocabulary presented using gestures
- 100% of classroom instruction in target language
  - e.g., reinforcement (e.g., ticket system); entrance routines

**Practice**
- L2 practice is primarily teacher-directed
- Students manipulate PDL and grammatical structures in context (e.g., using play/story) or during TLSE activities

**Feedback**
- Student errors during choral activities must be corrected
- Teacher should reinforce and praise students when they take risks with L2 positive or use it for a whole class

**DESIGN**

**Objectives**
- Linguistic-oriented = “critical level of fluency”
  - awareness of how the language works, and an ability and readiness to learn new words and grammatical L2 structures
- Process-oriented
  - oral skills before reading and writing
  - L2 literacy skills will transfer from L1
- Product-oriented = learning the PDL vocabulary

**Syllabus**
- Priori Syllabus = determined in advance
  - Starts from “communicative-experiential” syllabus (LeBlanc, 1990; Stern, 1992)
  - minor emphasis on cultural syllabus
- Progresses through units of “years”, not grade levels
- Verbs introduced early via “regularized stem”

**Teaching Activities**
- Similar sequence of activities through each AIM unit/year
  - learn vocabulary words, gestures and structures unique to each AIM text
  - practice orally and in writing, both in and out of context
- Repeated exposure meant to promote high levels of communicative competence

**Learner Role**
- Learners are not consulted regarding the syllabus
- Primarily receptive in beginning stages (e.g., choral repetition)

**Teacher Roles**
- Implement AIM as prescribed in the instructional materials
- Consistently model the target language
- Teach 700-900 gestured vocabulary items
- Correct errors and prompt language refinement
- Cultivate a positive student attitudes toward the L2

**Instructional Materials**
- *Histoires en Action* (3 plays/stories per unit)
  - each unit includes a teacher guide, program guide, student workbook, student DVD, posters, image cards and a music CD related to each play/story

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*Figure 1. Summary Description of AIM Using Framework Categories from Richards and Rodgers (1985, 1986, 2001).*
teachers have to follow (p. 128). Interestingly, the majority of criticism directed toward the ‘method’ concept has targeted these two commonalities.

**One best method**

Inherent to the notion that one best method exists is the assumption that one way of teaching will succeed with a myriad of learners. Indeed, the AIM method is advertised in this same manner, as a method whose pedagogical principles and procedures apply to all students, anywhere, anytime (AIM Language Learning, 2012a; Maxwell, 2006, 2008). While AIM is not the first methodology to declare universality, the history of second language teaching has led researchers to repeatedly concede that this is simply untenable in reality (e.g., Danesi, 2003). Stern spent most of the 1980s voicing his displeasure with the field’s obsession with searching for the ultimate method (1983); however, despite his best efforts, the search continued. In the early 1990s, Prabhu (1990) argued that we risk devaluing teachers when debating whether one best method exists, saying:

> If we regard our professional effort as a search for the best method which, when found, will replace all other methods, we may not only be working toward an unrealizable goal, but in the process, be misconstruing the nature of teaching as a set of procedures that can by themselves carry a guarantee of learning outcomes. (p. 175)

In 1991, Nunan declared that the history of methods showed that “there never was and probably never will be a method for all” (p. 228). Since the millennium, researchers have continued to attack the existence of a one size fits all pedagogy (e.g., Canagarajah, 2006). This trend of “breaking from the method” has recently been re-articulated in the postmethod approach offered by Kumaravadivelu (1994, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006), who has argued that the concept of method is dead (Brown, 2002), necessitating an entirely new language for conceptualizing innovations in language teaching that uses principles that are less limiting in the way they define instructional practices and procedures in theory and in practice. The extent to which stakeholder perspectives and AIM implementation relate to the movement towards this type of postmethod condition is described further in the next chapter.

**Methods as prescriptions**

Often central to a method is a set of recommendations and instructions that teachers are expected to follow in order to be considered a user of that particular method.
However, researchers have debated accepting such restrictive labels as “Silent Way Teacher” or “Communicative Language Teacher” at face value, questioning whether methods can ever be realized in their ‘purest’ form (i.e., how they are described on paper). In the early 1980s, Stern (1983) voiced reservations about what it really meant when a teacher said they used a specific method, and whether multiple teachers using a particular method did so in the same way. For him, the idea that teaching could be aggressively prescribed and consistently implemented offered a very narrow view of classroom-based instruction, similar to Brown’s (2000) claim that methods oversimplify language teaching to fit all contexts. Larsen-Freeman (2000b) advocated the same caution when considering what it meant to use a method, warning that “saying that a particular method is practiced certainly does not give us the whole picture of what is happening in the classroom (p. xi). According to Tudor (2001), this ‘whole picture’ of classroom-based language learning includes both micro- and macro-level influences that inevitably make the passage of prescriptive methods from theoretical principle to pedagogical reality extremely context dependent.

While the prescriptive nature of methods might be appealing to teachers who need explicit guidance, claims derived from prescribed teaching procedures often lead to declarations about student achievement that are incredibly difficult to substantiate, as appears to be the case with AIM based on the research conducted to date. However, despite what might be a fundamental weakness of the method concept, I agree with Nunan (1991), who argued that features of methods should not be disregarded as entirely useless since “we have yet to devise a method which is incapable of teaching anybody anything” (p. 248).

**Future of Methods**

Regardless of whether ‘method’ can be appropriately defined, or whether the theoretical concept of method is dead, there is no doubt that methodological innovation contributes to classroom-based language teaching. Using multiple corpuses of teacher data, Bell (2007) ascertained that language teachers considered methods to be useful and practical resources for their pedagogy; picking and choosing whatever procedures or techniques from a particular method that help them to realize learning objectives or solve problems in their classroom. Akbari (2008) suggested that Bell’s findings are more
indicative of the survival of the practical concept of ‘methodology’ as opposed to the theoretical framework of ‘method’ that postmethod has attempted to replace; however, he then proposed that how teachers describe their own practice should take precedence over such distinctions in academic discourse.

For this study, I wanted to observe how teachers implemented AIM and investigate how they described their AIM practice and explained their reasons for following and/or disregarding prescriptions and proscriptions inherent to the method. I also chose to embrace the inevitability of context, and examine both the context where AIM was being used, and the perspectives of educators in each context (e.g., teachers, principals, consultants). Based on the research summarized in this chapter, as well as my personal observations as an AIM teacher, I propose that conditions inherent to classroom-based instruction environments interact and shape both the method and the teacher who uses it. I will now expand on this point by describing the two theoretical perspectives that I use to inform the design and analysis of my research in more detail.
Chapter 3 - Theoretical Framework

Introduction

In this chapter, I review the theoretical literature related to two specific areas: agency and educational change. I then combine the two bodies of literature to offer a consolidated conceptual lens that I use to analyze the data from this study.

Agency

The notions of agency and mediation have emerged as central constructs in Sociocultural Theory (SCT). Theorists and researchers alike have attempted to define these concepts, and have used them to illustrate the dialectical relationships between human mental functioning and cultural, historical and institutional contexts. To date various conceptualizations have been attributed to mediation and agency, resulting in them being inextricably linked in the SCT literature related to agency.

After providing a brief overview of these two notions, I discuss their relevance to L2 teaching and the use of instructional methods that takes place in formal education settings like the CF classroom. Finally, I introduce a new direction for agency-related SCT inquiry that informs the proposed study.

Mediation

According to Vygotsky (1978, 1986, 1987), human contact with the social world is indirect or ‘mediated’ by culturally-created tools and/or artifacts appropriated by humans, the most powerful of which is language. This foundational assertion of SCT stresses that the use of mediational means initiates a dialectic relationship between the human mind and the social domain, which enables humans to shape and be shaped by their social context and relationships with others. The theory maintains that, from birth, the acquisition of higher-order cognitive functioning is mediated through language with adults (inter-mental processes), eventually leading to internalization (intra-mental processes) – the inevitable by-product of mediated social interaction. This process is thought to be the same for L2 learning that takes place in schools, where mediated interaction with ‘experts’ (e.g., teachers, native speakers, adults) helps learners to internalize knowledge and skills, and eventually progress from a state of other-regulation to self-regulation (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Appel, 1994; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). In the classroom setting, SCT scholars generally use the terms ‘scaffolding’ (Wood, Bruner, &
Ross, 1976) to refer to the assistance offered by ‘experts’; and ‘zone of proximal development’ (Vygotsky, 1978) to refer to the domain where learning can most productively take place. Most recently, Wertsch (2007) proposed an implicit-explicit dimension to Vygotsky’s original definition of mediation, suggesting that the process of meaning development is more explicit in formal education settings (e.g., the classroom), mainly because more attention is drawn to the mediational means being employed, (e.g., the teacher).

Vygotsky originally insisted that the spoken word should be the unit of analysis when researching the mediated mind. However, not all scholars have agreed with this designation. In particular, Wertsch (1991, 1995, 1998) claimed that the use of mediational means involves action; and that introducing a psychological tool (language, for example) into the flow of action does not leave that action unchanged; rather, it leads that action to be transformed into a “new instrumental act”. Therefore, by analyzing these dialectically-interacting moments or ‘actions’, as opposed to just the language that redefines them, Wertsch believed that SCT researchers could achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between human mental functioning and the cultural, historical and institutional settings in which we live. Wertsch termed this new unit of analysis “mediated action”, and stressed that “the analysis of instrumental action must be grounded squarely in the irreducible tension between mediational means and the individual using them” (1995, p. 64). This condition, coupled with Wertsch’s conceptualization of socioculturally mediated action, has important implications for the evolving SCT definition of agency, which I introduce in the next section.

**Mediated agency**

The definition of agency continues to evolve across disciplines. Linguistic anthropologists who have written about agency and language have located its roots in the individual, describing it as one person’s “socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn, 2001), which has potential consequences for oneself and others (Duranti, 2004). Sewell (1992), a sociologist, argued that personal agency exists in a dialectical relationship with structure, where “different structures empower agents differentially” (p. 21). In the field of SCT, Vygotsky characterized agency as existing on both the inter-mental and intra-mental planes of mental functioning, saying that “without agency, we
are left with unsatisfactory accounts such as those that invoke the picture of ‘thoughts thinking themselves’” (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 50). Along these lines, Lantolf and Thorne (2006) insisted that agency was more than voluntary control over one’s behavior, and also entailed “the ability to assign relevance and significance to things and events” (p. 143).

With ‘mediational means’ and ‘mediated action’ having emerged as the essential underpinning of the formulation of SCT research (Lantolf, 2000), it is not surprising that the notion of mediation is also closely associated with the evolving SCT view of agency. In their article entitled “A Sociocultural Approach to Agency”, Wertsch, Tulviste, and Hagstrom (1993) attempted to redefine the boundaries of agency and broaden its attribution beyond the isolated individual. They claimed that agency “extends beyond the skin” due to the fact that it is frequently a property of groups (and not merely dyads or small groups as Vygotsky had suggested), and that it enables humans to function in a range of contexts and carry out a variety of cultural activities that would otherwise be impossible without the use of mediating tools or artifacts. This conceptualization of “mediated agency” is two-fold – (a) it implies that actions can originate with individuals and groups; and (b) the “possibilities for formulating certain problems, let alone the possibilities for following certain paths of action, are [also] shaped by the mediational means employed” (Wertsch et al, 1993, p. 342). By their rationale, the basic unit of analysis to be highlighted in agency-related SCT research should not be the ‘individual’, but the ‘individual(s)-operating-with-mediational-means’, and attempts to capture or describe agency entails an acknowledgement of the belief that cultural tools and artifacts are mediating the human action under investigation. Wertsch (1998) went on to differentiate between the complex processes of mastery (e.g., knowing how to use AIM) and appropriation (e.g., taking ownership of AIM) when explaining how active agents internalize the meditational means they are employing. This distinction helps account for actions of acceptance and resistance that agents sometimes exhibit when negotiating each level of internalization.

**Mediated agency in the L2 classroom**

Classroom settings have played an important role in contemporary psychology studies of cognition, teaching and learning (Wertsch et al, 1993). From an SCT
perspective, inter-mental and intra-mental mediated functioning are central to the process of teaching and learning in formal education settings that are comprised of two primary stakeholders - teachers and learners. Agency in these contexts is mediated through a process of constant negotiation (both implicit and explicit) between teachers and students, and other aspects of the classroom setting (e.g., Swain, Kinnear & Steinman, 2011). According to Lantolf and Thorne (2006), agency can be controlled or challenged during this negotiation – teachers and learners control their own behavior while simultaneously negotiating the constraints and affordances that dictate the possibilities for action.

Teachers, in particular, face challenges unique to L2 instruction that have implications for their agency. For instance, for most L2 learners, the classroom represents their sole exposure to the target language culture that is said to be vitally important to L2 learning (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). When the target language is not spoken beyond the walls of the classroom (as is commonly the case for FSL education in Canada, or English as a Foreign Language in European and/or Asian contexts), teachers are expected to manufacture L2 learning environments that expose students to as close an approximation of the target culture as possible. In this context, the authenticity of social interaction that is said to mediate students’ L2 learning is jeopardized (Magnan, 2008), putting the onus on teachers to initiate a locally constructed interactive community (Van Lier, 1996) or introduce alternative mediating tools (e.g., computers, email, etc.) to maximize the realism of L2 interaction. This type of contextual demand shapes and dictates logistical and instructional aspects of L2 teaching, consequently impacting teacher agency in the L2 classroom.

Johnson (2006, 2009) takes these kinds of challenges into account when she characterizes L2 teachers as “users and creators of legitimate forms of knowledge who make decisions about how best to teach their second language students within complex socially, culturally and historically situated contexts” (2006, p. 239). If contexts are always changing, then it would be foolish to portray L2 teaching as being static, done the same way by each teacher, with each class, over the course of each school year, as some prescriptive methods like AIM do. Rather, as Sierra (1995) insists, L2 teaching should be seen as always changing to accommodate the needs and demands of a volatile classroom context. At the very least, researchers (e.g., Bell, 2003, 2007; Block 2001; Tudor, 2001)
have maintained that methods can provide teachers with a starting point in their pedagogy, giving them something to work from that complements their individual ideas and intuitions. In the next section, I introduce research describing this kind of dialectic negotiation and construction of method, which differs from the traditional top-down imposition that methods have typically embodied, and the implications of this view for L2 teacher agency.

**Mediated agency and instructional methods**

Over the years, different instructional methods and approaches have been created and combined for the purposes of maximizing the effectiveness of L2 instruction. In the beginning, a case was made for more regimented methods to be used in L2 classrooms in response to the concern that teachers had no specific research-based routines, procedures or approaches to draw from. Years later, Prabhu (1990) argued that “the enemy of good teaching was not a bad method, but over-routinization” (p. 174). In his view, regimented methods in language instruction reduced teaching to a ‘pedagogic ritual’ and characterized teachers as mechanical beings with no agency. He maintained that the choice between which methods to use was not as important as a teacher’s subjective understanding of the teaching they do while using or not using a particular method, what he called their “sense of plausibility”. For teaching to be productive, Prabhu insisted that a teacher’s sense of plausibility must be engaged:

> Teachers need to operate with some personal conceptualization of how their teaching leads to desired learning – with a notion of causation that has a measure of credibility for them. (1990, p. 172)

In the twenty years since Prabhu’s declarations, the field of second language education has gradually shifted towards a re-valuing of teachers’ pedagogical intuitions. With the widespread adoption of the Communicative Language Teaching approach (c.f. Spada, 2007), helping teachers to become self-directed, autonomous individuals is now seen as more conducive to affective L2 instruction (c.f. Nunan & Lamb, 1996). Similar to Prabhu, Kumaravadivelu (2001, 2003, 2006) began insisting that teachers be characterized not as passive technicians, but as individuals who needed to avoid designing their classroom and teaching according to one specific method. Instead of an alternative method, he advocated for an alternative to the notion of method itself,
claiming that all teachers construct personalized theories of practice and “know not only how to teach but also how to act autonomously within the academic and administrative constraints imposed by institutions, curricular and textbooks” (2003, p. 33). Kumaravadivelu’s postmethod pedagogy emphasizes teacher beliefs, teacher reasoning and teacher cognition, and encourages teachers to rise above methods by:

- Facilitating the advancement of a context-sensitive language education based on a true understanding of local linguistic, socio-cultural, and political particularities.
- Rupturing the reified role relationship between theorists and practitioners by enabling teachers to construct their own theory of practice.
- Tapping the socio-political consciousness that participants bring with them in order to aid their quest for identity formation and social transformation. (2001, p. 537)

It is worth noting that Kumaravadivelu cited Prabhu’s original notion of a teacher’s sense of plausibility as an example of what he called “principled pragmatism” (2003), where, instead of combining the desirable attributes of established methods (i.e., described in Chapter 2 as ‘principled eclecticism’), teachers should exercise their agency by constantly shaping and reshaping their pedagogy by means of self-observation, self-analysis, and self-evaluation. In this sense, a method is more like a highly articulated sense of plausibility with the potential to extend or restrict a teacher’s agency. More simply, a teacher can operate with meditational means, or ‘appropriate’ AIM (Wertsch, 1998), in so far as their sense of plausibility is in dialogue with the method. This could result in consensus, conflict, or revision in relation to the parameters of the method, ultimately contributing to its rejection, growth or change.

With FSL research showing that teachers implement methods in different ways, it seems foolish to assume that all of the teachers in this study use AIM in the same way. While AIM as described on paper does not coincide with the definition of postmethod pedagogy, I feel that it is worth keeping the ideas of Prabhu, Kumaravadivelu and Wertsch in mind when analyzing how participating teachers perceive and implement AIM in their respective contexts, and when considering the dialectic relationship between AIM and the teachers that use it. If, as Prabhu would likely predict, the teachers in this study are found to be generating their own location-specific version of AIM, then this has implications for the teachers and the method itself. Considering the SCT concept of mediated agency, how
teachers internalize AIM (i.e., mastery versus appropriation) in their respective Mandated or Optional contexts has important consequences for the micro-level policies that dictate CF programming. In addition, the implementation of an instructional method as meditational means for teaching should unavoidably change the approach and the act of ‘teaching’ resulting from its use. This assertion is supported by Larsen-Freeman (2000b) who stated that instructional methods are no longer static once they have been implemented by a teacher because any method put into practice “will be shaped at least by the teacher, the students, the conditions of instruction, and the broader sociocultural context” (p. 182). Thus far, the few observations of AIM and non-AIM teachers in action tend to support this conviction. However, the language in AIM literature and instructional materials implies that the method does not change, nor does it have to, once teachers begin to implement it. Richards and Rodgers would characterize this approach to method innovation as “teacher proofing the instructional system by limiting teacher initiative” (1986, p. 28). Considering the lenses of mediated agency, teachers’ sense of plausibility, and principled pragmatism, it seems virtually impossible to separate ‘teacher’ from ‘method’, particularly when AIM researchers are isolating an ever-changing method as the primary influence affecting student proficiency. For this reason, I have included these concepts in my conceptual framework to inform my analysis and interpretation of stakeholder perspectives and teacher actions related to AIM. In addition, not only am I looking at individual AIM teachers, but I am also interested in whether the act of mandating AIM for FSL instruction influences teacher perspectives and implementation patterns. The fact that teachers in this study were working in school boards where a policy was in place related to the use of AIM led me to an additional body of SCT literature that attempts to account for the types of power dynamics that might be influencing teachers in the AIM-mandated and AIM-optional boards.

**Critical sociocultural theory on agency**

Research suggests that a shift from teacher- to student-centred teaching would not be governed solely by cognitive considerations alone (Wertsch et al, 1993), and that agency and successful change in general rely heavily on the compatibility between the change and the teacher’s working reality (Milne, Scantlebury & Otieno, 2006). For this reason, if teachers are to mediate learner agency by being more flexible and breaking from the notion of prescriptive, ready-made lessons in favor of improvisation as Van Lier
recommended (2008), then there must be an acknowledgment of the power-laden sociocultural context in which teachers would theoretically make this happen.

The idea that power relations and teacher agency are strongly intertwined is apparent in research related to curriculum design. In her study examining the agency of four elementary teachers involved in the creation and implementation of their own word-processing curriculum, Paris (1993) found that, similar to what the SCT perspective emphasizes, teacher agency was strongly rooted in the histories and realities of each individual participant and the institution they worked in. Based on her analysis, Paris challenged the notion that curriculum knowledge can only originate from so-called ‘curriculum experts’, and concluded that fostering teacher agency in any classroom context would require the following changes: (a) a recognition and resolution of assumptions underlying agency and the dominant ideologies in schools, (b) that “teacher’s curriculum work be understood in terms of its present and historical context”, and (c) that “teachers’ curriculum work be interpreted through the eyes of the teachers who live it” (1993, p. 151). These findings imply that teacher agency in the classroom is not only a product of negotiation between teacher, student(s) and other meditational means (in this case, curriculum or methods), but that it also involves an equally important negotiation between teacher, institution, and the hegemonic ideologies that are embedded within it.

Agency in the L2 classroom, or any classroom for that matter, is different from other social situations because teachers and students are often in the position of responding to conditions put forth by another. It is likely that the degree to which teachers or learners can operate with meditational means, or exert their ‘mediated agency’, is dictated to a large extent by the power relations and social order that are reproduced in classrooms and the institution of schools. Scholars outside the field of L2 education have articulated this point of view about agency for years. Sociologist Sewell’s perspective on agency relates strongly to power and structure in society:

…personal agency is laden with collectively produced differences of power…agency and structure exist in a dialectical relationship that can constrain and promote possibilities for teachers’ action to interact with available resources. (1992, p. 21)

Ahearn (2001) also urged that a productive direction for future research might be to
establish a typology of agency (e.g., oppositional agency; complicit agency; agency of power; agency of intention; etc.), while also “recognizing that multiple types are exercised in any given action” (p. 130).

Until recently (c.f. Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007), the majority of SCT research has not addressed the issue of power as it relates to agency and the production of knowledge. In response to this gap, Moje and Lewis (2007) proposed a “critical sociocultural theory” (C-SCT) framework that regards agency not only as a general process of negotiation and mediation, but as a calculated making and remaking of selves within structures of power. By emphasizing the strategic nature of agency, Moje and Lewis highlight how teacher agency is not rooted in the individual, but is also a process of positioning oneself within the systems and structures that shape the institution of schooling.

Although this framework was originally conceived for literacy-based teaching, it certainly has implications for language teaching, or in this case, FSL teaching in contexts where AIM has been mandated and others where teachers are left to decide whether they want to adopt the method or not. Similar to the C-SCT framework, the system of activity under investigation in this study includes the voices, experiences and subjectivities of people (i.e., teachers, principals, consultants) and ‘structures’ (e.g., board mandates, government policies, school policies, etc.) that are present in their AIM classrooms. Comparing AIM-optional and AIM-mandated contexts through the lens of this framework enables me to account for systems of power, in this case mandates or policies, as they shape and are shaped by stakeholders and teachers in different contexts. As well, I am better able to describe how each participating teacher’s agency is supported and/or constrained by the power relations at work in their particular context.

For this study, I use “mediated agency” and “critical SCT” to examine the dimensions of teacher agency in AIM-mandated and AIM-optional contexts. With AIM materializing as a formal method only in the last couple of years, it is reasonable to assume that teachers who decide to use AIM, or boards that decide to mandate it, are imposing change in their FSL programming. As a result, executing AIM and formulating perspectives and decisions related to it should be seen to represent attempts at implementing change. For this reason, I also ground aspects of the proposed investigation within the conceptualization of the process underlying meaningful educational change put

**Educational Change**

Since 1982, Michael Fullan has been developing a conceptual framework to better understand the dynamics of “meaningful” educational change (Fullan, 1982, 1991, 2001, 2007). The impetus for his work originated in his witnessing the chronic failure of innovations and reforms in educational systems around the world. Fullan attributed this recurrence to misunderstandings of what change is, and mismanagement of its implementation:

> The neglect of the phenomenology of change – that is, how people actually experience change as distinct from how it might have been intended – is at the heart of the spectacular lack of success of most social reforms. (2007, p. 8)

**Shared meaning**

In each revision of his conceptualization (1982, 1991, 2001, 2007), Fullan insisted that real educational change involves a transformation of conceptions and behavior. He believed that change is a sociopolitical process involving a variety of “change agents” at different levels of the educational system, including students, teachers, principals, parents, consultants, district administrators, faculties of education and government. According to Fullan, instead of making decisions or arriving at solutions based on one individual agent’s point of view, a “shared meaning” must be attained, where “the relationships between the new programs or policies and the thousands of subjective realities embedded in people’s individual and organizational contexts and their personal histories” (2007, p. 37) are taken into account. The extent to which these realities are considered or overlooked is vital to whether the potential change has a chance at becoming meaningful for each individual agent. In this inquiry, select change agents’ actions related to AIM are investigated (e.g., teacher implementation; consultants’ recommendations etc.) and all participants were asked about their own subjective realities, as well as how the realities of other participants contribute to an emergent shared meaning about the use of AIM in their context.

Similar to the dynamic nature of mediated agency, Fullan’s shared meaning involves simultaneous individual and social change where “the ’what’ and the ‘how’ [are] constantly interacting with and reshaping each other” (2007, p. 9). This process-oriented
view highlights how educational change is more than one simple event, and emphasizes the need to put the change into action in order to evaluate its impact and viability, which Fullan calls the “bias for action”.

**Bias for action**

Fullan (2007) maintained that change is not meaningful unless the agents and processes commonly involved in top-down and bottom-up initiatives are able to come together, and prioritize putting change into action to determine its value in their context. In other words, it matters more what happens during the process of change than where the particular innovation originated. To do this, Fullan advocated for a deviation from the traditional “ready-aim-fire” mindset, and endorsed a “ready-fire-aim” approach to effectively developing meaningful educational change, saying:

> Ready is important. You have to work on key problems and establish basic conditions, but it is necessary to get to action (fire) sooner rather than later because that is where knowledge, skills, understandings and commitments get sorted out. (p. 68)

Central to this “bias for action” approach is the idea that only by monitoring an innovation in action can agents gain a realistic picture of how change should be refined and strengthened to suit the local context. This monitoring and reflection of change in action is what makes it meaningful to all involved. Fullan goes on to caution that “silver bullets” or “off the shelf” solutions are futile; rather, the idea is to be a “critical consumer of external ideas, while working from the base of understanding and altering local context” (2007, p. 128).

Ascertaining the extent to which a bias for action related to AIM is in place is a key aspect of this study. Of equal significance is examining how such change in action is being experienced by agents in contexts where such a bias exists, either due to top-down policy (i.e., AIM-mandated board) or bottom-up initiation (AIM-optional board). Consequently, this study focuses on how AIM is being put into practice within the classroom and school settings, and the kinds of reflective action and monitoring that is taking place.

**Implementation**

Fullan operationalized teacher implementation of educational change as taking place across three possible dimensions: (a) the use of new or revised *materials*
(instructional resources such as curriculum materials or technologies); (b) new teaching behaviors (new teaching approaches, strategies or activities); and/or (c) the alteration of beliefs (pedagogical assumptions and theories underlying particular new policies or programs) (2007, p. 30). Based on the analysis of AIM in terms of approach, design and procedures introduced in Chapter 2, it is assumed that the developers of AIM ideally envisioned its implementation to take place across all three dimensions. In this study, I examine teacher implementation of AIM in Mandated and Optional contexts in light of these three dimensions. While it is possible that agents may implement AIM using different combinations of these three dimensions, Fullan insists that changes that do not practically embrace all of these dimensions are considered to be trivial, and unrepresentative of meaningful change:

The use of new materials by themselves may accomplish certain educational objectives, but it seems obvious that developing new teaching skills and approaches and understanding conceptually what and why something should be done, and to what end, represents much more fundamental change, and as such will take longer to achieve but will have a greater impact once accomplished. (2007, p. 36).

Factors influencing implementation of change

For this study, I considered the nine factors that Fullan identifies as influencing the implementation process (1991, 2001, 2007). These factors are thought to form an interacting “system of variables” that determine whether a change ultimately succeeds or fails. In this study, I gauge the degree to which educators considered these factors when making major decisions about the implementation of their CF program in general, and when considering how AIM factors into those decisions. Consequently, I also prompted teachers to reflect on the extent to which these factors influenced their implementation of AIM, and compared the perceived impact across Mandated and Optional teaching contexts.

Table 3 is an adapted list of Fullan’s factors (2007, p. 87), as well as brief explanations in the form of questions that shed light on their relevant impact on the implementation of change at multiple levels of the education system. It was not possible for me to access all of the local agents (e.g., district, community, students) or external factors (e.g., other agencies) in Fullan’s original list; however, each participant was asked
Table 3

*Factors Influencing the Implementation of Change (adapted from Fullan, 2007)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Change characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Need</td>
<td>• Is there an identified need for change to CF programming?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What priority needs is the implementation of AIM meeting?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Clarity</td>
<td>• Have the goals and means of using AIM been specified?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Why do teachers think they are using AIM?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Who is responsible for AIM implementation?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Complexity</td>
<td>• Is AIM considered to be a complex or simple change?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How easy/difficult is AIM to implement?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What skills are required of teachers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How has the implementation of AIM altered teachers’ beliefs, teaching strategies and/or use of materials?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Quality and practicality</td>
<td>• Does the implementation of AIM require a new curriculum, a new policy, and/or a restructured school?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Is ‘adoption’ more/less important than ‘implementation’?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Is the implementation of AIM considered to be a short- or long-term change?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Local characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Board / District</td>
<td>• What role do the board/consultants play in the implementation of AIM?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What change(s) have been made in recent years (e.g., past ten years) to the CF program in the particular board?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Did the change(s) succeed/fail?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To what extent does the board/consultant(s) verbally support/oppose the implementation of AIM?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What has the board done to support/challenge the implementation of AIM?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Community</td>
<td>• What role do parents play in the implementation of AIM?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What has the community done to support/challenge the implementation of AIM?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Principal</td>
<td>• What role does the principal play in the implementation of AIM?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To what extent does the principal verbally support/oppose the implementation of AIM?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What has the principal done to support/challenge teacher implementation of AIM?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Teacher</td>
<td>• What role does the teacher play in the implementation of AIM?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What effort is required on the part of the teacher to implement AIM?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do teachers view the implementation of AIM as a positive/negative change?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How does the culture and/or climate of the school support/challenge the implementation of AIM?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To what extent do other teachers in the school support/challenge the implementation of AIM?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Are teachers receiving support from other teachers outside of their school environment (e.g., professional learning communities)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How supported do teachers feel by their principals, board/community, and/or district when it comes to implementing AIM?

- What role does the government play in the implementation of AIM?
- What has the government/other agencies done to support/challenge innovation in CF?
- To what extent does the government support/challenge change like AIM in CF?

External factors

Government and other agencies

9. What role does the government play in the implementation of AIM?

What has the government/other agencies done to support/challenge innovation in CF?

To what extent does the government support/challenge change like AIM in CF?

Conce...
the local level. This interdependence is metaphorically represented as a system of gears, illustrating the dynamic processes of school based education and human behavior that are inherent to both frameworks. Both the SCT and Educational Change theories advocate for such dynamic characterizations. The different sizes of each gear delineate participating agents’ importance relative to each other and to the classroom-based implementation process. So, for instance, research has shown that the teacher is of paramount importance in the implementation of AIM (Arnott, 2005; Carr, 2001); however, no research to date has investigated the perspectives or practices of principals or consultants related to AIM. Therefore, in this initial depiction, this gear is the biggest of the three; however, it can change depending on whether my findings suggest that they represent a greater influence on the implementation of AIM at the school and classroom levels.

In addition to teachers, Fullan (2007) singles out principals and consultants as agents whose theories of action require investigation. He says that the principal in particular is an agent who is often confronted with as many unwanted or incomprehensible change initiatives as teachers, but who is also expected to lead the change implementation. He explains that principals can be placed in an impossible position if they are assigned too much responsibility without the capacity to carry it out, like “add-ons without anything being taken away” (Fullan, 2007, p. 168). Ascertaining the capacities and challenges that principals face when determining a shared vision, developing staff, and redesigning the organization of their school culture in relation to a change (in this case, AIM) is important if a practical theory of meaning is to positively influence student achievement (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). Consultants are equally vital to mobilizing change agents at the individual and collective levels of the school system.

In theory, when the subjective realities of consultants, principals and teachers are resolved and deemed compatible, then the gearwheels figuratively function or “rotate” at their optimum capacity (i.e., shared meaning is attained; teachers’ sense of plausibility is engaged; individuals are exercising their mediated agency). However, when the subjective realities are out of sync, then the cogs do not function as effectively, and run the risk of seizing the process of effective implementation altogether. As well, the central
characteristics of AIM, external forces (e.g., government initiatives) and board-level policies are shown outside of the prism, as it is unknown the extent to which they influence the system by introducing a metaphorical “wrench”, perhaps some “grease”, or in fact bear no influence at all on the shared meaning generated by the change agents. The degree to which these factors impact the implementation of AIM or the shared meaning generated by participating change agents is unknown, hence the dotted lines that imply a likely – but not a definitive - influence in this initial depiction.

In this study, Figure 2 is used to analyze, interpret and represent the subjective realities inherent to each AIM-mandated or AIM-optional teacher, principal and consultant. In Chapters 5 through 8, I customize and expand this graphic based on the findings in order to arrive at a detailed representation of: (a) what AIM implementation looks like in AIM-mandated and AIM-optional contexts, (b) how educators exercise their agency in relation to AIM, and (c) how meaningful AIM implementation is in each learning environment. The lines of the triangle will remain less dotted or become more solid to represent the influence of external factors, board policy and/or AIM on the reported subjective realities of the change agents being examined. Based on my findings, I also zoom in on each gear/change agent to provide important details related to the
meaningful nature of AIM as educational change in each of these learning environments.

In light of the literature and theoretical frameworks I have just introduced, I now turn to describing the facets of my methodology in more detail.
Chapter 4 - Methodology

Introduction

This study has three objectives: (a) to investigate the present practices of Ontario school boards regarding their endorsement of and/or opposition to different methodologies, including AIM, for CF instruction; (b) to explore the perspectives of educators in AIM-mandated and AIM-optional contexts, specifically related to aspects of utility, implementation, resources, and benefits/drawbacks; and (c) to compare the implementation of AIM in contexts where it has been mandated for elementary CF instruction, and where it remains an optional method that CF teachers can select (or not).

In this chapter, I describe the methodology employed to address these objectives. First, I present the context and important aspects of the study design. Then, I introduce the participants and each of the procedures related to data collection and analysis. Finally, I explain issues surrounding validity, ethics, limitations and my influence as the researcher.

Context

I conducted this study in Ontario as it presently accounts for over 70% of AIM use in Canada. Current estimates are that AIM is also being used in 33% of Canadian elementary school (Grades K-8) CF classrooms. In order to maximize the representativeness of my sample, the scope of my inquiry includes educators (i.e., consultants, government officials, principals and CF teachers) who work in the Ontario elementary context.

For the past ten years, Ontario teachers have been encouraged to use their professional judgment when making decisions related to the suitability of instructional approaches for implementing this curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education & Training, 1998, p. 3). Over the last year, some Ontario school boards have enacted policies stating that teachers are only to use AIM for teaching CF at particular grade levels (i.e., “AIM-mandated” boards). Conversely, other boards continue to consider AIM to be a method that CF teachers may choose to use if they so desire (i.e., “AIM-optional” boards). The

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7 Both of these percentages are based on sales of AIM instructional materials as reported in email correspondence with Wendy Maxwell in 2008 (and also seen in Carroll, 2011).
Study Design

Figure 3 provides a visual representation of my mixed-method study design. The rationale for using this design as a ‘best fit’ is based primarily on its explanatory potential related to further developing one set of data using findings from another inquiry (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003). For example, findings from the case study were used to clarify and/or develop stakeholder response patterns. Interview data from the teachers and principals in the comparative case study were also used to triangulate educator perspectives from Part I.

Rationalizing a mixed-methods approach

Following the logic of the fundamental principle of mixed research (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007), I adopted a mixed-methods approach to the design of this study. I did this in order to optimize the complementary strengths of the qualitative and quantitative methods being employed and to gather as much relevant data as possible to respond to my research questions (Caracelli & Greene, 1997; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). In this study, there were more qualitative methods (QUAL) employed than quantitative (quan), as seen in the different capitalization of methods in Figure 3.

Incorporating a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to measure a single phenomenon – in this case, AIM implementation – has increased the trustworthiness and strength of my inferences. Using mixed methods to strengthen the inferential validity in this way also follows the traditional rationale of triangulation as operationalized by Greene (2006) and Mathison (1988). Larsen-Freeman (1986, 2000b) claimed that instructional methods should be thought of as involving both thoughts and actions, implying that researchers should observe and interview teachers to capture a more representative portrayal of their methodological orientation. The fact that stakeholder perspectives about AIM have yet to be investigated in this way also necessitated an exploratory outlook that could offer more constructive explanations for decision-making and implementation of AIM across Ontario. In this study design, my interviews complemented the observations, tapping into different dimensions of AIM
implementation, and adding what Greene (2006) calls a ‘complementarity mixed-methods purpose’ to this inquiry. At the same time, as Greene advocated, I was open to the possibility of discovering contradicting findings between data sets, and welcomed the opportunity to attempt to explain such divergence.

This mixed-method mode of inquiry allowed for the investigation of complex and interconnected phenomena across a variety of participants and contexts. I now introduce the comparative case study approach adopted in this study, and then elaborate further on each feature of the study design in the sections to follow.

**Comparative case study approach**

A case study approach was used to address the two research questions related to AIM-mandated and AIM optional contexts: (a) how educators in both contexts felt about AIM, and (b) how teachers in each environment were implementing it. Using a case approach in this type of inquiry is most ideal when answering these types of “How” research questions (Yin, 1989), when studying the experience of real people operating in real situations (Stake, 1995), and when using qualitative data to develop, support or challenge theoretical assumptions about phenomena under investigation (Merriam, 1988, 2009). Instead of focusing on one case where AIM was being used for CF instruction, I used a multi-case study framework (Stake, 2006) to analyze and compare the phenomenon of AIM implementation (i.e., the “Quintain”) in two different case environments (i.e., AIM-mandated and AIM-optimal contexts). According to Stake,
multi-case study research is ideal for dissertation research, as the struggle to coordinate multiple researchers is not an issue - the student is the director, data collector and analyst, and receives guidance from responsible advisors during all phases of the study.

As multi-case study researcher, my objective was to study the similarities and differences about each case in order to better understand the Quintain (i.e., the common characteristic under examination across multiple cases). To meet this objective, and to better triangulate my findings, I observed each of the teachers in action more than once and obtained diverse perspectives of each case through the eyes of teachers and their administrators. In order to study the real situation of each case, it was necessary to go into the classroom to observe teachers using AIM for CF instruction and understand the advantages and challenges inherent to classroom-based research.

**Classroom-based research considerations**

While it remains the most authentic environment in which to examine second language education in action, the classroom as a site for research represents a volatile context that cannot be controlled in the same way as experimental labs. Schachter and Gass (1996) identified three common challenges that researchers face when conducting studies in classrooms: (a) recognizing competing agendas at play in the classroom (e.g., policies, board initiatives etc.); (b) acknowledging the classroom as an ever-changing context that requires flexibility; and (c) managing the demanding relationship between players in the classroom context, including the researcher. As I describe throughout this chapter, I managed to balance these challenges by including as many stakeholder perspectives as possible in my study design, being flexible with each teacher’s scheduling commitments and constraints, and establishing trust between myself as researcher and each of the teacher participants.

Due to the unique complexities inherent to all classroom settings, researchers have also highlighted challenges associated with generalizing one’s findings beyond the context of their study. Larsen-Freeman (1996) advocated that conducting classroom-based research inevitably results in a process of “compromising the ideal to accommodate the real” (p. 164) and should not be considered as jeopardizing generalizability. Surely, she argued, findings from classroom-based studies are not entirely useless outside of the context in which they are gathered. Rather, it is by embracing the “messiness” of the classroom (Freeman, 1996) that one is able to make connections across equally complex contexts. For this reason, I chose to
be less concerned with generalizations, and focused more on the local realities of AIM classrooms. I justified adopting a more emic research perspective to ascertain how each case operated in terms of its own inner logic and rules, and how each participant perceived their case and their place within it. As Tudor (2001) maintained, this type of emic research emphasis “brings the concerns of researchers closer to the day-to-day experience of practicing language teachers” (p. 42). In doing this, to borrow Larsen-Freeman’s metaphor (1996, p. 165), I believe that examining some unique grains of sand (i.e., the use of AIM in multiple cases), would enable me to learn more about the “beach” (i.e., AIM implementation across Ontario).

**Participants**

I will now describe the participant samples for this study, including how they were recruited, the final number of participants, and the characteristics of each final sample. It is important to note that inclusion was not dependent on how much a participant knew or did not know about AIM. All participants were given the opportunity to explain how much they knew about AIM at the beginning of their survey or interview. In terms of teacher participants, all teachers in the AIM-mandated context were considered for inclusion, as were those who self-identified as being an AIM-teacher in the AIM-optional context. The goal of this study was not to compare AIM and non-AIM teaching or to judge the AIM-likeness of each teacher. Rather, my objective was to observe and compare how the method and the resources were being used across a variety of AIM teachers, comparing as much with the ideas outlined in the teacher manuals as with each teachers’ implementation patterns in relation to each other.

**Consultants**

Here, the term “consultants” refers to those who are included in the administrative-level decision making process about teaching methodologies used for CF instruction at the elementary level. In Ontario school boards, there are a variety of job titles associated with this type of decision making in CF programming. The titles represented in my participant group were FSL consultant, FSL Program Coordinator and FSL Program Head. For the purposes of simplicity, I have chosen to refer to this participant sample either as “FSL consultants” or more simply as “consultants” throughout the thesis.
All Ontario FSL consultants serving in Public and Catholic school boards were considered for the survey component of this study. In order to recruit as many FSL consultants as possible (i.e., a sample of convenience) from across Ontario, I sent a recruitment email with an embedded consent letter (Appendix A) to personal contacts working in Ontario school boards as well as two organized groups of consultants from across Ontario who met regularly through the academic year (i.e., Modern Language Council, Western Ontario French as a Second Language Council). Consultants consented to participate in the study by opening a link in the email to complete the survey online.

A total of 18 FSL consultants participated in the survey component of this study. Of the 60 English language school boards in Ontario, 16 were represented in this sample. In terms of geographical representation, two consultants were from the Northern Public boards, 12 were from the Southern Public boards, and the four remaining consultants represented Catholic boards (three Southern and one Northern). Responses to basic demographic questions on the survey indicated that the majority of respondents had been FSL consultants for between one and five years, and had never worked as FSL consultants outside the current board in which they were working. The majority of participants’ previous FSL teaching experience was based in the CF program at the elementary level. At the time of the study, over 60% of respondents claimed to have had at least 10 years of previous FSL teaching experience, and over 70% were not teaching while completing their duties as an FSL consultant.

In order to recruit consultants to participate in the focus group, I attended a Modern Language Council (MLC) meeting in September 2009 to explain my study in person and address any questions or concerns related to participation. I then distributed paper copies of a consent form (Appendix B) for consideration. A total of four consultants expressed interest in participating in a focus group by submitting a signed form to the president of the council, who subsequently confirmed with them whether the most convenient time to hold the focus group would be after the next MLC meeting (i.e., March 2010). They all agreed, and the focus group was conducted at that time with the four consenting FSL consultants.

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8 Two pairs of participating FSL consultants ended up being from the same school board. Often, especially with large boards, two FSL consultants are appointed to serve within the same board.
I did not inquire as to whether the consultants from the focus group had also participated in the survey component of my study because I did not want to risk breaching their confidentiality if they had. Also, I did not originally seek permission from survey participants to compare their responses across methods if they ended up participating in the focus group as well.

The focus group was comprised of one male and three females. In order to protect their identities, I have assigned a female pseudonym to each of them – Erin, Irene, Anna and Lorena. Ideally, I wanted to have an equal representation of consultants from “AIM-mandated” and “AIM-optional” boards for the focus group in order to gain a better understanding of those terms and to ask questions of both groups to complement the survey data. However, low recruitment numbers limited this ideal from becoming reality. Nonetheless, both contexts were represented - one consultant did acknowledge that her board was mandating AIM for CF instruction starting in Grade 4, while the others claimed that AIM was an optional method for their teachers to use at any grade level.

**Ontario ministry of education representative**

To further triangulate stakeholder perspectives, I interviewed one representative from the Ontario Ministry of Education whose portfolio included FSL education within the province. Similar to the consultants, I purposefully recruited her based on her job responsibilities as they related to CF in Ontario, and not her knowledge or opinion related to AIM. After sending her an email (Appendix C) to see if she would be interested in participating in an interview, I saw her at a separate function and was able to follow up in person with a discussion about my study and her potential participation. We scheduled a time to conduct the interview, at which time I brought a consent form for her to sign (Appendix D).

The Ontario Ministry of Education representative (referred to from now on as “Ontario Ministry Representative”) indicated in her interview that she had been working in her current position at the Ministry since 2004. Her previous FSL teaching experience included teaching CF to Grades 4 through 8 and French Immersion at the elementary level. She had also served as a principal at two French Immersion schools.
Comparative case study

Due to the fact that there are presently fewer AIM-mandated boards than AIM-optional boards in Ontario, I began the case study recruitment process by purposefully recruiting the AIM-mandated board, and then recruiting an AIM-optional board that was as similar as possible in size, geography and CF programming. To start, I sent an email (Appendix E) to prospective board representatives introducing myself and the study. In the end, I was able to recruit one AIM-mandated board (i.e., a board with an explicit policy stating that AIM was the only method being used throughout the board for CF instruction from Kindergarten through to Grade 6) and one AIM-optional board.

As Table 4 shows, the AIM-mandated board was slightly larger than the AIM-optional board in geographical size and student population. In spite of this, the participating AIM teachers were relatively similar across groups in terms of their overall teaching experience and their experience using AIM (see Table 5 later in this chapter). As well, the starting grade for CF programming was earlier for the AIM-mandated board (i.e., Junior Kindergarten) than for the AIM-optional board (i.e., Grade 4). For the majority of Ontario students, CF instruction begins in Grade 4, continues until Grade 9, and then becomes an optional subject in Grade 10 (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1998, 1999). Generally, Ontario CF teachers are often responsible for teaching a range of grade levels in their respective schools (i.e., primary, junior, intermediate and/or senior). As I show in the section entitled “Teachers”, this reality made it challenging to ensure that participating CF teachers all taught the same grades within and across AIM-mandated and AIM-optional contexts.

Both of the boards had different regulations and guidelines related to research being conducted in their schools. As a result, the recruitment process for “mini-cases” (i.e., schools, administrators and teachers) embedded in each of the AIM-mandated and AIM-optional cases had to follow the parameters set out by each board. I will now describe the recruitment processes for both cases, and then end this section by presenting all of the comparative case study participants (i.e., principals and teachers).

AIM-mandated board

After contacting the AIM-mandated board via email, I was instructed to fill out their research application requesting details about the study and explanations relating to
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AIM-mandated</th>
<th>AIM-optional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Size of board (km²)</td>
<td>12,000 km²</td>
<td>9,000 km²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical description</td>
<td>Several large municipalities; many rural areas</td>
<td>Mostly rural; one large municipality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate population of largest municipality in the Board</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate # of students (elementary and secondary)</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>19,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core French starting grade</td>
<td>Junior Kindergarten</td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

consent, recruitment and confidentiality. I submitted my research application in August 2009, and the Board’s research committee reviewed my application the following month. The Board requested a conference call in October to discuss the study and how it connected to the overall vision of the Board, to suggest some rewording of the interview questions, and to propose an action plan related to how they would like the recruitment process to unfold. The committee requested that one school from each of the geographical regions within the board be included in order to have a more representative sample of the Board’s schools and teachers. I agreed to these terms, and allowed the FSL consultant from the AIM-mandated board to begin contacting schools in each of the four regions that met my inclusion criteria (i.e., teachers who only taught in the CF program, a mixture of new and experienced CF teachers). I was given a list of four participating teachers in December 2009, and in January 2010 I accompanied the FSL consultant to each of the four schools for an initial visit where I introduced myself and the study to the principal and participating AIM teacher. At this time, consent forms were signed by principals (Appendix F) and AIM teachers (Appendix G) within both the Mandated and Optional boards.

**AIM-optional board**

In September 2009, after receiving confirmation that the AIM-mandated board was interested in participating in my study, I immediately contacted two other comparable boards without any policies in place related to the use of AIM at the
elementary level. The superintendent of one of the boards emailed me back and recommended that I contact their FSL consultant directly to discuss the study in more detail. After contacting this consultant, she wanted confirmation that I had received approval from the University of Toronto Ethical Review Board, and then indicated that they would prefer to have teachers volunteer to participate by sending out a brief call for participation using their email list-serve for FSL teachers. I asked that the call for participation outline the same inclusion criteria described earlier, as well as the parameters of participation for AIM teachers (i.e., observations and interviews) and non-AIM teachers (i.e., one interview). If an AIM teacher expressed interest in participating, the consultant then proceeded to contact their principal to describe the study and determine whether they would also be interested in participating in an interview.

Initially, a total of three AIM teachers and one non-AIM teacher expressed interest in participating in this study. In order to render the AIM teacher case study samples as comparable as possible across AIM-mandated and AIM-optional contexts, I asked whether the FSL consultant would be willing to purposefully recruit one more AIM teacher to ensure representation of the different regions of the board, similar to the arrangement made with the AIM-mandated board. The FSL consultant told me that this was possible, and purposefully recruited one more AIM teacher from the geographical quadrant that was not represented. I was given a list with the names of the participating schools, principals and teachers in November 2009, and I contacted each of them to arrange my first visit as soon as possible. In December 2009, I met the AIM-optional participants and the consent forms were signed by the principals (Appendix H) and the AIM teachers (Appendix I). The non-AIM teacher was available to meet in April 2010, at which time she signed a consent form (Appendix J).

I will now present the CF teachers and principals from the AIM-mandated and AIM-optional contexts who participated in the comparative case study.

**Teachers**

A total of nine teachers participated in this case study – teachers who used AIM \(n = 8\) and those who did not \(n = 1\). Only the AIM teachers from the AIM-mandated board \(n = 4\) and the AIM-optional board \(n = 4\) were observed in addition to being interviewed. When triangulating stakeholder perspectives on AIM, I felt it was important
to include the voices of teachers who preferred not to use AIM when given the choice. I was able to recruit one non-AIM teacher from the AIM-optional board to participate in an interview as well.

Of the eight AIM teachers, seven were female and one was male. The non-AIM teacher was female. To protect their identities, all of the teachers were given a female pseudonym. To simplify the identification of each teacher as being from the Mandated or Optional context, teachers from the Mandated boards were given pseudonyms beginning with the letter “M” and those from the Optional have were assigned pseudonyms starting with the letter “O”. The non-AIM teacher’s pseudonym begins with the letter “N” to denote her non-AIM designation.

Table 5 presents some of the background characteristics of the teacher sample. There was a wide range of general CF teaching experience represented in each case environment, ranging from 1 to 20 years in the AIM-optional context, and 5 months to 12 years in the AIM-mandated context. The AIM teaching experience was equally variable, ranging from 5 months to 6 years in the AIM-mandated case, and 1 to 7 years in the AIM-optional case. The non-AIM teacher revealed in her interview that she had tried using AIM after hearing about it in her board; however, following one year of trying it out with her Grade 4s, she decided to stop using it. In each context, there was a former French Immersion teacher, and a teacher who had just begun their FSL teaching career. Some of the more experienced teachers had spent the majority of their teaching careers at their current schools while others had only recently arrived.

Despite the varied start time for CF programming in each context, Table 5 shows that I was able to recruit teachers across both boards who taught at least one of the junior grade levels (i.e., Grades 4, 5 and/or 6). While this helped me to compare AIM implementation in one specific range of grades across all participating teachers, I was also able to observe AIM implementation across a wider variety of levels within the range of elementary grades (i.e., K-8). While this was not my original intention, in the end this reality enriched my observation data, as I was able to examine how different teachers used AIM at the same grade levels, and how individual teachers used AIM across different grade levels.
Table 5  
Characteristics of Case Study Teacher Participants (AIM-mandated and AIM-optional)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mary</th>
<th>Melissa</th>
<th>Miranda</th>
<th>Monica</th>
<th>Odette</th>
<th>Olivia</th>
<th>Oksana</th>
<th>Orianna</th>
<th>Nancy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CF grades taught</td>
<td>Gr. 4 - 8</td>
<td>SK – Gr. 4</td>
<td>SK – Gr. 5</td>
<td>Grade 2, 4, 8</td>
<td>Grade 4 - 6</td>
<td>Grade 3 – 6</td>
<td>Grade 4, 5, 8</td>
<td>Grade 4 – 6</td>
<td>Grade 4 - 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CF experience</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>11 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CF experience at current school</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>11 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience using AIM</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other FSL teaching experience</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>3 years (French Immersion)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2 years (French Immersion)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Principals**

Each of the AIM teacher’s principals ($N = 8$) participated in one interview over the course of the study period. Principals’ points of view were included to further triangulate stakeholder perspectives in this study, but also because their perspectives had yet to be represented in any of the AIM studies to date. In order to simplify the process of knowing whose principal I am referring to throughout the remaining chapters, I refer to them in relation to the teacher they are affiliated with (e.g., Olivia’s principal stated…). All of the principals had teaching experience at the elementary level (i.e., Kindergarten to Grade 8), and two principals from the AIM-optional board had taught Core French during their teaching career. The majority had served as principals at other schools in their respective board, but had been at their current school for between one and six years.

In the next sections, I describe the methods and instruments I used to collect my data, and then outline the data analyses procedures.

**Data Collection**

In order to answer my research questions, different methods were used with different participants to collect data. In the sections to follow, I present each of the data collection procedures, including the methods and instruments employed (I have chosen to embed my description of the instruments into this section). Table 6 outlines the timeline of the study in relation to these methods.

**Survey**

In order to get an overall picture of what methodologies were being recommended for CF instruction in Ontario, and what educators in administrative positions thought of AIM, participating FSL consultants ($n = 18$) filled out an online survey (Appendix K). The survey was in English, and was comprised of biographical information prompts, chose-ended questions (categorical, numerical, and multiple choice with ‘other’ option if required), and open-ended questions. To begin, all participants were prompted to indicate what they knew about AIM, the extent to which it was being used in their Board, and whether it was mandated, or optional. All of the participants indicated that they were familiar with AIM, and consequently responded to questions related to its implementation, resources, usefulness in elementary and secondary contexts and overall perceived effectiveness. In subsequent sections of the survey, consultants were redirected to answer different sets of questions based on their responses. For example, those
consultants who indicated that AIM was mandated in their board were directed to answer a set of questions that others (i.e., consultants from AIM-optional boards) were not. Similarly, consultants from AIM-optional boards were asked what methods besides AIM were being used in their boards, and why they had elected not to mandate it. At the end of the survey, all consultants were asked to provide some background information and to indicate what school board they were working for in order to get a better sense of the geographical areas of Ontario that were represented in the sample.

In September 2009, I piloted the survey with six colleagues to confirm whether the links to different sections of the survey were active, and to obtain feedback on the wording of the questions. Following this process, consultants were able to access the survey online from
October 2009 until June 2010, at which point it was taken offline. The software used to create and distribute the survey (i.e., Survey Wizard) allowed consultants to save their responses and go back to complete the survey at their convenience.

**Focus group**

Over the course of the last few years, I have had a chance to observe many spirited conversations and debates about the effectiveness of AIM. Following the rationale provided by Krueger and Casey (2009) for conducting focus groups, I chose this method for three reasons: (a) to obtain a range of ideas or feelings that consultants had about AIM; (b) to understand differences in perspectives between consultants from AIM-mandated and AIM-optional contexts; and (c) to uncover factors that influenced consultants’ motivation and opinions related to AIM. I suspected that I would learn a lot about consultants’ decision-making processes and rationalizations by observing their interaction during a focus group experience.

The focus group took place in March 2010. It was conducted in English, lasted approximately one hour and was recorded on audiotape. I transcribed the tape recording verbatim immediately following the focus group in order to ensure that I recognized each of the voices on the tape, and to make detailed notes about the dynamics of the group during specific points in the conversation.

The focus group protocol (Appendix L) contained eight open-ended questions concentrating on participants’ opinions related to AIM, as well as eliciting rationales for FSL consultants’ decisions and discussing the impact of those decisions. I began with a warm-up question, asking participants to state their name and describe how they originally found out about AIM. Afterwards, I went through the protocol and was able to pose each remaining question to the group. Consultants were asked why teachers in their boards used or did not use AIM, how they monitored and supported their teachers, and whether they saw the use of AIM in their board as a short- or long-term change. Included in the protocol were some general questions, including noteworthy benefits and/or challenges they noted in relation to the use of AIM in their board, as well as what they thought about the AIM resources and the growing popularity of the method across Canada.

While I welcomed each consultant to answer the original question or prompt at their leisure, I also instructed them to feel free to respond to comments made by others if they so desired. In essence, the goal of the focus group was not to obtain four different answers to the
same question; but rather to initiate a free flow of conversation about a certain topic and to observe how various arguments and points of view influenced each participant. By doing this, the group generated new topics of conversation that were important to them, and debates and critical incidents emerged.

**Interviews**

All of the interviews for this study were conducted in English, were semi-structured in nature, and were audiotape recorded for subsequent transcription and analysis. I visited each of the AIM teacher participants \(n = 8\) four times over the course of the study period. Overall, I conducted four semi-structured interviews (Appendix M), or one interview per visit. The goal of these interviews was two-fold: to triangulate perspectives on AIM across stakeholder groups; and to strengthen the data related to teacher implementation of AIM. Each of the AIM teacher interviews focused on different themes, like teaching context and needs, instructional materials and complexity, professional development and support and assessment and practicality. As well, I asked the same three questions during each interview to gauge how the implementation of AIM progressed over the course of the study period - teachers were asked to reflect on three different areas in relation to that specific moment in the school year: (a) how they perceived their role in the implementation of AIM; (b) whether they were experiencing any challenges; and (c) how they perceived their students were reacting to their use of AIM.

In order to accumulate a wide variety of stakeholder perspectives on AIM, each teacher’s principal (Appendix N) and the Ontario Ministry Representative (Appendix O) participated in one semi-structured interview. I also conducted an interview with the non-AIM teacher participant to ascertain why she had chosen not to use AIM, and what method she did use to teach CF (Appendix P).

In order to triangulate perspectives on AIM across participants, many of the same questions were asked during the interviews, focus group and survey. For instance, all participants were asked how they first found out about AIM, whether they were aware of any of the academic research on AIM, and how they felt about its growing popularity across Canada for CF instruction. Everyone except the non-AIM teacher was also asked about their perceived role in the implementation of AIM across Ontario. Each question was worded and posed in exactly the same way to ensure consistency across methods and participants.
Observations

In this study, only AIM teachers were observed, and each teacher was visited four times. During each visit, my objective was to observe their use of AIM in as many of their CF classes as possible. When scheduling observations, I also had to take into consideration when each teacher had a break in their timetable so that I could arrange a time to conduct their interview. As Table 7 shows, I ended up observing AIM implementation at a range of elementary grades from Kindergarten through to Grade 8, with some commonalities across teachers within and across cases (e.g., Grade 8 was represented in AIM-mandated and AIM-optional contexts). In hindsight, I feel that this worked in my favor, as it yielded data that better reflected the reality of CF teachers in Ontario who are often teaching French at variety of levels. Also, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, this also allowed me to see how AIM was being used by different teachers at the same grade level and by individual teachers across a range of different grade levels.

Like other AIM studies (Arnott, 2005; Mady et.al., 2007), I used a modified version of the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT) observation scheme (Spada & Fröhlich, 1995) to document classroom processes and language production in the AIM teachers’ CF classrooms (Appendix Q). Each lesson that I observed was coded in real time by checking off the corresponding descriptors on the observation scheme. In addition to using the scheme, I also took handwritten field notes in class. Immediately following each observation, I converted these notes to electronic Microsoft Word files by retyping them and integrating analytical comments and memos on recurring activities that appeared to be typical of that particular teacher, or exemplary activities that reflected what that teacher had said in a previous interview. By providing thick descriptions of each teacher participant’s style and routines, I was able to contextualize the observation data yielded from the scheme, and corroborate findings related to teachers’ perspectives that emerged from their interviews.

I felt that the COLT was the most appropriate instrument to document AIM instruction as it had been validated and modified over the years in many CF classroom-based research investigations (e.g., Allen & Carroll, 1987, 1988; Arnott, 2005; Harley, Allen, Cummins & Swain, 1990; Mady, Arnott & Lapkin, 2007, 2009; Mady, Salvatori, Lapkin, Arnott, Knouzi & Thomas, 2009; Turnbull, 1998, 1999a). As well, links could be made between many of the categories from the COLT and how an AIM class is characterized in its instructional materials. For instance, it is expected that AIM teachers prioritize whole class activities during the initial
Table 7

*Core French Grade Levels Observed (AIM-mandated and AIM-optional teachers)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Visit #1</th>
<th>Visit #2</th>
<th>Visit #3</th>
<th>Visit #4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Grade 4/5</td>
<td>Grade 4/5</td>
<td>Grade 6/7</td>
<td>Grade 4/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade 6/7</td>
<td>Grade 7/8</td>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Grade 3</td>
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<td>Olivia</td>
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<td>Grade 6</td>
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<td>Oksana</td>
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<td>Grade 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orianna</td>
<td>Grade 4/5</td>
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<td>Grade 4/5</td>
<td>Grade 6</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grade 8</td>
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</table>

years, and then revert to more partner/group work as students advance (Maxwell, 2006, 2008). Using the COLT category “Participant Organization”, I was able to observe and document how AIM teachers organized their students in each of their classes over the course of the study period. Since the COLT was not originally developed to examine AIM implementation exclusively, I felt that I also needed some additional categories to document how activities and strategies specific to AIM were being represented in my participating AIM teachers’ practice. The following list describes each category of the COLT observation scheme that was included and/or adapted to reflect the focus of this study (i.e., AIM implementation):

1. Time: The start time of each classroom activity was recorded.
2. Activity/Episode: The activity and any sub-activities (i.e., episodes) being introduced were given a name. The same name was designated for recurring activities/episodes throughout the observation period.

3. Participant Organization: Classroom activities were categorized as whole class, group or individual. The organization of students was further distinguished according to task (e.g., choral for whole class, same task for all groups/individuals, different tasks for different groups/individuals).

4. Content Control: Indicated who was determining the content of the activity. Options included (a) the teacher and/or the text (e.g., published material used during the class); (b) the teacher, text and student(s); or (c) the student(s).

5. Student Modality: Identified what the students were meant to be doing during a particular activity according to the language strands of reading, writing, listening, speaking, gesture and other. The category “gesture” was added as it is a central part of AIM teaching; according to Maxwell (2006), “approximately 95% of the gesturing [in AIM] is done by the teacher” (p. 30). The “other” choice was used for other modalities, like drawing.

6. Materials: The materials used during each class were categorized according to length of L2 in text (e.g., minimal, sentence, extended), type (e.g., written text, audio, visual) and source (e.g., authentic resources, resources made for second language learners, etc.). The category labeled “AIM Resource?” was used to denote whether the resource was taken from one of the AIM instructional kits (i.e., ‘Histoires en Action pour les Tout Petits’, ‘Histoires en Action’ or ‘Jeunesse en Action’). The length categories were subdivided to include single words and word lists for “minimal”, then a separate category for “sentence”, and “extended” (connected sentences, paragraphs, etc.).

The remaining categories of the observation scheme were organized according to common features of AIM teaching. I identified these features following in-depth consultation of the AIM instructional materials used with younger (Maxwell, 2006) and older learners (Maxwell, 2008). The following is a list and brief description of the three categories in the “AIM Procedures” section of the scheme:

7. Teacher Support: This category refers to support corresponding to the general progression of scaffolding provided by the teacher (i.e., modeled, shared, guided and independent). The categories “Gesture (ALL)” and “Gesture (specific)” were added because gesture is considered as a support system for learners, as they provide “extensive guided-modeled practice of the language” (Maxwell, 2006, p. 30). Using gestures as support is also said to vary across levels - in the beginning teachers are expected to gesture throughout all teacher-led activities; however as students progress, teachers are expected to gesture less (e.g., only when practicing new vocabulary or to correct grammatical mistakes).
8. **Target Language Use**: This category referred to teacher and student language use during each activity/episode,\(^9\) whether it be target language (L2), L1 or a mix thereof. Exclusive use of French by both teachers and students is identified as a key strategy for successful implementation of AIM. While the degree of “Mix” was not identified, if either group spoke English and French during a particular activity or episode, I coded the Target Language Use as “Mix”, and noted in my field notes the degree to which this kind of L1 use occurred throughout the observation period.

9. **Context**: This category distinguished how teachers contextualized language practice during activities/episodes by using: (a) the context of a text (e.g., AIM plays), (b) integrating students’ lives or other topics that interest them (e.g., during teacher-led self-expression activities), or (c) language practice in isolation from either (a) or (b), which I labeled “other”. An example of ‘other’ would be if the teacher was doing a gesture review activity using an isolated list of vocabulary words.

**Data Analysis**

I began analyzing my data by processing each individual data set (i.e., averages, percentages, themes etc.). Then, I focused on addressing the first research question, which enabled me to contextualize my study and report on the CF programming trends and decisions taking place in Ontario. I then proceeded to analyze the case study data to answer my remaining research questions. I started looking at each case study participant, then moved to each case, and finished with a phase of cross-case analysis and triangulation.

In this section, I outline how I analyzed the survey data, the textual data (i.e., focus group and interviews) and the observation data. Then, following recommendations on qualitative (Miles & Huberman, 1994), mixed-method (Caracelli & Greene, 1993) and multi-case study (Stake, 2006) analysis strategies, I describe how I integrated data sets to triangulate the findings and to develop a typology representing the cross-case findings.

**Survey data analysis**

The survey software (i.e., Survey Wizard) organized consultants’ responses to each question in an MS Excel spreadsheet. I transferred the close-ended question responses (i.e., categorical, numerical, and multiple choice) to a Word document to map the responses to each question across all eighteen consultants. I generated percentages representing the response patterns of all participants, and those who were prompted to answer subsets of questions. For

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\(^9\) This category was taken from Part B of the COLT. It typically refers to target language use during teacher-student interactions. For the sake of time, I elected to code this category in real time, and refer generally to teacher and student target language use during each activity/episode.
example, halfway through the survey respondents were asked whether their board mandated the use of AIM at one or more grade levels for CF instruction. From this point forward, those who self-identified as representing an “AIM-mandated” board only answered questions about the AIM method and its resources, while the “AIM-optional” respondents were prompted to answer questions related to all of the methods and resources being used for CF instruction in their board. At the end of the survey, all participants were directed to answer the same background information questions.

The AIM-mandated and AIM-optional survey data were especially valuable when addressing my first two research questions, as this data provided contextual detail related to the policy decision-making processes of consultants in Ontario and enabled me to extend my triangulation of educator perspectives on AIM-mandated and AIM-optional contexts to include consultants from both contexts. Due to the fact that there were an uneven number of consultants in each of these groups, I used percentages to represent and compare the response patterns across consultants. Open-ended survey data (i.e., responses to open-ended questions, “Other” explanations for multiple choice questions) was treated as qualitative data, and coded for recurring themes.

**Coding and generating textual data analysis**

I transcribed all of the focus group and interview data verbatim, noting incomplete utterances, sighs and laughter in participants’ speech that could influence my interpretation of the data. Each question in the focus group and interview protocols was intentionally linked to a theme; however, I welcomed the possibility that participants would initiate additional themes through their responses. Some of the original themes were taken directly from Fullan’s factors influencing educational change (2007), while others were general questions about AIM that were asked of all participants. This list of themes represented my preliminary coding scheme for the interview and focus group data.

For the focus group data, I began by manually cutting and pasting responses that related directly to the themes of the coding scheme. Then, I examined the remaining data for additional emergent themes. During this process, I discovered some critical events and interactions within the transcript that shaped the dynamic of the group, making it evident that pattern identification alone was not enough to adequately represent the discussion that took place. These incidents were useful in describing the emotional context of the discussion, particularly in relation to
rationalizations and explanations that consultants offered in response to the decision-making processes of others and in support of their own. According to Krueger and Casey (2009), taking note of the synergy of a focus group in this way should be a central part of the analysis of focus group data, as it often yields valuable findings that individual interviews cannot provide.

When reading each of the interview transcripts, I noted portions of each transcript that related directly to the coding scheme, and highlighted exemplary quotes for subsequent reporting. Most portions of each transcript were coded under one theme; however, some segments were more multidimensional and were coded under additional themes in the coding scheme where applicable. I also recorded new themes that emerged from each participant’s transcript. This process enabled me to capture each participant’s perspective of the themes under investigation. As I describe in more detail later, these themes were used to develop a typology of teachers and principals in each case, and to facilitate the subsequent cross-case analysis. In order to link teacher perspectives and practices related to AIM, I also isolated teacher comments that could be linked specifically to the categories from the observation scheme.

**Observation data analysis**

During each observation, the beginning time of each activity was noted and the corresponding content descriptor(s) checked off. As recommended in the COLT manual (Spada & Fröhlich, 1995), percentages from all of the categories that had been reproduced from Part A (i.e., Participant Organization; Content Control; Student Modality; and Materials) and the new categories in the “AIM Procedures” section of the scheme were calculated in relation to the total time observed. The category “Target Language Use” was based on the COLT category from Part B, which was originally included in the COLT based on the assumption that “in order for L2 development to occur, the target language must be used” (Spada & Fröhlich, 1995, p. 21). Coding the “Target Language Use” category for this study was an attempt to capture the language use of AIM teachers and their students, as one of the most important principles of AIM is that “every classroom interaction is in the target language” (Maxwell, 2008, p. 2). In the COLT, this category is to be coded using audio recordings of each observation; however, I chose to code this category in real time. For the Student Modality category, I coded for multiple modalities in addition to single modalities. For instance, if a teacher had the students singing aloud while reading the lyrics on a poster board, I coded that as “Listening, Speaking and Reading”, and made the three skills into one separate category. According to Spada and Fröhlich, these types of decisions about coding
and/or analysis are permitted, as long as it does not compromise the purpose of the research study.

I began by calculating percentages for all categories in each class that I observed. Before looking at the cases, I decided to look at each individual teacher’s observed practice using AIM. I represented each analysis using a table I created in Word with the observation categories listed in the rows, and the teacher or grade level of interest listed in the columns. For instance, I thought it might be interesting to analyze the way each teacher used AIM across different grade levels, so I averaged the percentages for each grade level taught by each teacher and listed the grade levels in the columns to look for trends or patterns.

In order to systematically report data that best represented the observed pedagogical tendencies of each teacher, the same analytic process was followed:

1. I looked for trends in the COLT data averages of all grades, and checked to see if those same trends emerged within each specific grade.

2. I returned to my field notes and interview data to try and account for the trends that emerged across all grades (e.g., routine activities) and/or within specific grades (e.g., more gesturing observed with younger grades).

3. Differences of 10% or more between COLT categories were investigated and analyzed using this method, and I reported on those that could be explained using additional data.

**Integrative data analysis**

As I described above, I began by analyzing the data sets in isolation from each other. In order to answer my first research question, I integrated the themes and patterns generated from the survey and focus group, and looked for convergence, corroboration and correspondence of findings across the different method types. At this stage, I also took note of any contradiction between data sets. This kind of data consolidation (Caracelli & Greene, 1993) enabled me to gain insights about stakeholder perspectives and decision-making processes that might not have otherwise been possible without these iterative techniques. This merging enabled me to better represent the context of my study, and the policymaking practices of my participants (i.e., consultants, Ontario Ministry Rep).

In order to generate cross-case findings, I used an integrative data analytic approach to the case study data. I began by taking the themes and patterns generated from the isolated analyses of interview and observation data, and creating case reports for each individual participant. Then, I read each case report, looking for themes generated in each context and
ranking the utility of each participant to represent each theme or pattern. By doing this, I was able to create clusters of themes using constant comparison (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and eventually develop a typology for each case (Caracelli & Greene, 1993). This process enabled me to conduct a final cross-case analysis and make assertions about the Quintain (i.e., AIM implementation) across the two contexts. Following the advice of Stake (2006), during this process I reminded myself that convergence was not my sole purpose, but that my rationale was to study the Quintain. Therefore, I reflected on what made each case unique, and noted both the commonalities and differences across the manifestations of AIM in both environments.

On the whole, this data analysis approach helped me to provide more comprehensive responses to my research questions, and to tell a more coherent story that reflected the data. The research questions, participants, instruments and analyses used for this study are summarized in Table 8. I conclude this chapter by mentioning some important considerations related to validity, limitations, ethical considerations and my influence as researcher.

Validity

According to Yin (1989, 2009), ensuring internal validity in case study research is most crucial at the level of analysis, where building explanations for patterns in the data is more credible than implying causality. In terms of the internal validity of this study, I was more concerned with using my data to make inferences about AIM implementation in both case contexts rather than causal statements about AIM implementation across Ontario or Canada.

Regarding external validity, I rejected the existence of a linear relationship between methodological principles and the reality which these assume in the classroom. For this reason, I figured that it would be counter intuitive for me to suggest that the local meanings represented in my findings would translate directly into global meanings for all other AIM classrooms. Alternatively, I chose to strive for ‘analytical generalization’ (Yin, 1989, 2009) where I worked to generalize my findings to theory on Agency and Educational Change and to generate new theories of my own based on my data. Yin (1989) emphasized the importance of appreciating this type of generalization, claiming that “understanding the distinction between ‘statistical’ and ‘analytical’ generalization may be the most important challenge in doing case studies” (p. 38).


Table 8  
**Summary of Data Collection and Analyses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Instruments</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the present practices of Ontario school boards with respect to endorsing or opposing different methodologies, including AIM, for CF instruction?</td>
<td>FSL consultants</td>
<td>Survey (Appendix K)</td>
<td>Thematic/Content Analyses</td>
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<td>Ontario Ministry Representative</td>
<td>Focus Group Protocol (Appendix L)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ontario Ministry RepresentativeProtocol (Appendix O)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>How do elementary-level educators in AIM-mandated and AIM-optional contexts feel about the method in regards to its:</td>
<td>AIM Teachers</td>
<td>Teacher Interview Protocols (Appendix M ; Appendix P)</td>
<td>Thematic/Content Analyses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utility and/or futility for CF instruction?</td>
<td>Non-AIM Teacher</td>
<td>Principal Interview Protocol (Appendix N)</td>
<td>Constant Comparison (Lincoln &amp; Guba, 1985)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Implementation?</td>
<td>Principals</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Resources?</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Benefits and/or drawbacks?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are elementary-level CF teachers in AIM-mandated and AIM-optional contexts implementing the method?</td>
<td>Elementary-level CF teachers</td>
<td>Observation Scheme (Appendix Q)</td>
<td>Thematic/Content Analyses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AIM Teacher Interview Protocol (Appendix M)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Typology Development (Caracelli &amp; Greene, 1993)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Ethical Considerations**

Prior to data collection, I obtained approval for the procedures I followed from the Ethical Review Board at the university and at the AIM-mandated board. In terms of compensation, participating teachers received a gift certificate to a local bookstore at the conclusion of the data collection process.

I was also unavoidably limited in the extent to which I could guarantee complete confidentiality of those participating schools, principals and teachers in the AIM-mandated group. As there are only a small number of school boards in Ontario that have officially mandated the use of AIM at the elementary level, I was left with few boards to choose from.
Also, each board insisted that they be in charge of recruiting teachers, making them aware of the teachers from their board who were involved in the study. To deal with this, I took all precautions at my disposal to protect their identities, including assigning a pseudonym to each participant and removing as much identifiable data from the participant descriptions as possible. 

**Influence of Researcher**

It was inevitable that my status as a former FSL teacher with experience using AIM for CF instruction was going to impact participants’ impressions of me as the researcher. I could tell that my knowledge of AIM from a teaching perspective made me less of an outsider, which helped the AIM teachers feel more comfortable having me observe their classes and interview them. Looking back, participants also responded positively to the exploratory nature of this study. I made a point of explicitly communicating that my objective was to hear their stories. To the AIM teachers in particular, I affirmed that my goal was to observe how they chose to use AIM, not so much in comparison to any norms or standards set out by the AIM materials, but more in relation to fellow AIM teachers. Instead of saying what they thought I wanted to hear in interviews, or changing the way they were using AIM to more closely resemble the AIM teacher manual, I think participants felt comfortable showcasing their practices and perspectives to inform my study.

From the beginning of the thesis process, I recognized that I could not pretend to be objective. Still, I felt strongly that I could take some necessary steps to be as transparent as possible in each aspect of the research process. For instance, I attempted to provide rich descriptions of each teacher’s context and recurring instructional activities and strategies so that readers would be able to better understand my interpretations and have enough information to come to their own conclusions about the data. I also made a point of documenting my initial thoughts and impressions of each observation in my detailed field notes, and I recorded and reported my rationale for decisions and interpretations made during the analysis process in a data analysis log.

**Limitations of Methodology**

Despite taking the above precautions in this study, some limitations remained. Firstly, due to the fact that I was only able to recruit eighteen consultants to respond to my survey, and four consultants for my focus group, my “Ontario perspective” was restricted to those boards represented by the participating consultants. Secondly, although I did make an effort to observe
as many AIM classes as possible, the observations cannot be considered entirely representative of each teacher’s habitual classroom organizations. Thirdly, I was unable to videotape a lesson or arrange for a colleague to accompany me to a classroom in order to confirm the reliability of my coding decisions. While I have taken part in other research studies where this observation scheme was used (e.g., Mady, Arnott & Lapkin, 2009; Mady, Salvatori, Lapkin, Arnott, Knouzi & Thomas, 2009), the rating of 80% or higher for inter-coder agreement achieved in those studies cannot be applied directly to this scheme as well, especially with a new section that was in its piloting stage during the study period. Fourth, in order to gain access to the two boards, I had to agree to administrative participation in the recruitment process. While I am confident that teachers agreed to participate voluntarily, I must acknowledge that the mere fact that a board representative contacted them to participate may have swayed them to take part. Had I recruited teachers and schools on my own, my findings might have varied. Lastly, I am limited in the extent to which I can make inferences about all other contexts where AIM is being used; however, I feel strongly that analytical generalizability is the main objective of this study. In spite of these limitations, this study is still worthwhile, as it is the first to highlight the practical implications of decisions relating to AIM in Ontario schools, and redefine the “AIM teacher” to include what is being observed now in practice.
Chapter 5 - Ontario Perspectives and Practices

Introduction

In this chapter, I report on findings that address: (a) the present practices of Ontario school boards with respect to supporting different methodologies, including the Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM), for Core French (CF) instruction; and (b) the degree of convergence or divergence of educator perspectives on AIM.

To begin, I summarize the general and AIM-related CF programming practices represented in my survey sample of Ontario school boards ($n = 16$). Then, I introduce findings from my analysis of data from the French as a second language (FSL) consultant survey respondents ($n = 18$) and focus group participants (Erin, Irene, Anna, Lorena) in an effort to explain their reasoning for decisions and recommendations that are made in relation to AIM. To conclude this chapter, I present themes that emerged following my analysis and triangulation of educator perspectives (i.e., FSL consultants, Ontario Ministry Rep, principals and teachers) related to four particular areas of inquiry: (a) their knowledge about AIM; (b) the utility of AIM for CF instruction; (c) the AIM instructional materials; and (d) the growing popularity of AIM across Canada.

On the whole, this chapter serves to provide a rich contextual description by offering a macro-level perspective on AIM use in Ontario and educator perspectives on the method. It also segues to subsequent chapters where findings related to the micro-level implementation of AIM are presented.

Core French Programming

Of the sixteen boards represented in my sample of consultants, the majority (63%) followed the mandated Grade 4 start for Core French in Ontario. Of the remaining boards, two indicated that they began their CF programming at the Kindergarten level, while the other four reported a Grade 1 start for CF instruction.

When asked how often CF classes were being held, the majority of the boards (75%) surveyed stated that CF was offered on a daily basis, ranging in time from under 30 minutes for primary (13%) to 30-40 minutes (25%), 40-50 minutes (56%) or more than 50 minutes (6%) for...

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10 Recall from Chapter 4 that two pairs of participating FSL consultants ended up being from the same school board, resulting in sixteen boards being represented. In this chapter I report on board practices looking at the sixteen boards, as well as consultant perspectives looking at all eighteen consultants who filled out the survey.
the junior and intermediate levels. Only two boards indicated that their CF periods got longer as students moved up the junior grades.

Analysis of the survey data revealed that the majority of participating boards (61%) had experienced some sort of change to their CF programming over the last five years. The main change identified by the consultants was alteration in the length or scheduling of CF classes. Many cited the fact that CF was often viewed as preparation time for homeroom teachers, and that recent board- and union-level mandates had increased this preparation time, which consequently led to alterations in the length of CF classes (e.g., an increase of ten minutes per class).

Three of the eighteen consultants also noted the influx of AIM in their board as representing change to their CF programming. They referred mainly to the general use of the method by many of their teachers or the use of the AIM materials; however, one consultant reported that the ‘random’ use of AIM in their board led to the need for more detailed administrator guidelines regarding how they could support those who wanted to use it or those who did not. With this in mind, I will now present more of the survey findings directly related to the use of AIM in the participating Ontario school boards.

**Use of AIM**

According to the survey data, AIM was being used for CF instruction in fifteen of the sixteen Ontario school boards represented. Consultants who indicated that AIM was being used in their board were subsequently asked to specify the level(s) at which AIM was being used. As Figure 4 demonstrates, AIM appears to be most popular at the junior (Grades 4-6) levels, and less so at the intermediate (Grade 7-8) or primary (K-3) levels. Only two consultants indicated that AIM was being used at the high school level (Senior Grades 9-12). Looking at when CF programming started in each of the boards, it appears that AIM-use dominated during the beginning stages of CF instruction. Further analysis of responses to this question revealed that when AIM was being used, it was rarely employed exclusively at the primary, junior, intermediate or senior grade levels. In fact, data showed that AIM was being used simultaneously at multiple levels in the fifteen boards, either at the junior and intermediate levels (40%) or the primary, junior and intermediate levels (26%).

Consultants were also asked about whether the teachers who were using AIM at these levels were also using the AIM resources (i.e., *Histoires en Action – Pour les Tout Petits*,...
Histoires en Action, Jeunesse en Action) (Maxwell, 2006, 2008). The majority of the fifteen boards (60%) stated that all of the teachers who were using AIM in their board were also using the AIM resources. Others said that only some of their AIM teachers were using the resources, with one consultant reporting that they simply did not know for sure.

**Mandated or optional**

In addition to general AIM use, consultants who completed the survey were asked to indicate whether AIM had been mandated at any level for CF instruction in their board or whether it had been left as an optional method for CF teachers to use or not. Analysis of their responses showed that AIM had been mandated for CF instruction in three of the fifteen boards where AIM was being used (20%).

Consultants from these three AIM-mandated boards were then prompted to specify the level(s) at which AIM was mandated for CF instruction. Two boards reported that it was mandated at both the primary and junior levels (i.e., Kindergarten to Grade 6), while the remaining board indicated that AIM was mandated at the junior level only (i.e., Grade 4 to 6). One of the consultants went into more detail, saying that AIM was being mandated across each
of the Kindergarten to Grade 3 levels, but more incrementally at the junior level, starting at Grade 4 and adding a grade every year. Interestingly, similar to the trend found in the data related to general AIM use, the levels where mandating began in all three of the boards corresponded to the levels at which CF programming began. As well, mandating AIM did not always come with a mandate to use the AIM resources. In one of the three AIM-mandated boards, the consultant reported that it was not obligatory for their CF teachers to use the AIM resources, while the other two stated that it was obligatory for CF teachers to use the AIM materials at the mandated levels.

Consultants from the remaining AIM-optional boards were asked what instructional methods and resources were being used in their board for CF instruction. While AIM was still the most popular choice (86%), AIM-optional consultants also reported that Multidimensional Project-Based Teaching (64%), Total Physical Response (21%), Grammar Translation (21%) and Total Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) (14%) were also being used to teach CF in the junior grades. In addition, most of the AIM-optional consultants (79%) confirmed that these same methods were being used for CF instruction at the intermediate level. When asked what resources were being used for elementary-level CF in their board, teacher-made resources was the most popular answer given by 93% of the AIM-optional consultants, followed by the Acti-Vie textbook series (79%), the AIM resources (67%) and the Visages textbook series (59%).

After being asked whether AIM was mandated or not in their board, all consultants were asked in an open-ended question to explain their reasoning. Specific motives behind consultants mandating AIM or leaving it optional also emerged during the consultant focus group discussion. I will now draw from both data sets in an effort to explain the reasoning behind decisions and recommendations made by participating consultants regarding whether to mandate AIM or to leave it as an optional method for CF teachers to choose or refuse.

Why AIM-mandated?

Each of the three consultants from the AIM-mandated boards cited that board-level experimentation and anecdotal input had rendered ‘positive results’ that led them to mandate the method. For instance, two consultants reported that they had piloted AIM in elementary schools in their boards, and another consultant wrote about informal surveys they had distributed to parents and students. While they did not go into great detail about their results or the data collection methods they employed, they stated that findings from their endeavors had led them to
mandate AIM at the elementary level:

The results from our piloting were so positive that we undertook to have AIM used board wide. *(Consultant #5)*

Based on teacher feedback and classroom observations of student oral language use, AIM was purchased for all schools…AIM was mandated in all K-6 Core French classrooms. *(Consultant #18)*

One consultant also reported hearing that teachers had observed an increase in student engagement resulting directly from the use of AIM for CF instruction:

When [teachers] would meet it was obvious that the methodology was working. They said that students were motivated and achieving success, they were 'producing' more and better quality of work…. students were capable of completing some work independently and were engaged. *(Consultant #10)*

This same consultant went on to explain how mandating AIM provided more consistency in instruction and professional development for CF teachers, and “made it fair for all students to meet success” *(Consultant #10)*.

Of the four consultants who participated in the focus group, three represented AIM-optional boards while one (i.e., Irene) talked about how she was mandating AIM incrementally in her board, starting at Grade 4 and progressing up through the junior grades. Like the AIM-mandated consultants who filled in the survey, Irene had also conducted board-level research to justify this decision. She described how she tracked beginner level CF students (i.e, Grade 4s) in AIM classrooms throughout the year. She asserted that Grade 4 student marks in her board went from a regular distribution of grades on the first report card to everyone having As and Bs by the end of the year. She went on to explain how she also used this information to convince those Grade 4 CF teachers who were unsure about the effectiveness of AIM, or to “win over [those who] were waiting to see if I was still going to make them do it.”

While the other three consultants in the focus group had not mandated AIM, they also elaborated on the board-level research they were doing to monitor their CF programming, and in some cases, how this research led to their decision to keep AIM as an option for CF teachers. Other influences on board-level decisions to leave AIM optional for CF teachers to use are described in the next section.

Why AIM-optional?

The majority of consultants who self-identified as being from AIM-optional boards on
the survey offered multiple reasons for this course of action. Looking at all of the responses, the decision not to mandate AIM commonly centred on the belief that honoring CF teachers’ autonomy and right to choose a method that is right for them was most important. This theme of “teacher choice” emerged in the open-ended responses of 70% of the AIM-optional consultants surveyed. They acknowledged that methods like AIM are only valuable if teachers believe in them, and added that they supported CF teachers regardless of whether they chose AIM or not:

If AIM is effective for them they certainly can integrate its use within their program, but AIM is not mandated. (Consultant #1)

Any philosophy and supporting resources are only as successful as the teacher implementing it so if the teacher does not believe in it then they will not be successful with [AIM]. (Consultant #6)

Professional judgment regarding what works best for each student/class is left at the teacher's discretion. (Consultant #12)

We decided that it should be at the discretion of the teacher what program best suits their teaching style. AIM is a valuable program only when the teacher truly buys in. (Consultant #14)

The cost associated with mandating AIM emerged as the second most popular reason for keeping it optional, with five consultants (38%) identifying the high-priced resources and training as grounds for not mandating it in their board:

It [AIM] is definitely NOT for every teacher, and it would be a very COSTLY mistake to assume so, given the high cost of the kits! (Consultant #4)

The elevated per teacher cost of AIM-training would be impossible for our large board to finance even if we did believe that board-wide use of the program would be beneficial. (Consultant #9)

We do not have the funding to train all teachers which we believe is a key component of its success rate. (Consultant #6)

The third most popular reason that survey respondents offered for not mandating AIM was also related to the resources, with 23% of the AIM-optional consultants highlighting the fact that the AIM materials were not listed on the Ontario Ministry of Education’s list of approved CF textbooks (i.e., the ‘Trillium List’) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). Consequently, as

11 According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2012), “in order to meet their local needs, boards are responsible for selecting textbooks from ‘The Trillium List’ and approving them for use in their schools with the assurance that
one consultant elaborated, “therefore, it [AIM] cannot be the core resource” (Consultant #1).

Some AIM-optional consultants from the focus group highlighted similar factors that restricted them from mandating AIM in their board. For instance, after receiving a grant from the Ontario Ministry of Education, one of the consultants from the focus group (i.e., Lorena) talked about how she had used that money to offer AIM training and resources to those elementary-level CF teachers who wanted it. Once they had received the training, Lorena said that she then sent teachers the AIM resources so they could “implement what they had learned”. As a result of being able to offer this, Lorena estimated that more than 75% of elementary CF teachers in her board were now trained in AIM. However, while she clearly supported the widespread use of AIM in her board, Lorena stated that whether all of those teachers were using AIM in their elementary classrooms was dependent on many factors, including teacher investment:

So we’ve got more than three-quarters of our teachers trained, and more than that percentage of our schools is using it from Grades 1 through 8. Well, not everyone is using it from 1 to 8; it depends on the [teacher’s] comfort level, the dynamic in the school, the students...It varies from school to school, but overall it’s quite an infectious thing.

Later on in the focus group discussion, Lorena reiterated her justification for allowing CF teachers to choose whether or not to use AIM, which initiated the following dialogue with Erin related to the importance of teacher investment:

Lorena: It’s not for everybody, cause’ some people shy away from it. They say “Oh, I don’t know. I don’t want to do that”. And that’s OK. And that’s why it’s invitational for us so that the people that come out for the training it’s because either they’re interested in something new or they see how successful how it is with their colleagues. But, it’s no pressure.

Erin: I don’t think it would work if you forced it on the teachers. They have to be enthusiastic about it.

Lorena: Yeah. I mean it’s different boards, different dynamics.

Focus group participants also discussed board-level research that they were using to make decisions about mandating AIM or keeping it optional, which led to an interesting debate during the focus group discussion about the general merits of the method. One of the AIM-optional consultants (i.e., Erin) voiced some of her hesitations about the method, citing reading that she

these textbooks have been subjected to a rigorous evaluation in accordance with the criteria specified in the policy document ‘Guidelines for Approval of Textbooks’.”
had done on her own and her own board-level research showing no differences between AIM and non-AIM test results:

Reading one or two studies, and also we have done some performance tasks, just within our board, and the studies and these tasks seem to indicate that at the end of the day it makes minimal difference, from what I’ve seen. So, that’s kind of part of the question in my mind. Also, looking at the AIM program and how it relates to the new [Ontario Ministry of Education] curriculum document, it falls somewhat short. And already I’m thinking what we’re going to be doing in a year’s time when we’re choosing our programs? I’d hate to pull it away, or not promote it as much because teachers become very attached to it. But at the same time, it’s intriguing to see what AIM is doing to make it meet the expectations of the new curriculum documents a little better. And that’s a very interesting discussion as well, I find.

It was clear from this comment, as well as others that I cite in this chapter from the focus group discussion, that Erin was still exploring the extent to which she supported the widespread use of AIM in her board and was inviting others to partake in a more critical discussion about its effectiveness and staying power given the realities of change in CF programming (e.g., a new curriculum). In this instance, and others, I observed how these types of comments tended to polarize the group, prompting responses and explanations from other AIM-mandated and AIM-optional consultants that would often lead the discussion off-topic. For instance, Lorena responded to this particular comment from Erin by disagreeing with her view that AIM might not align with the new curriculum expectations, and then went on to recount her own positive experiences observing AIM teachers and administrators:

I don’t know. When I saw the draft of the new curriculum, I was thinking the opposite. What a great tie-in, and how it’s going to…yeah, the exact opposite. So I was so glad that we had gotten on board with AIM because now our teachers, they’re going to be able to feel fulfilled because they’re working in the same vein as what the document wants, like the oral proficiency. And that’s [AIM is] really going to provide it. I don’t have any documentation on student achievement prior to AIM because it’s just something I didn’t do. And I know this doesn’t seem professional, but you can just walk in and see the difference. And I have walked into classrooms where the students, when they are not doing the oral part, they’re reading and writing, even Grade 5s are writing full sentences.

Lorena went on to describe how significantly the use of AIM was motivating her teachers, saying that they were “seeing results” and “experiencing success” as well as giving up their own time to come to AIM workshops she was offering. These comments caused Irene to contribute some of her own positive anecdotes about a teacher personally thanking her for turning her on to AIM when they were initially resistant, and another who had declined a
homeroom teaching position because of the success she was experiencing teaching French using AIM in the CF program. This idea of “seeing results” also emerged repeatedly in my data related to educator perspectives on AIM. I will introduce data related to this trend and others in the next sections.

Educator Perspectives on AIM

In addition to questions about why they had mandated AIM or not, consultants also offered their perspectives related to the general utility of AIM for CF instruction, the instructional materials and the growing popularity of AIM across Canada. Each of these participants was also asked questions related to their general knowledge about AIM, specifically about how they found out about the method and what they knew about the academic research that had been conducted on the method to date. In an effort to triangulate educator perspectives, participating teachers ($N = 9$), principals ($N = 8$), and the Ontario Ministry Representative were also asked questions related to these three topics. Considered collectively, the findings presented in the following sections link well to the data presented thus far, in that they complement the macro-level perspective on decision-making related to AIM by delving deeper into educators’ general opinions about the method.

Knowledge of AIM

The majority of educator participants found out about AIM through word of mouth. The non-AIM teacher, the Ontario Ministry Representative and the majority of participating consultants and principals learned about the existence of AIM from teachers who were using it for CF instruction in their board. Most of the AIM teachers found out about the method from AIM workshops that their board had arranged or ones they had attended voluntarily at professional conferences (e.g., Ontario Modern Language Teachers Association, 2012).

Most participant groups seemed to be aware that research had been done on AIM; however, most were not familiar with specific studies or findings, or they stated that they had not had a chance to read any of the research as of yet. Of those who did go into detail, the majority cited being familiar with the Mady et al. (2009) study or their own board-level research, which they did not elaborate much on. Seven of the eight participating principals claimed to know nothing whatsoever about the research done on AIM. One of the AIM-mandated principals assumed that the board must have already consulted the research, because they were advertising AIM as “a very effective way of teaching French and increased the ability of the children to
speak French and feel comfortable with it” (Miranda’s Principal). And, while 67% of consultants surveyed said they were aware of the research, when prompted to describe what they knew they either listed one or two studies, neglected to describe the findings altogether, or were inaccurate when they did so. Almost half of the AIM teachers also stated that they relied on the AIM website (i.e., AIM Language Learning, 2012a) for information about pertinent research on AIM.

After examining the survey, focus group and interview data, I was also struck by the unexpected variation of terms that educators used when referring to AIM in their responses. When they were not just using “AIM” on its own, the following six terms were used: method, program, approach, resource, strategy and technique. The most popular term used by all participants was ‘program’; however, in some groups, consistency and variation of use emerged across Mandated and Optional cases. For example, six of the eight AIM teachers (i.e., three from the Mandated board and three from the Optional board) only used ‘program’ when talking about AIM, while the remaining two from each case used ‘program’ and ‘method’ synonymously. The Ontario Ministry Representative insisted that AIM was an approach, stating:

It is an approach. AIM is an approach… I see a program as being one, I guess, one medium to language teaching and learning that has a number of approaches that has a number of methodologies. There’s more than one methodology to teaching and learning a language. I think the richer your program is, and the methodology and strategies, the better it is. So I guess that’s one component. I wouldn’t limit myself to AIM….the way we see it in Ontario, if I use Tout Ados, it looks very carefully at helping the teacher meet the expectations and providing a number of ways to do that. I’m not sure AIM does that.

Principals from the AIM-optional board used ‘program’ exclusively, while each of the four AIM-mandated principals used a different term or combination of terms when referring to AIM during the same interview, including: (a) ‘program’; (b) ‘method’ and ‘program’; (c) ‘approach’ and ‘program’; or (d) ‘method’, ‘approach’ and ‘program’. The consultants also varied in their characterization of AIM as a program, method, approach, strategy and/or resource. During the focus group, ‘program’ was used exclusively by the AIM-mandated consultant and two of the AIM-optional consultants, while the terms ‘program’ and ‘method’ were both used by the remaining AIM-optional consultant. In their open-ended survey responses, consultants either referred to AIM on its own, used the terms ‘program’ or ‘method’ in isolation, or employed a combination of one or more of the terms listed above. Some consultants used these terms to clarify what they understood AIM to be, even though the question did not prompt them to do so:
AIM is an appropriate strategy to be integrated within a program. (Consultant #1)

The only core program that teachers should be using is the curriculum. Not to mention that AIM is a strategy we use on a daily basis. It is not a pedagogy. (Consultant #8)

One of the teachers from the AIM-mandated board made a similar clarification, adding that understanding AIM in relation to these terms is important to its implementation, saying: It can be difficult to implement it from the teacher side because it really is a methodology and a program. (Mary)

Although ‘program’ was the most popular term used to refer to AIM, on the whole these findings suggest that local definitions of what AIM represents are more inconsistent and complex across educators than they are simple, as shown by the aforementioned variety of terms used to qualify different aspects of second language acquisition.

**Utility of AIM for CF instruction**

When asked about the need for AIM and its general appropriateness and utility for CF instruction, educator responses converged around the following three themes: (a) most useful in beginning stages of CF instruction, (b) builds oral fluency, and (c) improves CF programming.

**Most useful in beginning stages of CF instruction**

Analysis of the survey data revealed that almost 80% of the eighteen consultants agreed that AIM was either appropriate or very appropriate to use at the primary level (Kindergarten to Grade 3). Fewer consultants (66%) agreed that AIM was appropriate to use at the junior level (Grades 4 to 6). When prompted to explain, many felt that it provided a solid oral foundation from the beginning of CF instruction, and also cited the kinesthetic (i.e., the AIM gestures) and drama components as being advantageous with both of these age groups. Principals referenced these same advantages in response to the identical line of questioning as to whether AIM was appropriate to use with primary and junior CF students. Teachers from the AIM-mandated board who taught primary CF students using AIM also had positive things to say about its usefulness at this level:

Primaries can do it [AIM] inside and out. (Mary)

It’s easy to keep the gestures and L2-only with primary. (Monica)

Primaries are more open to AIM. They’re like sponges. (Miranda)

Some consultants and teachers expressed hesitancy regarding the utility of AIM at the junior level. In their survey responses, some consultants warned that students of this age might...
get sick of doing the plays, especially if they had begun their FSL learning during the primary grades in an AIM classroom:

Depending on when students begin Core French it [AIM] can be appropriate. Students in our board begin in grade 1. By the time students are in grade 4/5, they are sick of doing the plays. (Consultant #8)

If a school board begins Core French in gr.4 then I see it as being appropriate. The potential for developing oral language is definitely there. If on the other hand a school board begins Core French in the primary grades then AIM is not appropriate. Those junior students need to move on to developing reading and writing skills. (Consultant #17)

AIM could be an appropriate method for grades 4-5 CF, if CF is only introduced in grade 4. If students have primary CF, then AIM should be in the earlier grades… AIM is most effective, in my opinion, when introduced to new learners of French (Consultant #18)

The AIM-mandated teachers whose oldest students were at the junior level also identified the gestures as limiting the suitability of AIM with this age group:

- Gestures don’t work with my older kids in Grade 4 (Melissa)
- The Grade 4-5 class thinks that the gestures are bébé [baby]. They have no interest in it. It’s insulting to them to do all of that stuff. (Miranda)

Endorsement for the appropriateness of AIM began to decrease once participants were asked about its usefulness at the intermediate grade levels (Grades 7 to 8). Almost two-thirds of consultants surveyed (77%) felt that AIM was somewhat or not appropriate for CF instruction at this level. Similar to what the Grade 8 students from Mady et al. (2009) reported, some consultants argued that aspects of the method (namely the gestures and the content of some of the plays) were too juvenile for this age group. One consultant went so far as to insist that the production of AIM resources for older students (i.e., Jeunesse en Action – Maxwell, 2008) did not make a difference, saying that “even the newer units which are aimed at adolescent learners do not create interest” (Consultant #18). Principals were equally skeptical about the utility of AIM at the intermediate level. Five of them questioned the appropriateness of the gestures and whether using AIM could help prepare students for CF in high school. One principal identified the maturity level of students in Grades 7 and 8 as influencing whether AIM, or any method/program, works with students in this age group:

- The program can be the best program in the world, they [intermediate students] cannot step up and become vocal, and standing in front and being the one and the only...the limit
is not set by the program itself, it is set by the developmental stages of children. (Miranda’s Principal)

During their interviews, all of the participating AIM teachers who taught CF at the intermediate level explained how these students were resistant to their use of the method. They described how intermediate students no longer liked speaking chorally with the teacher, disliked the gestures, complained about the recurring use of plays as texts, asked why they were not doing more reading or writing, or questioned the absence of explicit grammar teaching.

When talking about the usefulness of AIM at the intermediate grade levels, educators distinguished between the appropriateness of initiating AIM at this grade level and continuing AIM at this grade level. For instance, consultants who were surveyed identified the struggle of integrating students with variable experiences with AIM in the same class (e.g., different plays, different starting grades, etc.) or in classes where some students had no AIM experience. Some of the AIM teachers also reflected on limitations they had noted when introducing the method to this age group:

That might have been my biggest resistance to it at the beginning, was when it started they said this is what we’re going to do - start it with all of the grades, and so grades 1 to 8. I was the one here teaching the intermediates and I found it such a struggle because they just were not interested. They just rolled their eyes. I found it harder to manage them, trying to keep them going with AIM in the strict way that it was laid out. (Monica)

I jumped into using AIM with the French-only rule, and it worked great for junior and on down, but not with the intermediates. (Oksana)

I started with all of the classes, and in hindsight I don’t think I should’ve started with the Grade 8s because they were doing a Grade 4 play at a Grade 4 level, and I was supplementing. But a few of the kids came back and said we didn’t feel like we were as ready for Grade 9 as we should’ve been. Now that might have been in their own mind because they didn’t like it, and they felt it was too primary…that was my fault I guess. I guess I just shouldn’t have started AIM with that group. (Orianna)

During the focus group discussion, the consultants engaged in a long discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of initiating AIM during the intermediate grades. Similar to the example given earlier in this chapter, this particular conversation came about following a critical comment by Erin about when AIM should start and its overall usefulness at the intermediate level. As with the critical incident described earlier, Lorena and Irene seemed to respond defensively to Erin’s original criticism, and steered the conversation to talking about the merits
of AIM and justifying how it was being implemented in their contexts. Although Erin prompted the discussion with a critical comment, she responded positively to some of the explanations offered by Lorena and Irene:

Erin: I mean, initially it was for primary classes in a private school with about twelve kids in the class. And it’s gone from that very quickly to Grade 8 classes doing Les Trois Petits Cochons [Three Little Pigs]. I’m not sure that was the ideal place for it. We’ve had schools I know that have done the very first unit, Les Trois Petits Cochons, with Grade 8s, in fact, for every grade throughout the school.

Lorena: But that thing is because it’s like learning to play the piano…

Irene: It is an introductory unit.

Lorena: We’ve had that scenario too, where in Grade 3, 4, 5, and 6, everyone started with Les Trois Petits Cochons because it’s like learning to play the piano. You have to start with Grade 1 in piano it’s like grades, but we call it Year 1, Year 2 and so on…and it may seem like, especially the parents “Why is my child in Grade 6 doing the same thing as my child in Grade 3?” But then I send out a parent letter to explain that it’s very much like learning to play the piano, and those starting in Grade 6 will move faster and have more with it than your child in Grade 3.

Irene: That’s why we brought it in one year at a time because parent perception that it is a Grade 4 program or a Grade 5 program.

Lorena: And that’s the hardest part.

Erin: With the intermediates too, because a Grade 7 student sees that a Grade 4 student is doing it too. That’s not great either.

Irene: We had that problem in our pilot project because the teachers loved it so much they used it across the board. With us it was 4 to 8. The Grade 8s were able to finish the play in six weeks because they acquired the vocabulary.

Erin: That’s amazing.

Irene: At first it was novel to be using the gestures, but they grew tired of it very quickly. So, that’s why we’re not sure about AIM in 8 cause’ in 8 they think it’s baby, the gesturing.

Lorena: And I think it depends on the kids, always, because we’ve had those brave teachers that try it cold turkey with the students never having had anything else, and for some it worked, for some it didn’t. But, we found for teachers who had had their students in Grade, let’s say they started them in Grade 5, 6; 7 and 8 wasn’t a problem.

Irene: Exactly.
Lorena: Because they were so attuned to it.

In terms of continuation, the consultants who were surveyed seemed to disagree as to whether starting AIM earlier and continuing its use into the intermediate grades was beneficial for CF students. Similar to what some consultants had to say about the usefulness of AIM at the junior level, many survey respondents also wrote about how the repetitive nature of AIM risks making it inappropriate at the intermediate level:

If a student has been immersed in AIM from grade 1 through to grade 6, it might become tiring and uninteresting for the student. (Consultant #3)

If students have been using it [AIM] in primary and junior, we should be encouraging our students to wean themselves off of it [AIM], especially the use of the gestures. (Consultant #6)

It depends on when students start Core French instruction. (Consultant #10)

Students report being tired of the plays and AIM format. (Consultant #16)

Conversely, the few consultants who felt that AIM was appropriate or very appropriate at the intermediate level identified the previous years with AIM as being the key to its success with this age group:

It is appropriate if they have had some grounding in it already. (Consultant #4)

Many other resources that are of interest to this age group can be more thoroughly explored with the level of oral competence. (Consultant #7)

Other materials are more accessible to the students who have used AIM for four or more years…the ability to spontaneously communicate in French should not be underestimated in building student engagement. (Consultant #13)

The idea that using AIM provides a foundation for the development of L2 proficiency was another popular theme that emerged from the data related to the utility of AIM for CF instruction.

**Builds oral fluency**

Throughout the study period, educators continually reported that teaching CF with AIM helped to establish and develop students’ oral fluency. When asked what need the implementation of AIM met in their classrooms, the top three most popular answers provided by AIM teachers centred on the idea of the method enabling them to build students’ oral proficiency
from the beginning levels of CF instruction, and to sustain the use of French as the language of communication in the CF classroom:

   I think oral is the most important because it provides a foundation for second language acquisition and I haven’t found anything better for that than AIM. *(Oksana)*

   Well, with AIM, the students actually speak French now. They actually speak instead of just read and write. *(Melissa)*

   It [AIM] definitely helps to get them to speak more. *(Mary)*

   Before AIM, I always felt that my weakness was that the kids’ oral skills were not strong enough when they headed to high school. And that was something I wanted to improve on. And AIM, I guess, gave me the confidence to say “No English”. *(Orianna)*

   Even the non-AIM teacher - who had tried the method out over the course of one school year, but stopped using it because she was discouraged by the “rules and regulations” associated with AIM - was enthusiastic about how it helped her to get students speaking in French:

   I loved it [AIM] with my Grade 4s and 5s because they were speaking in French… I think it [AIM] certainly has benefits and there’s certainly richness to it, especially the oral.” *(Nancy)*

   During the focus group discussion, consultants seemed to agree with the teachers that AIM was useful for developing students’ oral skills, and enabled CF teachers to use more French in their CF classroom:

   Lorena: I find that the kids’ bottom line, they’re empowered with the ability to speak in another language with a purposeful reason. Not just being able to conjugate a verb…it hits the nail on the head in promoting fluency. It makes you better able to speak, to read and to write. You’re thinking in that language.

   Anna: Yeah. And at the onset, I was most interested in it because I thought it would build teacher capacity that required use of the target language right “à la porte” [at the door]. If the kid has to do it, guess what? So do you. And, so that was my major goal, was to give them, with that enthusiasm, they were hooked, to now you have to…that is the language of the classroom.

   Erin: And that’s arguably its biggest success I think.

   ALL: Yes.

   Taking into account previous research (e.g., Calman & Daniel, 1998), the possibility that teachers and students in AIM classrooms are able to sustain French as the language of the
classroom points to the use of AIM as representing a possible improvement to the delivery of CF in this respect. It is worth mentioning now that this is not the only data set in which this theme emerged, as I demonstrate in subsequent chapters. However, for now, I will introduce more relevant data related to AIM being viewed as useful for improving CF programming.

**Improving CF**

When responding to questions and prompts related to the usefulness of AIM, participants continually alluded to ways in which AIM had generally improved CF programming. For example, the Ontario Ministry Representative speculated that AIM was probably useful because “it enables teachers to do more in short Core French periods”. Focus group consultants said things like “I could never imagine Grade 8s doing that before” (Anna), or asked other consultants if they recalled the “nightmare” of teaching the differences between masculine and feminine nouns, and went on to recount how AIM students in their board were now differentiating “automatically” (Irene). Teachers felt that students got more out of their CF programming as a result of using AIM, with one asking “wouldn’t you rather have your kids being into it and participating rather than having them sit there like little bumps on a log?” (Monica). Another teacher declared that the use of AIM made it more probable that CF teachers might meet the Canadian government’s goal of doubling the proportion of bilingual graduates before 2013 (Government of Canada, 2003).

Principals seemed to connect strongly with the idea that AIM was useful for improving teacher and student engagement in CF programs. Regardless of whether they were from AIM-optional or AIM-mandated contexts, most principals spoke about how their teachers and students appeared more motivated and energized since they’d started using AIM. One principal talked about how her CF teacher was keen to abandon her grammar sheets, while another described the enthusiasm her CF teacher had for AIM and how it was influencing other CF teachers to consider using the method. Two of the four principals from the AIM-mandated board attempted to explain why some teachers did not show much interest because of their personality or personal choice:

I’ve watched five teachers use the AIM approach...and put it into their classroom and all but one was tremendously excited. All but one felt that it revolutionized the teaching of French, all but one. That one chose not to be excited. I agree with the rest though. The excitement was unbelievable. (Miranda’s Principal)

For the most part teachers that are energetic seem to thrive on the use of AIM, and teachers that aren’t energetic typically don’t stick with the AIM program or shy away
from it. (Monica’s Principal)

Principals who observed an increase in student engagement since CF teachers in their board started using AIM attributed it primarily to the focus on fostering oral skills in AIM and its ability to reach a wide range of students:

It [AIM] gets the kids interested. It gets the kids able to communicate, to listen to French and have a better understanding than I think they ever have in the past because I’ve seen traditional French classes. I grew up in a traditional French class. We all have [laughter]. There are limitations, certainly, to those [traditional classes]. (Oksana’s Principal)

When we introduced AIM, that certainly broke down a lot of barriers in that the kids could all, because basically they’re all starting at the same place, and it’s something that they could feel very comfortable with very quickly. And I think because it was a lot of fun, then it went a long way to encouraging kids to see French in a very positive light because you’re all doing it together, you’re all sort of at the same place learning it. I certainly saw the kids enjoying their French classes a lot more. (Melissa’s Principal)

Some principals also attested to the fact that keeping students engaged with AIM also helped to decrease behavior problems or resistance they had normally experienced during CF programming. One of the focus group consultants also corroborated this observation in their board as well (see third quote):

The kids in Grade 4 and 5 love French. There’s never ever any balking at going to French class, it’s let’s go. That’s a change from what I’ve seen previously. Typically the joke had always been - have a good French teacher because that’s where most of your behavior issues will come from. They’ll come from French class down to the office because kids do not want to be there. But I don’t see that at all. I don’t think I’ve ever had a student come out of French class since AIM. (Oksana’s Principal)

I think it [AIM] does keep students engaged. I think they enjoy French more. Personally, for most kids, I would say it [AIM] also reduces the opportunity for any misbehavior because they’re engaged the whole time. (Orianna’s Principal)

And in, I would say, five years or four years since it began, and I believe it was four years ago, I haven’t had parents come in and ask to have their kids removed from French because they’re not enjoying it or they’re not having a good time. That doesn’t happen. The children truly do enjoy French. (Miranda’s Principal)

I’ve had principals call me and tell me again, no one is in the office for French since their teachers started using AIM. (Irene)

In addition to the usefulness of AIM for CF instruction, all participants were asked what they thought about the instructional materials, and the extent to which teachers should follow the
directives in the AIM resources. Below, I report on findings and themes that emerged across participating educators related to the AIM materials.

**AIM Instructional materials**

Each participant, except the non-AIM teacher, was asked explicitly what they thought about the AIM instructional materials (i.e., Maxwell, 2006, 2008). When analyzing their responses, it became clear that participants had a wide range of familiarity with these resources in question. For instance, all of the participating AIM teachers were observed using the AIM materials in their CF classrooms, and all participating FSL consultants appeared to be familiar with the resources based on their answers. Alternatively, all of the principals signaled that they had limited knowledge of the AIM resources, while one of the AIM-optimal principals and the Ontario Ministry Representative acknowledged that they had never actually seen the AIM materials before.

All of the teachers had both positive and negative things to say about the AIM resources. The majority of AIM teachers seemed to like them because they facilitated their long-range planning and offered a clear, step-by-step guide on how to implement the method. One AIM-optimal teacher even referred to the AIM teacher’s guide as being like “French for Dummies”. Similarly, the seven principals who had seen the AIM materials also liked the idea of a resource that supported the method, saying that their CF teachers found them to be helpful, user-friendly and especially useful when each teacher had their own set of resources.

Teachers also identified things they did not like about the materials, including the high cost, frequent spelling mistakes, and lack of assessment materials. They also had mixed feelings about the DVDs, raps, dances and posters, with some teachers specifying their preference for them, and others identifying them as materials that they never used. Four of the teachers specified that the AIM kits were missing authentic reading material besides the play, and that additional assessment activities and texts were lacking. I should also mention here that all of the teachers went on to describe how they used the materials, and ways in which they supplemented in response to this question about the AIM materials. I introduce these findings in more detail in later chapters related to AIM implementation.

When answering the general question about the AIM materials, consultants in the focus group concentrated on the cost, agreeing that negotiating the high price was a complex aspect of their role in the implementation of AIM in their board. For example, after mentioning the high
cost of the resources, Erin went on to tell the group about some additional costs that she had learned about in relation to charges for access to the AIM website and online professional development (c.f. AIM Language Learning, 2012a for more details). Not all of the consultants knew about this impending fee, which sparked an interesting debate about the need to have all of the AIM materials or to add to what they already have, especially when a new version of the Ontario CF curriculum was pending:

Erin: In our system, the cost yet again, it’s fairly expensive at the moment, and the talk is that they’re going to be adding an online membership scheme for which they’ll be charging $180.00 per teacher, per year.

Lorena: What’s that?

Irene: That was for…

Lorena: It’s the license.

Irene: I don’t think it’s for one teacher?

Erin: It’s for access to their online material.

Lorena: For one log-in.

Erin: Yeah, for one log-in.

Lorena: Yeah, she’s right.

Irene: One log-in? Wow. Well, you know, that’s an optional thing.

Erin: Yeah, I don’t know how integral it will be to the program.

Lorena: I mean, we’re doing our own in-house, and I spoke to our master teachers about that too. We felt that the personal contact was better and more affordable. I think it’s more costly to do the online than to bring people in. So, I don’t think that’s a route that we would necessarily take.

Erin: Although, they’re adding the readers and the big books and all the rest of it because they are in some way short of the new curriculum expectations. So they are adding a number of things to it, the cultural pieces and so forth. So the price is going to go up.

Irene: Is this regarding the balanced literacy pack?

Erin: Yeah, there are the readers for the literacy, but also cultural pieces they’re going
to be adding as well.

Irene: Well, everybody is going to have to do that.

Erin: There are going to be new programs, whereas these are going to be add-ons as well as the regular kits.

Lorena: Well, I guess there will be purchases that need to be made, regardless.

Erin: Oh yeah.

Lorena: Because, what happened the first time we got a new [curriculum] document, all the publishers were out there tuning things up so that they were in line with the document. Again, I’m sitting in a spot where we’ve done a lot of our purchasing. So, if we choose to add on, it would be small pieces here and there.

Irene: I don’t see it as being an expensive piece either because it’s very small the cultural piece is very small. That has to be added on and it’s still cheaper than buying a whole new program that has the cultural piece. “On y va” is $55 per textbook.

Lorena: Really?

Irene: Yup.

During the study, educators were also prompted to comment on the extent to which teachers should follow the directives outlined in the AIM materials. As I show in the next section, this emerged as a point of divergence, revealing the different perspectives that educators had regarding what constitutes the “proper” use of AIM.

**Following AIM directives**

Principal’s characterizations of the AIM resources ranged from them being a reference point or supporting teacher practice, to representing what teachers were supposed to be doing if they considered themselves to be an AIM teacher. A similar range in perspectives emerged from the consultant data sets. The majority of FSL consultants surveyed felt that AIM teachers should either follow the directives closely (45%) or somewhat closely (17%), while the remaining consultants thought that it should be at the teachers’ discretion (28%), or that they should not follow the directives at all (11%). During the focus group discussion, consultants debated what the proper use of AIM looked like in their boards. The group seemed to support the idea that teachers ultimately made the decisions in their AIM classrooms; however, as the next excerpt
demonstrates, some also insisted that deviating from the materials too much, or leaving certain aspects of the method out of their AIM practice (i.e., gestures, plays), was unacceptable. One of the consultants (i.e., Lorena) even offered a metaphor for how she conceptualized the proper use of AIM as including the use of the plays and the gestures:

Lorena: In order for this approach to be effective, the teachers have to be using it correctly or it’s not going to happen. And I think where it fails, that may be why, because the teacher isn’t using it correctly as delineated in the materials. But sometimes people try and use modified versions of it, and it’s just not going to cut it.

Irene: It’s not based on pedagogy anymore.

Lorena: And some people, they see the plays and they’re not using the gestures that go with it. And I say, well, the plays without the gestures, forget it. Nothing is going to happen. I akin it to having a really great car, like a Mercedes or something, and the engine has been pulled out. You can still move that car, you put it in neutral and you can push. It’ll move. Put the engine back in, being the gestures, and watch it. So, you’re still going to move a program, but nowhere near to the same degree as if you’re using the plays and the gestures.

Alternatively, teachers in AIM-mandated and AIM-optional contexts all seemed to agree that deviating from the directives in the AIM instructional materials was more acceptable practice. For instance, they expressed how following the directives related to progression through the plays and vocabulary was more important than the recommended scheduling and timing allocated for each suggested activity:

I definitely follow the order in which things are presented…It’s kind of like following the pattern. It doesn’t work for me, you know, how there are these tables that show a 30-minute period. I can’t do these. So I don’t go by that, I tend to go by, OK, so I covered the vocabulary, so then I just move on. (Odette)

I do try to follow the materials closely, like they mention to not go out of order. Sometimes I do go out of order, like a few activities, teacher-led activities. Like, I could be doing #65 and jump back to #63. But as long as you don’t go way out of order… a lot of them, they’re built to be about 10 minutes, but I don’t find that that’s realistic. They’re often longer, like they suggest getting three done in a class and I rarely get three done. (Oksana)

You develop your own timing. Like, I know the natural progression of the activities, so I follow that. But you know, I guess I sometimes skip doing things for the full time, and then jump ahead. (Monica)

The four teachers with the most AIM experience also declared that the extent to which
they followed the directives had changed over the years:

I followed the manual very closely in the beginning. I’m not using it the way I did when I started...now I have a better handle of what they know, and it comes more naturally. *(Orianna)*

When it’s a new program, and you haven’t done it before, so if it’s a new kit and everything is new to you, you tend to follow it pretty closely. Or, early in the year you say “OK, this is the year I’m going to follow it, I’m going to follow it page by page”. But you kind of do get caught up in things as you get going, and that’s OK. *(Monica)*

I find with my beginner classes especially I stick to the manual more, following the script. And then as my classes get more developed, I find that I have to adapt the class more because I have lower level and higher level students. So I have to adapt what it is I’m saying more as opposed to just sticking right to what is scripted there. So, I’ve started doing that and it seems to work for me. *(Olivia)*

I follow the manual quite closely...I still really like doing everything that’s in them now, but I create tests periodically, and that’s not something that comes in the manual. And I find instead of just doing a story retell, I do some other type of writing to retell the story and create my own rubric...sometimes I’ll do a comic strip instead, you know, different ways, like a book report format for example. But, I still pretty much use it the same way. *(Mary)*

As these comments demonstrate, the AIM teachers seemed to be more open than the consultants and principals to the idea of deviating from the directives outlined in the materials. In Chapters 6 and 7, I introduce more findings related to how teachers’ adapted and supplemented the method, and how they justified their practices in this respect. Also of note in this section is the introduction of participants’ conceptualization of the existence of ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ ways to use AIM. This theme reappeared many times throughout my data analysis, including when participants were asked what they thought about the growing trend of AIM use across Canada. I will now report on my triangulated findings related to this important question.

**Growing popularity of AIM**

Generally, teachers (AIM and non-AIM) and principals all considered the growing popularity of AIM across Canada to be a positive trend for CF programming, citing the same reasons that they offered regarding its overall utility in their responses. In contrast, when I asked this question of the focus group participants, they were somewhat polarized. Similar to the other critical incidents I introduced earlier in this chapter, Erin responded first by saying that she was suspicious of whether the phenomenon of AIM use across Canada had grown too fast. Again, the
uncertainty expressed by Erin caused the other consultants to endorse the influx of AIM in CF classes across Canada, and defend their preference for using AIM as opposed to not using it at all or using other CF programs or resources:

Erin: I sometimes feel that it [AIM use] grew too fast. It kind of snowballed, and I think a lot of the principals heard about it from their colleagues and said “Yup, let’s jump on this bandwagon”. And they heard it creates good results without maybe knowing too much about it. And also I think the speed with which it has caught on has made it difficult for them to keep up, you know, producing the materials and editing things properly, and so on and so forth. They’ve done it in different languages very quickly as well. And I mean it’s only been a few years hasn’t it? Already there’s a vast amount of things out there, and I’m just wondering because it spread through word of mouth so quickly...

Lorena: Well, we are working around any snags like that cause’ we figure, you know what? We know we’re going to have problems, there’ll be bumps in the road because we didn’t do it like you [Irene], but better to use it than to not.

Irene: Exactly.

Lorena: I’m kind of envious that we didn’t get that start like you [Irene] did, but it was just all about money and the funding. For whatever reason, it’s working. It’s working for us, for the most part.

Irene: It [AIM] clearly answers expectations. That’s the bottom line – it’s what you do with it to meet expectations. It’s a resource to use.

Lorena: A resource that’s an approach. It’s more than…yeah.

Irene: And I find that for as a medium, for the teacher, that they’re more successful. The students are more successful with that than they are with any other program. Like towards being bilingually fluent.

Interestingly, the only consultant to indicate on the survey that AIM was inappropriate at all three grade levels seemed to feel the same uncertainty as Erin about the widespread enthusiasm about AIM, writing that what she objected to most was the “cult-like approach to AIM training and marketing”, and adding that she encouraged fellow teachers to “look at AIM techniques but to beware of the religious zealots who will descend upon them [when they do so]” (Consultant # 9).

When considering the growing popularity of AIM in Canada, some educators referred to two important themes (a) the proper and improper use of AIM, and (b) the question of whether one best method exists.
Proper and improper use of AIM

When offering their opinions about the growing popularity of AIM, many participants distinguished between the ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ use of AIM and the risks and benefits of many different CF teachers using it at the same time. For instance, the Ontario Ministry Representative reported what she had heard about the impact of varying use of AIM across Ontario:

I also hear particularly from our sharing sessions in the regions that there are different degrees of use of AIM, and different degrees of, I guess, experience and training with AIM. And what I’m hearing is that if teachers use the AIM program in its fullness, it would seem to give better results than a teacher who may just be assigned to a school where AIM is used and just takes out the kit and tries to cope with it and does components of AIM but not the program. So that’s what I’m hearing.

Participating teachers also frequently made this distinction throughout each of their interviews, and I introduce more data related to each teacher’s understandings of ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ use of AIM and their practices in this respect in later chapters. However, what is particularly relevant to this section is the fact that AIM teachers also specified reasons and consequences of more and more teachers using AIM properly or improperly. For example, in response to the question about the growing popularity of AIM and during other interviews, each of the teachers argued that using AIM led to desired learning in CF, which in most cases was related to learning to speak or communicate with others in French. One AIM-optional teacher also thought that different teachers using AIM created opportunities for educators to share ideas and strategies that worked for them, declaring that “we have one methodology and we have a thousand people using it a totally different way, and you get all these different ideas, which is really cool.” (Odette). However, this same teacher, and two other AIM-optional teachers, also added that their impression of widespread “improper” use of AIM, or general doubt in its central tenets, risked damaging the method:

If you’re not sold on [AIM], you’re going to butcher it” (Oksana)

It can do [AIM] a lot of damage if not delivered properly” (Odette)

If you’re not going to do it [AIM] the way it’s meant to be done then don’t do it at all” (Olivia)

This idea that there is a proper/improper way to implement AIM, or that one best method even exists, was also a prevalent theme in participants’ responses to the question about the
The growing popularity of AIM across Canada.

**One best method?**

When offering their perspectives related to the growing number of teachers using AIM for CF instruction, several participants went beyond the idea of using AIM correctly to contemplate whether one best method even exists. The participating non-AIM teacher expressed her uncertainty as to whether she believed in the idea of there being one superior method for all:

Honestly, I really have mixed emotions about what is the best method. And I guess as a teacher that maybe you do that your whole career, keep questioning. And, maybe that’s a good thing, keep informing yourself about what’s effective or what works, and what works with one class isn’t necessarily going to work with another. And maybe there isn’t one method, I don’t know if there is. *(Nancy)*

During the focus group discussion, one AIM-optional consultant echoed this doubt about the existence of one best method or program, but still advocated that AIM was the best she’d seen for CF instruction:

Nothing can be the be all and end all. I think you have to take the best from everything and use it. But AIM is up there in terms of helping students. *(Lorena)*

Instead of thinking of AIM as being the best method, some educators seemed to agree with Carr (2001), that widespread use of AIM should happen as part of an overall CF program. For example, the non-AIM teacher acknowledged that AIM was another “exciting tool” that teachers could use in their “tool chest of teaching”. In their survey responses, consultants who had not mandated the use of AIM in their board also referred to this idea that AIM should not be the sole element of a CF teacher’s practice:

It [AIM] is an appropriate strategy to be integrated within a program. It cannot be considered the program. *(Consultant #1)*

It [AIM] cannot be the only tool used in the classroom. *(Consultant #6)*

Students benefit most when a teacher is able to blend methodologies to meet student and community needs. *(Consultant #9)*

It [AIM] is appropriate as one component of the program but not the sole component. *(Consultant #15)*

The Ontario Ministry Representative also cautioned against teachers limiting themselves to AIM alone:

There’s more than one methodology to teaching and learning a language. I think the
richer your program is, and the methodology and strategies, the better it is. So I guess that’s one component. I wouldn’t limit myself to AIM… for teachers I think it is critical that there is no one either program or approach that will be sufficient to meet what students need.

As with many of the other themes introduced in this chapter, I expand on these emergent themes when reporting on the teacher data in subsequent findings chapters of this thesis. However, before I do this, I will summarize and briefly discuss some of the noteworthy findings presented in this chapter.

Summary and Discussion

It is clear from the data presented in this chapter that AIM is having a significant impact on CF instruction across Ontario. Findings showed that all educators had heard of AIM; however, their characterization of it varied widely (i.e., program, method, approach etc.), suggesting an overall inconsistency in educators’ shared meaning related to what AIM represents. In terms of use, findings demonstrated that AIM was being used for CF instruction in 94% of participating boards, oftentimes at multiple elementary level grades. While the overall high rates of AIM use in participating boards suggest that they were adopting a “bias for action” (Fullan, 2007), the findings presented thus far suggest that there are many factors affecting board practices and educator perspectives related to AIM. As the next sections show, there were points of convergence and divergence in relation to each of these factors.

Age matters

Data showed that the use of AIM dominated during the beginning grades of CF instruction (i.e., primary or junior levels), and less so beyond these levels. Likewise, findings demonstrated that the mandating of AIM also tended to happen at the start of CF programming and never at the intermediate level. While there is no empirical research to support such a preference for using or mandating AIM at these levels, this inclination to limit the use of AIM at higher grade levels is corroborated by qualitative findings from intermediate students in the study by Mady et.al. (2007, 2008, 2009) who judged that many aspects of the method were childish. Ironically, the pattern seen in this data coincides with the majority of other language teaching methods, which are seen as being most useful with beginning-level learners (Brown, 1997; Bell, 2003), and also supports the original vision of AIM as an “initial step” or providing a “language base” (Maxwell, 2004, p. 8) from the beginning of L2 acquisition. Certainly, the majority of participating educators agreed with the idea of AIM helping to establish a
foundation, especially for oral skills, during the beginning stages of CF instruction. In terms of the utility of AIM for CF instruction, they emphasized the usefulness of AIM for developing students’ oral skills, an aspect of CF programming that former CF students have reported was lacking from their experience (Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation, 2004).

Whether or not AIM is as useful as students get older and develop beyond these beginning stages is still up for debate. Some educators argued that the pleasant repetition inherent to AIM (Maxwell, 2006, 2008) may work in the CF students’ favor in terms of predictable expectations and continued scaffolding, while others cautioned that students might eventually get bored with learning French in the same way, or that the developmental predisposition of intermediate level students in particular might limit the delivery of the method and students’ engagement with it. The AIM teachers also identified ways in which they changed or supplemented the method in order to appeal to older students, and I go into more detail in subsequent chapters about how CF instruction using AIM changed throughout the grade levels. Based on the data presented thus far, initiating and continuing the use of AIM at the intermediate level remained a point of contention amongst educators in this study. Interestingly, research to date has suggested that the use of AIM does not affect whether older students remain in CF programs once it is no longer obligatory to do so (Mady, Arnott & Lapkin, 2008).

**Board-level research**

A great deal of anecdotal evidence was offered by the participants in this study when they were asked to talk about AIM-related practices and offer opinions about the method. Participants also continuously referred to phenomena such as “the success rate of AIM”, “experiencing results with AIM”, or “seeing the difference with AIM” when they spoke about board-level research, informal observations of AIM in action, or hearsay conversations between AIM teachers. While this data is useful in understanding the impetus behind educator practices and perspectives related to AIM, and refreshing given previously documented negative educator attitudes towards CF (e.g., Turnbull, 2001), these statements are in contrast to findings from the existing academic research on AIM described in Chapter 2, which is not surprising given that the majority of participants seemed to know very little about this body of research.

This trend of relying on board level research or personal observations coincides with findings from other studies of what teachers do and think in their classrooms (e.g., Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989; Scott, Stone & Dinham, 2000), where the effectiveness of teaching and
programming in schools was based on the same sort of informal observations of students and teachers. The statements and language used by participants in relation to impact of AIM in their board is also reminiscent of the “one best method” mantra that Stern (1983) and Prabhu (1990) warned against. As Fullan, Hill and Crévola (2006) insisted, assessing how well a change is impacting students is never simple, and requires a more critical understanding of the “success” or “results” that they are seeing. Based on these findings, it seems that Erin was in the process of doing just that, and faced some resistance from her colleagues as a result. It is interesting to note that whenever Erin initiated critical discussion about AIM, the other focus group participants either fell silent (as was often the case with Anna), or interpreted such comments as a prompt to defend the method or their decision-making in relation to it. In my opinion, this dynamic represents a possible resistance to the type of critical thinking and analysis that Fullan (2007) and Fullan, et al. (2006) advocate when trying to make change more meaningful. In this respect, I also think it is unfortunate that the board level research described by educators has not been disseminated more widely, and that educators are not becoming more informed about other research that has been done on AIM to date. Perhaps, if more educators were doing this, they might be better prepared to engage in the kind of critical analysis that Erin was undertaking and that Fullan, et al. promote.

**AIM materials**

Generally, findings introduced in this chapter showed that the AIM instructional materials were often being used in tandem with the method. While the majority of educators who were familiar with the resources had both positive and negative things to say about them, there was no consensus as to whether exclusive use of the materials was required. Focus group participants were also uncertain as to whether their AIM teachers needed all of the resources, especially in anticipation of a new version of the Ontario CF curriculum that they had yet to become familiar with. In addition, survey responses showed that mandating AIM was not synonymous with a mandate for teachers to use the AIM materials. Perhaps, as 93% of the AIM-optional consultants attested to, teachers who use AIM often make use of other resources in their CF classrooms. I present more data in the next chapters related to how AIM-mandated and AIM-optional teachers used and felt about the accompanying materials.

Data also showed that the cost of the AIM materials greatly influenced decision-making related to the use of the method for CF in the participating boards. The cost of the materials and
the fact that they were not listed as an approved resource on the Trillium list were identified as major reasons why participating boards were not mandating AIM. Also interesting was the finding that most of the participating principals and the Ontario Ministry Representative were not familiar with the materials, which calls into question their clarity about what the AIM materials represented in relation to their understandings of the method. Along these lines, one could also argue that the clarity of what AIM represented (i.e., program, method, approach, strategy, resource) was also questionable across the participating educators given the variety of terms they used to refer to AIM during the study.

My attempt to triangulate educator perspectives on the AIM instructional materials also revealed a continuum related to whether teachers needed to follow the directives in the AIM materials. Most consultants surveyed (62%) felt that teachers should follow the directives so they would be using AIM as it was originally intended. Principal viewpoints ranged from the materials as an important point of reference to representing what teachers were supposed to be doing. As Stern (1983) and Block (2001) would agree, these perspectives represent a rather narrow and oversimplified view of classroom-based instruction. Nonetheless, they do coincide with the idealized portrait of AIM teaching described in the resources, where the method is characterized as being most effective when teachers implement it as prescribed by the materials. In contrast, whereas AIM teachers stressed the utility of following the manual more during their first years as an AIM teacher, they characterized the manual as being more of a support than a regimen, and identified the suggested progression of the method as being more important to their everyday teaching than the detailed scheduling and timing of specific activities.

This continuum of allegiance to the directives outlined in the AIM materials is similar to Fullan’s distinction between the fidelity and evolutionary perspectives on new materials as they relate to educational change. According to his classification, the participating consultants and principals were more on the fidelity side of the continuum, as most of them supported the idea of implementing AIM faithfully in practice – “that is, to use it as it is ‘supposed to be used’, as intended by the developer” (Fullan, 2007, p. 31). Conversely, the AIM teachers adopted a more evolutionary or “mutual-adaptation” perspective related to the materials, saying that AIM is implemented most effectively when they are able to make their own decisions and adaptations in relation to the prescriptions, resulting in change that is determined by the combination of the idealism represented by the directives and their specific context. I present more data related to how
teachers were observed using the AIM materials in the chapters to follow.

**Teacher agency**

The extent to which teachers should exercise their agency when using AIM for CF instruction was discussed frequently by educators to rationalize AIM-related decisions and to justify their opinions related to the growing popularity of the method. For instance, local research seemed to be particularly important to the AIM-mandated consultants when they were asked to explain why they had made the method obligatory for their CF teachers to use. Oftentimes, the language used in reference to positive change resulting from AIM implied that the method was the influence and not the “teacher operating with AIM” (Wertsch et al., 1993), which risks characterizing CF teachers as mechanical beings with no agency. In contrast, the AIM-optional consultants felt that preserving teacher agency was more important than mandating a particular method. Like Kumaravadivelu (2001, 2003), it seems that the AIM-optional consultants believed that their CF teachers should avoid designing their classroom and teaching according to one specific method, especially if they are not convinced of the central tenets of the method to begin with. They also acknowledged the same “sense of plausibility” that Prabhu (1990) promoted when characterizing language teaching in relation to methods-based pedagogy. According to Bell (2007), this valuing of teacher agency also corresponds to teacher beliefs about methods as being most useful to their pedagogy when they are able to choose whatever procedures or techniques help them fulfill their classroom learning goals.

When offering their opinions about the growing popularity of AIM for CF instruction in Canada, findings showed that some educators insisted on distinguishing between proper and improper use of AIM, but did so without describing either use in detail. This is reminiscent of the pattern of researchers who attempted to distinguish between AIM and non-AIM teaching without documenting each designation in detail. The AIM materials (Maxwell, 2006, 2008) and most of the AIM research to date implies that there is a ‘pure’ form of the method even though most of the researchers did not observe the method in action (Bourdages & Vignola, 2009; Maxwell, 2001; Michels, 2008), and neglected to acknowledge that there are elements of AIM that are, in principle, common to many L2 classrooms (e.g., target language use) (Mady et al., 2009). Despite this, I still think the distinction between proper and improper use of AIM is an important notion to unpack using the voices and actions of teachers who are using the method as opposed to observers or developers who might be more inclined to standardize and idealize its use. It is
also important given the Mandated and Optional contexts under investigation in this study, especially when AIM-optional teachers in particular were the ones who alluded to how the improper use of AIM could have negative consequences for the reputation of the method and AIM teachers alike.

**Educator Perspectives Typology**

In order to compare the Mandated and Optional cases, a more consolidated summary of the educator perspective data presented in this chapter is required. To this end, Figures 5 and 6 expand on the theoretical framework guiding this study by grouping important Mandated and Optional educator perspectives under headings representing its central concepts (i.e., bias for action, teacher agency, shared meaning). The lines framing the prism of each figure are formatted to reflect the influence of external forces, characteristics of AIM, and the board-level policy on educator perspectives from each case. As well, the bolded red points are meant to indicate educator perspectives that differed from those of their comparative case counterpart. These figures will be explained and consolidated even further in Chapter 8; but, for now, I will briefly introduce the general trends that emerged from the analysis of data related to educator perspectives.

Looking within and across cases, most of the similarities and differences that emerged between consultants, principals and teachers within each case were the same across cases. For example, in terms of similarities, the majority of educators in both the AIM-mandated and AIM-optional cases felt that AIM was worth using (i.e., had a bias for action) because they believed that it helped to build and maintain a strong oral foundation in French for students and teachers. The AIM-mandated and AIM-optional principals both attributed a reported increase in student and teacher engagement in CF programming to the use of AIM by teachers in their boards. In addition, as both figures show, teacher perspectives on AIM did not differ significantly at all within and across cases. In terms of external factors, the Ontario Ministry of Education declared that the decision to use or mandate AIM is left to the discretion of each school board. As a result, it could be assumed that consultants felt warranted to do as they saw fit when it came to making decisions about the method; however, none of them cited this leniency as having directly influenced their decisions about the use of AIM in their board. In addition, even though the AIM materials are not listed as an approved resource on the Trillium List, findings showed that they were being used in the majority of contexts where the method was being implemented.
Collectively, these findings suggest that the Ontario Ministry’s perspective had limited impact at the level of implementation, hence the line framing the prism underneath the heading “External Factors” has been left solid in both contexts. Nonetheless, one relevant point that I will touch on further in Chapter 8 is the emphasis that the Ontario Ministry of Education put on monitoring the use of AIM in order to avoid it becoming a “lost investment” if Ministry money was being given to support implementation (e.g., resources, PD, etc.).

Looking at the shared differences, findings showed that the educators in both cases had identical disagreements about how the AIM materials should be treated by teachers – the AIM-optional and AIM-mandated consultants and principals felt that the materials should be treated as supportive and prescriptive, whereas the teachers in both cases agreed that the materials worked to support, and not dictate, their CF teaching practice. Also, teachers, consultants and principals
from both cases often characterized AIM with the same irregularity (i.e., using various terms including program, approach, method, strategy and/or resource).

As I discuss further in Chapter 8, these findings point to a bias for action, shared meaning and common view of teacher agency that in many ways transcend the Mandated and Optional case contexts in this study. However, this finding is not absolute. To this end, the bolded red points in Figures 5 and 6 highlight significant educator perspectives that differed from those of their comparative case counterpart. Some of these differences can be directly attributed to the Mandated and Optional policies in place. For this reason, the line framing the prism above the heading “Board-Level Policy” in each case has been left dotted, showing how micro-level policies moderately influenced aspects of educator perspectives on AIM in each context. For
instance, during the focus group, critical discussion of AIM seemed to put the AIM-mandated consultant on the defensive and polarize the AIM-optional consultants (i.e., some seemed more open to critical analysis of the method than others). According to the AIM-optional consultants, teacher agency and the high cost of materials also emerged as important reasons for keeping AIM optional, whereas these factors were not mentioned to the same extent, if at all, by the AIM-mandated consultants.

Educator perspectives were also influenced by the “Characteristics of AIM”, albeit in a variety of similar and different ways. For instance, educators in both contexts seemed to agree that using AIM satisfied a need to increase student and teacher motivation, and to have both parties speak more French in the CF classroom. In the case of AIM-mandated boards specifically, making sure that AIM was used across the beginning grades provided the boost they felt they needed for their CF programming. However, despite the consensus on the need for AIM, it was not clear how educators were monitoring this so-called boost and its influence on student learning. In terms of clarity, educators from both boards were also divided on what AIM represented – a program, method, approach, strategy or resource.

On the whole, considering these graphical representations, consultant, principal and teacher perspectives on AIM did not vary significantly based on whether AIM was mandated or optional in their board. Although some of the educator perspectives were influenced by the Mandated or Optional policy in place, and the characteristics of AIM, the role that each educator played in their board seemed to matter more when considering the growing popularity of AIM, its utility for CF instruction, and the AIM materials. The significance and implications of these similarities and differences within and across cases are discussed in more detail in Chapter 8. In the next chapters, I focus more specifically on the teacher perspective, and introduce in more detail how AIM was viewed and implemented across eight teachers, and across mandated (Chapter 6) and optional (Chapter 7) contexts. By doing this, I hope to complement the macro-level perspective offered in this chapter, uncover what AIM looks like in action, and expand the one-dimensional “AIM teacher” designation that has plagued teachers in the existing AIM studies to date.
Chapter 6 - AIM-Mandated Teacher Case Vignetees

Introduction

In order to better understand AIM implementation, this chapter and the next report on findings related to teacher participants within each case study environment (i.e., AIM-mandated and AIM-optional). I draw from each teacher’s observation and interview data that I gathered and analyzed following four visits to their CF classrooms, as well as interview data from each teacher’s principal where relevant.

In each participant’s section, I begin by introducing the teacher, how they reported transitioning into becoming an AIM teacher, and the AIM-related training and/or professional development they had experienced to date. I proceed to describe the school context in which they taught CF, citing data related to the support they received from principals, teachers, parents and students within and outside of their school environment. Next, I profile each participant’s teaching practices, both AIM and non-AIM related, using data from my field notes, interview data and percentages generated from the observation scheme which are displayed for each participant in the format of a table. Each table displays the averages based on all of their observed CF classes in the first column, and the isolated averages for the grades they taught in the remaining columns. Where applicable, I differentiate between each teacher’s use of AIM across the levels they taught, and introduce data related to how they supplemented the method or deviated from its directives during the observation period. Each participant’s section ends with a description of the challenges that they identified related to implementing AIM in their CF classroom.

Here, I begin introducing participants from the AIM-mandated context, and move on to the AIM-optional participants in Chapter 7. The emerging case typologies presented at the end of each chapter carry over into the subsequent cross-case analysis, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 8.

AIM-Mandated case

The AIM-mandated board had an explicit policy stating that AIM was the only method to be used for CF instruction from Kindergarten through to Grade 6. I was able to recruit, observe and interview four CF teachers from this board – Mary, Melissa, Miranda and Monica.

MARY

At the time of the study, Mary had been using AIM for each of the five years that she had
been teaching CF, as the AIM-mandated policy was already in place when she switched to teaching CF. It was her first year at her current school, and she was teaching CF from Grades 4 to 8 using AIM. At the time of the study, the population of Mary’s school was approximately 250 students, and CF was the only FSL program offered. Before teaching CF, Mary had been an English homeroom teacher in multiple elementary grades.

When describing her transition to becoming an AIM teacher, Mary recounted how she was not able to become trained to use AIM until her first school year of CF teaching had begun. Following her initial AIM training offered by the board, she recalled the inordinate amount of time she spent learning the gestures and how she followed the teacher manual “word for word” during the remainder of that first CF teaching year. She claimed to have subsequently completed all of the levels of AIM training offered by the Mandated board.

**School context (Mary)**

Mary was the only AIM-mandated teacher who had her own classroom, which her principal insisted on:

> I have given the French teacher the only classroom we have due to the fact that AIM is an oral program and you’re trying to get kids to participate orally. I really felt that trying to do that in an open concept would be really difficult and challenging for everyone, not just the teacher. *(Mary’s Principal)*

Mary stated in her interviews that she felt that her implementation of AIM was supported by her FSL consultant, her principal, and other teachers and parents in her school. She stated that her principal was particularly supportive, helping her to find materials and creating an environment where she “could do her job”. In this respect, Mary’s principal described how she let Mary devise her own schedule and made sure that she was part of professional learning community (PLC) meetings with other junior/intermediate-level teachers in the school. Mary commented on the benefits of these meetings in particular, saying that they helped her to make connections between the AIM content and strategies she was introducing in her class and those that were being implemented across disciplines in her school.

**Observed teaching practices (Mary)**

Mary’s CF classes lasted an average of 37 minutes. When her students entered her CF class, she initiated choral repetition of raps from AIM (Maxwell, 2006, 2008; AIM Language Learning, 2012a, 2012b) (see Appendix R for lyrics from the AIM raps observed in this study), and “little ditties” that she had made up on her own in order to remind students that French was
the language of the classroom, facilitate everyday activities (e.g., handing out folders, getting pencils, etc.), and help them practice their French pronunciation. She would also use other songs she had created when initiating small talk with her students about how they were doing that day, what the weather was like, and to recite the date. Mary was also observed playing a French version of “Simon says…” (i.e., “Madame dit…”) with each of her CF classes.

As Table 9 shows, Mary’s CF classes were contextualized in the AIM play under study for just over half of the time observed, except for her Grade 6/7 class, which I explain in more detail later in this section. Mary was observed using the AIM resources (40%) in tandem with other materials she had designed (35%), and most of these contained extended level text (i.e., connected sentences and/or paragraphs). Her CF classes were also predominantly teacher-centred - she commonly controlled the content of the class (86%), and was either addressing the class (60%) or initiating choral repetition (27%) during the majority of the time observed (which was mostly reciting the play as a class with her junior level students). Overall, while students were often listening (33%) during Mary’s CF classes, she was observed initiating guided writing (15%) and shared reading (14%) activities during her CF classes, most times with her intermediate students. The guided writing activities were either based on questions from the play under study (i.e., Questions Totales, Questions Partielles), or other writing activities from the AIM kits like ‘Mets les Mots en Ordre’ [Put the Words in Order], where students reordered words from sentences in the play. Mary was also one of two AIM teachers who were observed initiating a story retelling activity, where students are asked to retell what happened in the play in their own words. Instead of doing this orally, Mary did it as a shared writing activity with her Grade 4/5 students to model how they would eventually have to do it independently.

Mary gestured a great deal during her AIM classes, more for specific words or phrases than for every word she spoke. Closer examination of the data revealed that she also gestured more often and more exclusively with her junior level students than she did with her Grade 7/8 class. While she normally spoke exclusively in French when teaching CF (75%), both Mary and her Grade 7/8 students were observed using a greater mix of French and English when compared with the younger grades. Further analysis of my field notes revealed that the mix being observed was still French-dominant, where Mary typically used English for one-word translations or for discipline. Neither the students nor Mary were ever observed using English alone during an activity or episode.
Table 9
*COLT Observation Data (Mary) – Percentage of Total Observed Time.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Organization</th>
<th>ALL Grades (7)</th>
<th>Grade 4/5 (3)</th>
<th>Grade 6 (1)</th>
<th>Grade 6/7 (1)</th>
<th>Grade 7/8 (2)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T – S/C</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>68</td>
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<tr>
<td>T – S/C + Choral</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choral</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group (same task)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual (same task)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
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**Content Control**

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<td>Teacher-Text</td>
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<td>81</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher-Text-Student</td>
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**Student Modality**

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<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading + Writing + Listening</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading + Speaking + Listening</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking + Listening</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading + Listening</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing + Listening</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
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**Materials (type and source)**

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<td>Minimal</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>26</td>
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<td>76</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>76</td>
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<td>L2-NNS Teacher-made</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student-made</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
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**Teacher Support**

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<tr>
<td>Modeled</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shared</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<tr>
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<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gesture (all)</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gesture (specific)</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>57</td>
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**Language Use**

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher: L2 only</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher: L2-dominant</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students: L2 only</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students: L2-dominant</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Context**

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text / play</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ lives</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mary had different reward systems going for each of her CF classes (e.g., group points, clothespins). Most of the rewards were given for bringing the appropriate things to class, and speaking in French, either independently or when Mary was initiating choral repetition. She said that her rewards were more like a “curriculum component” than just a behavior management strategy, as she believed it should be expected that students at least try to speak French in her CF class. Interestingly, Mary did comment on how she had to stop using the reinforcements with her Grade 4s later in the year because too many of them were speaking English and she felt they were taking the rewards for granted. She reacted by simply telling them that their marks would drop on their report card if they were not making the effort and that “they had to speak French anyways because it’s their job”.

Data showed that stopping the use of the reinforcements was one of many instances when Mary did things differently than prescribed in the AIM materials. In her interviews, she talked about how she never played any of the AIM DVDs for her CF students because it was challenging to get a TV in her room. She also described how she had to “change AIM to do less oral” because it necessitated being in front of the whole class all of the time, and she felt that she needed to provide more one-on-one support to some of the weaker kids in her class to help them catch up. With her split Grade 6/7 class in particular, Mary described how she was forced to “step out of the AIM philosophy and teach phonics” because her normal progression through the plays was not working with this age group:

I found with that age of kids they don’t want to memorize the whole play first and then start reading it. So I just had to give up on that, and I’m hoping that by reading it over and over, little by little, they’re starting to cover the words and trying to say it. But a lot of them still can’t pronounce. They don’t know how to pronounce certain words. They see it, they know what it means, but they don’t know how to read it aloud. So I’ve actually, in the last few weeks, have been changing my way of teaching it…we’re looking at rhyming and word spelling patterns for word family-type stuff because I’m trying to figure out another way they’re going to learn it. Because, with the AIM way, it’s supposed to just come from loads of practice and loads of oral work and then reading the big book together…At this point, I should be happily facilitating their group practices, but I actually had to just stop them and say “we need to learn some other way to figure out these words cause’ it’s not happening”. They weren’t remembering.

Mary also said that she supplemented for aspects that she felt were missing from the AIM instructional materials, specifically (a) a cultural component, and (b) more variety of assessment ideas “other than observe and record on a checklist.” In terms of the cultural component, she
described how she had implemented a francophone cultural resource in an ‘AIM way’ with all of her Grade 4 to 8 students, and noted how doing this had helped to keep students motivated to do AIM-related activities:

I did La Fête de la Sainte Catherine. So, there were cartoons to read, and I bought legend story boards. So, I show them the pictures and tell the legend. And I bring AIM into that and gesture the words for the legends…And they liked that, so those things keep them motivated for the other work.

To deal with what she reported to be a lack of variety in assessment offered in the AIM materials, I observed Mary administering dictation and listening tests and non-AIM texts (e.g., an Easter cartoon) that were not included in the AIM resources. These and other non-AIM writing activities that she did with her students (e.g., comic strips, book reports) were meant to supplement the story retelling and the total and partial questions provided in the AIM materials so that she could “know what they can do” and to make sure that “they’re just not reiterating my model.”

**Challenges using AIM (Mary)**

One of the challenges that Mary identified throughout her interviews was the “never-ending battle” of getting her students to speak French in her CF classroom. After changing schools three times in the last five years within the AIM-mandated board, she also thought it was particularly troublesome when students who were supposed to have been in AIM classrooms for years could not cope when they arrived in her AIM class from other schools, which affected her normal pacing through the plays and the vocabulary. She speculated that this might be because teachers in her board were not using the method “correctly”:

I get students and I see that their teachers have not followed the AIM method the way it’s supposed to be followed, because it amazes me the things that my students can’t do or don’t understand…At first a lot of them were also kind of reluctant to do the gestures, even in Grade 4, which made me wonder how much they were doing them in the past…I find I’m moving very slowly with them because pretty much all of them only did one play all last year, and it sounds like the focus was much more on the oral presentation component, rather than on the literacy component. So, I’m noticing that now.

Mary also identified the lack of board-level professional development as a frustrating challenge that she had to deal with, voicing her frustration that no PD had been offered by her board that year:

I’ve not been given any PD by the board and I’m annoyed, AIM or otherwise, none yet this year. It’s all below my level what they’re offering. I think they need to give
you a refresher workshop every couple of years, that would be my opinion, to really look at the retell and writing aspect, and creative writing, because that’s where the better equipped you are and the better you understand how to use AIM, you could really push your kids further. But you need a refresher every couple of years, I think.

Although she said she would have liked to attend the Summer Institute event offered annually by AIM (AIM Language Learning, 2012a), she admitted that she could not afford to pay out of her own pocket. Alternatively, she suggested that “collaboration would probably help, like if you had more teachers in your school or if you did French professional learning communities (PLCs) in your family schools that would be great.” Along these lines, Mary went on to describe an extremely positive experience that she had initiated with another AIM teacher in her board, where the two of them had written a play for Kindergarten level CF students before AIM had started producing materials for that age level in order to prepare them for the Grade 1 level plays.

While she reported that she wanted to keep using AIM indefinitely, one of the main reasons that Mary gave for supplementing the method and materials was to address the challenge of maintaining her interest in AIM, stating that “the material is the same year after year…and I’m starting to find myself feeling bored occasionally.” In the same interview, she contemplated “am I going to be singing the same song for the next ten years?”, and then came back to this issue later when considering how long she could foresee AIM being a part of her CF teaching practice:

I would say that I would always use it, but I’d like to see them create some more supplementary things to go with it because it’s going to get boring as teachers, teaching the same play for years and years over.

**MELISSA**

At the time of the study, Melissa had been teaching for twelve years, with four years of CF experience. In addition to CF, she was also responsible for teaching Gym and Music in French to her primary CF students. At the time of the study, there were just over 400 students in Melissa’s school, and CF was offered from Kindergarten to Grade 4 at which point students could choose to continue in CF until Grade 8, or switch into the French Immersion program offered from Grades 5 to 8.

Once she became a permanent CF teacher after a maternity leave from her current school, she was immediately sent to a board workshop on AIM by her principal because it was
“something she had to do.” Interestingly, Melissa’s principal reported that mandating AIM for CF led her to impose a requirement for continued AIM training, especially for teachers like Melissa who were new to using the method.

Melissa described how she really appreciated the ideas and resources that were shared at these workshops, saying the board-sponsored ones she had been to since “re-inspire [her] to do a better job”. Similar to Mary, Melissa also voiced her disappointment that the board had cut the AIM-related PD down to nothing from two workshops per school year in previous years. She stated that she could not afford to go to the workshops offered by AIM because they were too expensive, and wondered why the board was not offering more AIM-related PD if the method was mandated, which made her reconsider the longevity of board support for AIM:

It seems to be a lot of people’s opinions that they should be having [PD], especially if they’re saying that we’re all using it. You know, are they going to do what school boards seem to do? I think it’s all school boards, get on the bandwagon, ride it for five to ten years, and then suddenly change your mind and say “Oh no, this is much better”. If everybody got a chance to hammer away learning to do AIM and to get good at it before they change their minds, it would be wonderful...they better not suddenly decide that it’s not good and something else is better.

**School context (Melissa)**

Melissa was an itinerant CF teacher. During her interviews, she identified some limitations related to using AIM and traveling from class to class, including (a) infrequent access to audiovisual equipment in the classrooms, (b) limited ability to use the computer program that was being promoted to complement CF programming in the board (i.e., Tell Me More, 2011), and (c) restricted space for teacher-led activities:

With the Grade 4 group, it’s a huge group and we can’t sit together. And that’s been year after year after year...It stinks because we kind of fall apart. Sitting together on the carpet for a good portion of the time really is important, I think.

Melissa was also quite candid about the support she was receiving at her school. She felt she could call on her consultant if she had any questions about AIM or needed resources, and that her principal supported her use of AIM because it was mandated by the board. However, she also described how parents had challenged her use of AIM (especially during the transitions years when students were adjusting to her use of French all of the time), and noted instances where other teachers had made fun of AIM in front of her, knowing that she was using it. She also mentioned that the CF teacher responsible for the older grades (who did not use AIM) and
other French immersion teachers who were accepting students from her junior-level CF classes had voiced their displeasure with the use of AIM because it did not prepare them with explicit knowledge of French grammar. This led Melissa to question whether she should keep using the method:

Should I be doing it [CF] this way? When they shift into the higher grades they don’t get AIM anymore…In the Grade 5-6 classes last year, I know they did their written work. We didn’t do grammar drills, but we did do double verb construction. That’s all. But other teachers are saying that the students act like they don’t know anything. And then I say I know what they did, and they should know how to do this, this and this…I really don’t know if it’s the AIM program or if it’s the influx of kids from other schools or the lack of continuity across teachers. I just don’t know.

**Observed teaching practices (Melissa)**

Even though they were scheduled to last a total of 30 minutes, Melissa’s CF classes lasted an average of 28 minutes because of the delayed start due to traveling between rooms. I was able to observe her using AIM to teach CF with her Kindergarten, Grade 3 and Grade 4 classes; however, during my third visit, a scheduling conflict prohibited me from observing her using AIM during the normal CF timeslot. Instead, I observed Melissa teaching music classes to her Grade 1 and 2 CF students in French. Although she did include some aspects of AIM teaching in those classes (e.g., gestures), they were not the same type of CF classes that I had observed up to that point. For this reason, I decided to exclude observation data from this visit in my analysis of the observation data.

Melissa began each CF class by asking students what the date was that day. Sometimes, she would give stickers to reward students who spoke French with the group or independently. While she also played “Mme dit…” with her CF students, Melissa had invented other games as well – for instance, in one Grade 3 class she showed students hand-drawn pictures (some from the play under study) and asked students to describe what was happening, and during another class she split her Grade 3s into groups to play a French version of Pictionary that she had created. Melissa also sang songs with her Kindergarten and Grade 3 CF classes that were not from the AIM materials.

Table 10 outlines how Mary’s CF classes were predominantly teacher-centred, especially at the Kindergarten level (i.e., 100% of the time teacher-led), and contextualized within the AIM play or non-AIM story (e.g., storybook in Kindergarten) being studied. On average, Melissa’s CF students spent a lot of class time speaking chorally with the teacher (36%), however, this choral
practice was generally more predominant at the Kindergarten level. In her Grade 3 and 4 CF classes, students were observed doing more reading and writing, either during guided writing activities or when doing independent work, which were both centred on completing the total/partial questions from the play they were studying. These students were also the only ones who were exposed to text, mostly at the sentence-level (47% of time). In terms of the independent work, Melissa was observed organizing her Grade 3s (16% of the time) and 4s (32% of the time) so that they were doing different independent tasks, with some at their desks doing written work, and others practicing reciting the play orally to her. She said she did this so she could get an idea of what students could do on their own as opposed to what they did during whole class activities, because she believed that “you’re supposed to assess students according to what they can do independently”.

Melissa explained how she used AIM differently across the CF levels she was teaching. For example, she said that she tended to introduce the plays to her older students and use the gestures more with her younger students. This tendency was supported by the observation data. She was observed using the plays from the AIM materials with her Grade 3 and 4 CF students over half of the time observed, but never with her Kindergarten class. As well, in terms of her use of AIM gestures, she gestured less with her older students than she did with her Kindergarteners. Interestingly, target language use by Melissa also varied during the study – she used French more exclusively with her Grade 3 (81%) and 4 (86%) CF classes as opposed to her Kindergarten class (53%). Her students, on the other hand, were not observed using as much French-only as Melissa.

In her interviews, Melissa clarified why she had decided to do some things differently than described in the AIM materials, attributing the majority of her decisions in this regard to maintaining student motivation. For instance, she avoided following the AIM teacher’s word for word, saying that “the right thing for me, and I'm sure, for many teachers, is to stick to the gestures and maximize the speaking of French in the class, and to move away from the page by page grind”. She also described what she called a “blooming revelation” she had after noticing that her Grade 3 students were getting bored with repeating and memorizing the play. She decided to offer them different options for demonstrating their knowledge (i.e., some recited it from memory, while others read it aloud and presented it with puppets). In the end, her students reacted positively to her change, which made her feel justified in her intuition to deviate from the
Table 10
COLT Observation Data (Melissa) – Percentage of Total Observed Time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ALL Grades (6)</th>
<th>Kindergarten (1)</th>
<th>Grade 3 (3)</th>
<th>Grade 4 (2)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant Organization</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>T – S/C</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T – S/C + Choral</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
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<td>Choral</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group (same task)</td>
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<td>16</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group (different task)</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual (same task)</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual (different task)</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
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<td>Teacher-Text-Student</td>
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<td>32</td>
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<td><strong>Student Modality</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Speaking + Listening</td>
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<td>24</td>
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<td>Reading + Writing</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking + Listening + Gesture</td>
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<td>23</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading + Speaking + Listening</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td><strong>Materials (type and source)</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>59</td>
<td>72</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student-made</td>
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<td><strong>Teacher Support</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guided</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>Independent</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>32</td>
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<td>Gesture (all)</td>
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<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gesture (specific)</td>
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<td>53</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Language Use</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher: L2 only</td>
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<td>86</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher: L2-dominant</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students: L2 only</td>
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<td>39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students: L2-dominant</td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>61</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Context</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Text / play</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ lives</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I asked myself, maybe they don’t have to memorize the play? Why am I forcing these poor kids to memorize it, just because it’s in the guide book?...We’re not going to spend weeks and weeks and weeks memorizing it....I’m glad that I’ve come to that in a way. I don’t know, maybe other teachers have come to that ages ago. I think it’s brutal to do that. I kind of wish that I’d had a little hint in that direction in the beginning because I have put the kids through too much, getting them to memorizing the plays. I wasn’t thinking myself. I wasn’t thinking.

While Melissa hypothesized that the founder of AIM would most likely be “ticked” if she were to see how she was using the method like this, she assumed that her board supported such decisions to use AIM in this way, saying that “I think it’s a good thing that my board has said that we can use AIM to whatever degree we want”. She also cited these practices of “making AIM [her] own” as being integral to her prolonged use of the method for CF teaching.

Challenges using AIM (Melissa)

During her interviews, Melissa said many positive things about AIM, while also acknowledging challenges related to its implementation. She sang AIM’s praises for getting students to speak more French in CF; however, she identified the struggle of getting her own students to speak French, and reducing the amount of time she spent speaking herself, as being her biggest challenge as an AIM teacher.

Melissa also talked about how she found it tough to implement AIM the right way, confessing that “it’s difficult to do [AIM] properly, to really do it properly. But when you do it well, and some days I do feel I’m doing it well, not that often, it’s very effective”. She reported that she missed creating units for her CF students, and found it difficult to “use somebody else’s stuff and read instructions on how it should be done”. Mostly, she related her perceived improper use of AIM to her belief that the method was not a perfect fit with her personality. According to Melissa, teachers with more energy were the ones who could implement AIM properly:

I think to make it work...you have to have a certain personality. And, I sometimes think I don’t have that personality, so sometimes it’s a bit of a struggle to be shiny and enthusiastic every day about the play, or about the new vocabulary, and you have to be in order to get them enthusiastic. I’m not like that. I just can’t be up like that all the time...Using AIM is work for me, not in terms of material, the material is all there. But more in terms of gearing up to have the enthusiasm and energy.

MIRANDA

Of the four teachers in the AIM-mandated board, Miranda had the least amount of
experience teaching CF (i.e., five months); however, she had taught for three years in the early French Immersion context. Miranda reported that she was already familiar with AIM when she transitioned to teach CF at the Kindergarten to Grade 5 grades, saying that CF and French Immersion teachers had been sent together to AIM workshops a few years ago when the method had first been mandated by the board. After this session, she recalled how she did not have access to a teacher manual, but had still tried integrating some of the AIM gestures into her French Immersion teaching.

Since becoming a CF teacher at her current school (where CF was the only FSL program offered, and whose population at the time of the study was almost 200 students), Miranda stated that she had attended other AIM workshops sponsored by the board that were “the best workshops ever because you’re interacting, you’re doing [AIM], you’re hands-on”. Like the other AIM-mandated teachers described so far in this chapter, Miranda also noted the absence of AIM PD opportunities offered by the board that year, and mentioned that while she would like to attend PD opportunities offered by AIM, she could not because they were always held too far away and were generally too expensive. Alternatively, she talked about how great it would be if the board offered in-service PLC opportunities for groups of CF teachers to practice the gestures, observe each other using the method, or just have conversations about their teaching. Even though she might not even be teaching CF next year because of surplussing in the board, Miranda anticipated that she would continue to use AIM wherever she was placed (i.e., in CF or French Immersion).

School context (Miranda)

Similar to Melissa, Miranda did not have her own classroom and was also required her to teach additional Music and Art classes in French to her Kindergarten to Grade 5 CF students. In her first interview, Miranda described how this initiative was aimed at helping to better address the Arts curriculum in different contexts and “lighten the load” of homeroom teachers who were typically responsible for integrating that curriculum. Miranda was enthusiastic about teaching these classes in French, and maintained that AIM helped to make her CF classes more arts-based anyway “because AIM has that component of drama in it, and there’s the dancing in it, so it integrated really well”.

Miranda reported receiving a great deal of support from her FSL consultant and other teachers in her school. For instance, she noted how her FSL consultant was approachable
whenever she had a question or needed resources. She also recounted how other teachers started speaking French as soon as she arrived to teach their students, and how many of her colleagues made efforts to learn some of the AIM gestures. Miranda described how she would often work to coordinate her CF teaching with whatever theme her students were studying in their homeroom class, regardless of whether it corresponded to the theme of the AIM play under study or not (e.g., St. Patrick’s Day, Olympics, etc.).

Miranda spoke quite positively about the efforts of her principal to support her by providing resources that she needed and coming to visit her CF class whenever possible. She talked about how her principal included French in the school culture by insisting that students presented the AIM plays during the school assemblies. At the school level, Miranda certainly felt that her principal supported AIM:

She’s very on board with AIM, she thinks it’s effective. From day one, she felt results were being achieved.

Interestingly, Miranda’s principal corroborated her support for AIM in her interview, but also went on to describe how she perceived her role in the implementation of AIM as being an advocate for consistent monitoring and reflection about the impact that AIM has on one’s students, and how adjustments are welcomed if necessary:

My expectation with teachers right now is to see what they’re doing and re-evaluate and make sure that they’re not wasting the children’s time. And in French it would be the same, like what you’re doing now, are they competent? Are they able to do it? What’s your next step? How are you going to take them further down this journey? And will you continue using AIM or will you adapt and change it a little bit, or bring something else in, lessen it, add to it? (Miranda’s Principal)

**Observed teaching practices (Miranda)**

Miranda’s CF classes lasted an average of 33 minutes. She traveled from class to class with a cart containing her resources, included a laminated calendar and some AIM instructional materials (e.g., vocabulary posters, teachers manual etc.). Miranda’s classes would normally begin with her asking the students what the date was or how they were doing that day. She was observed singing one of the AIM raps related to using French during the CF class, but also sang a lot of other songs (e.g., song for the days of the week, counting) and initiated many games that were not AIM-related (e.g., statue game, naming the color of objects in the room, Smart Board/online games, etc.). She played the “Mme dit…” game with most of her students, and
during one class she taught them a game where they had to translate in English what she was gesturing.

As Table 11 shows, the degree to which Miranda’s classes were teacher-led decreased slightly as she taught CF to older grades. While the content was almost always controlled by Miranda, the one Grade 4/5 class that I observed was not as teacher-centred as the others. These students spent the class completing an independent project based on a unit from a non-AIM textbook (i.e., Acti-Vie), where they were creating and describing their dream house using pictures they were cutting out from magazines (see high percentages of “writing” and “other” in my observation data for this grade). Miranda did not use any of the AIM resources with her Grade 4/5s or 3s over the course of the study period, using teacher- or student-made materials instead. Overall, she used visual aids over half of the total time observed (58%), and most of the text she used was minimal in nature (i.e., single words). She also reported incorporating some cultural materials about the French-Canadian festival “Carnaval” in her CF classes.

In her Kindergarten to Grade 3 CF classes, students spent the majority of time listening, speaking chorally with the teacher (speaking and listening) or reading what the teacher was showing them during whole class activities (reading and listening). I noted no instances when students in these grades were writing, and the total/partial questions related to the plays were all done orally with the teacher. Activities in these CF classes were also contextualized in the AIM plays they were studying, but not the majority of the time observed – observations showed they were most often focused on the learning of vocabulary in isolation (i.e., numbers, colours, phonics) or classroom management.

Miranda and her students were observed speaking more of a mix of French and English as opposed to exclusively using French during the time observed. Miranda’s mixing included frequent translation and sandwiching for instructions she was giving, discipline, or vocabulary she noticed her students were having trouble understanding. When she did speak French, she paired her speech with gestures more often with her younger students, although gesturing specific words seemed to be something she did in almost all of the classes observed.

Although Miranda did not integrate each aspect of the teacher support categories represented in the scheme, she reported in her interviews how her ultimate goal was to be able to decrease the amount of teacher support she needed to provide as her students developed their
Table 11

**COLT Observation Data (Miranda) – Percentage of Total Observed Time.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Organization</th>
<th>ALL Grades (8)</th>
<th>Kindergarten (1)</th>
<th>Grade 1 (2)</th>
<th>Grade 2 (3)</th>
<th>Grade 3 (1)</th>
<th>Grade 4/5 (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T – S/C</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T – S/C + Choral</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choral</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group (same task)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual (same task)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Content Control**

| Teacher-Text             | 93             | 100              | 100         | 82          | 100         | 100           |
| Teacher-Text-Student     | 7              | 0                | 0           | 18          | 0           | 0             |

**Student Modality**

| Listening                | 35             | 6                | 68          | 35          | 10          | 19            |
| Speaking + Listening     | 24             | 41               | 18          | 31          | 19          | 0             |
| Reading + Listening      | 17             | 38               | 0           | 15          | 52          | 0             |
| Other (drawing, etc.)    | 16             | 0                | 0           | 0           | 0           | 81            |

**Materials (type and source)**

| Minimal                  | 26             | 44               | 8           | 19          | 81          | 5             |
| Sentence                 | 5              | 0                | 0           | 14          | 0           | 0             |
| Extended                 | 2              | 18               | 0           | 0           | 0           | 0             |
| Audio                    | 6              | 0                | 9           | 10          | 0           | 0             |
| Visual                   | 58             | 68               | 46          | 38          | 90          | 100           |
| L2-NNS Textbook          | 26             | 18               | 21          | 23          | 0           | 81            |
| AIM Resource             | 16             | 18               | 21          | 23          | 0           | 0             |
| L2-NNS Teacher-made      | 26             | 12               | 25          | 19          | 81          | 5             |
| Student-made             | 15             | 0                | 0           | 0           | 0           | 85            |

**Teacher Support**

| Modeled                  | 9              | 0                | 0           | 2           | 52          | 14            |
| Shared                   | 10             | 18               | 12          | 9           | 10          | 5             |
| Independent              | 10             | 0                | 0           | 0           | 0           | 81            |
| Gesture (all)            | 12             | 18               | 10          | 21          | 6           | 0             |
| Gesture (specific)       | 44             | 56               | 49          | 41          | 74          | 5             |

**Language Use**

| Teacher: L2 only         | 55             | 100              | 40          | 69          | 48          | 5             |
| Teacher: L2-dominant     | 45             | 0                | 60          | 31          | 52          | 95            |
| Students: L2 only        | 37             | 5                | 29          | 46          | 40          | 44            |
| Students: L2-dominant    | 61             | 95               | 71          | 55          | 60          | 56            |

**Context**

| Text / play              | 16             | 0                | 0           | 24          | 21          | 18            |
| Students’ lives          | 11             | 5                | 10          | 10          | 14          | 21            |
| Other                    | 72             | 95               | 90          | 66          | 66          | 62            |
French skills. Interestingly, she seemed to blend the idea of decreasing teaching support with releasing AIM when talking about her role in its implementation during her last two interviews:

My role at the moment is just to release AIM and not use it as much. *(Interview #3)*

Now I’m doing less of AIM and doing more conversation. Like I can talk to them and they get it because it’s repetitive at this point. So I’m kind of using that scaffolding where I’m slowly pulling AIM away if anything, instead of building it up. *(Interview #4)*

While she described how much she liked using the gestures to develop CF students’ vocabulary and oral skills, and as a drama component of her arts teaching, she admitted that she also saw the method as being more of a “guideline” and “[did] not follow the teacher’s manual as my teaching bible so to speak”. Instead, she described how she would frequently “dip into” her old French immersion resources to incorporate thematic units and explicit phonics teaching into her CF practice. For instance, she said introducing thematic units similar to those she had taught in her French Immersion classes enhanced her CF classes because “students can do things that are real, as opposed to stories, to have more meaning in it”. During my observation of her Grade 3 CF class, I watched Miranda implement a phonics activity where she paired AIM gestures with typical vowel sounds to help students recall the sound that those letters made. For instance, the nasal vowel < ã > (e.g., quand, temps, gens, etc.) was paired with the AIM gesture for “dans”, and when students were shown words with different letter combinations representing this sound, Miranda would use that gesture to help them to pronounce and read it correctly. After reviewing each of the sounds and their corresponding gesture, she ended the Grade 3 class with a game where students had to guess the words she was spelling when pointing to consonants written on the board and using the “sound gestures” I just described. While I only observed this activity once over the course of the study period, Miranda acknowledged that most of her AIM teaching was done like this, with her “immersion hat” on, particularly with the younger students:

I tend to go to what they’re expected to do in immersion in K-3 and I find I will look at that as well just for certain vocabulary, like numbers and colors, that sort of thing. I find that works with my kids here and it’s amazing. Sometimes it’s almost like they’re in immersion, but not. So I do both.

Although AIM was mandated for CF teaching in her board, Miranda did not seem to understand that to mean that there was a specific way to use it, as demonstrated by her approach to choosing aspects of AIM that work for her CF teaching, and a remark she made in this respect during her second interview:
So I mean AIM is mandated, but let’s face it. I’ve never heard that you have to do this or that, ever. And I do know some core teachers that don’t use it. So I think you get in your own routine.

When asked about the roles of her principal and FSL consultant in a subsequent interview, she also reported that she did not feel like anyone was monitoring how she was using the method, or whether she was using it at all:

I don’t feel someone watching me, I don’t feel that I have to justify my use of AIM. Obviously, my boss, my principal, is in the school environment. And she’s aware of how I’m employing this program. She obviously trusts my use of it because I pick and choose. But do I feel like someone would know if I’m not using it? No.

Challenges using AIM (Miranda)

Based on the observation data related to Miranda’s mixed use of French and English, it is not surprising that she cited maintaining the French-only rule as being a challenge for her as an AIM teacher, and also talked about the utility of using students’ L1 (often English) in the CF classroom:

Speaking French all of the time. I think this is where I have to really work on it…but sometimes, if you just explain it in their mother tongue, then they learn how it is English and why it is how it is in French. They need to know why.

Miranda also reported feeling overwhelmed by the number of new students arriving in her school throughout the year who had never studied French or who had been in other AIM classrooms in the board. She stated that it was often easier for new students who were younger to adapt to her AIM teaching, but that she was still unsure what they knew or how the other AIM teachers had been using the method:

In the Grade 1 class, we have two new kids this week. So they have no idea. I’m going to be interested to see how well they adapt. Now, they’re Grade 1 so it’ll be a lot easier. But other ones, like ones from other schools, I never know to what extent their teachers were using AIM beforehand, or how their teachers were using it…it is hard to assess, what does she really know?

Miranda repeatedly talked about the challenge of using the method with her older junior-level students, contrasting how her younger students were “a lot more open to AIM” versus her older students who (a) did not like to speak in French, (b) did not like the plays that were geared toward their age group because they were too hard, and (c) thought any gestures she introduced were “bébé” [baby]. Miranda speculated that the grade when students start learning French with
AIM makes a difference, adding that they were less likely to have a foundation of L2 skills to draw from because they started with AIM later:

My junior kids, you know, it’s hard to say when they started and I find if they don’t start right away with AIM in Kindergarten, then you notice it. I just think it’s very important for them to start right away with AIM because it truly does make a difference. It’s just very helpful.

At the same time, Miranda cautioned that teaching students who have been learning CF in AIM classrooms for many years is also be challenging because “there’s been no change”.

MONICA

Of all of the participating teachers from the AIM-mandated board, Monica had the most CF (12 years) and AIM (6 years) teaching experience. She had been using AIM before it was mandatory, and was actually part of the piloting process that preceded the mandate. During the piloting, Monica recalled how AIM came at a good time in her CF teaching career because she “needed to introduce something new into [her] teaching practice”. She talked about having to work hard to learn all of the gestures and about receiving support from other AIM teachers who were also new to the method at the time. After watching her colleagues trying to integrate AIM into their existing CF teaching practice for the past nine years, she deduced that “you either love it or you don’t”.

At the time of the study, Monica had attended all of the AIM-related professional development opportunities offered by the board (i.e., what she termed “Levels 1, 2 and 3”), as she claimed there had been a substantial amount of in-service support for CF teachers when AIM was first mandated. She reported that the advanced sessions in particular were the most motivating for her because going to the same introductory AIM workshops was no longer useful. Monica had also been on a committee with elementary and secondary FSL teachers who met regularly to discuss programming and report back to the board, but there was no longer funding for this, which disappointed her:

I really miss the committee because it was a really nice way to network with your other French teachers and really to see, OK, what are the concerns? And, you’re really not on your own.

Both Monica and her principal identified the recent lack of local training as a risk factor for the sustainability of AIM through the elementary CF grades (i.e., K to 8). Without these types of continued PD opportunities that challenged her, Monica moved to “search out ways to extend
the activities and keep the kids engaged so it’s not the same extension activity every year, and it’s not the same year after year for them”.

**School context (Monica)**

At the time of this study, Monica had been working at her school for nine years and did not have her own classroom for teaching CF. At the time of the study, the population of Monica’s school was just over 500 students and CF was the only FSL program offered. Similar to other participating AIM teachers in this board, she was also responsible for implementing an arts-based curriculum in her CF class, saying that she used AIM and the plays to “segue into other arts-based things” like drama, creative writing and visual arts projects.

Monica felt quite positive about the general AIM-related support she had received from her school, especially during the piloting process when she and her principal were fielding questions from parents, students and colleagues about the change in CF teaching, and when she needed AIM resources and sufficient training. She also highlighted how a guided reading initiative that had been started at her school was resulting in each classroom being better set up for the types of whole class activities that are supposed to happen often in AIM classes. While Monica admitted that it took some CF colleagues a while to come around to AIM, mostly because “it was such a departure from the way French was taught before”, she also remarked on how much she valued conferring and collaborating with AIM teachers outside of her school, particularly during the transition stages after the mandate because it made her “feel like we were all learning AIM together at the same time”. With a recent lack of funding from her board for this type of organized face-to-face collaboration, Monica pursued getting together with a colleague on her own time, saying that email or online opportunities (e.g., AIM website) were no substitute for the real thing:

We’ve all said we noticed a difference this year because you’re not having that opportunity to collaborate. You are isolated in a certain respect anyway as a French teacher, and so losing that ability to get together and have those discussions…sometimes you really need to say I’m at the end of my rope, or you know, I’m getting tired of the play. Or, you need to ask “What can we do to add a little bit of zest to things to get things going again”, or “Our kids aren’t quite as motivated; what are you doing to reel them back in?”. Those things don’t translate well in an email or online. It’s good for resources and what not, but just the dialogue is missing.

**Observed teaching practices (Monica)**

Monica’s CF classes (i.e., Grades 2, 4 and 8 were observed) lasted an average of 36
minutes. She began her classes by singing songs or asking students to say the date, to describe the weather, or to talk about how they were feeling that day. She would commonly practice different tenses with the students during these entry routines, asking what the date or weather was yesterday, today and what they predicted it would be next day. Monica admitted that she did not like most of the newer AIM raps or songs because they were hard to sing and “catered less to everybody’s general interest”. She did play games from the AIM materials (e.g., choral counting games, “Mme dit…”), and also created different game formats to initiate competitions based around correctly answering questions about the play being studied. Monica did not use reward systems in any of the CF classes observed.

According to Table 12, Monica’s students were organized as a class or in groups for the majority of the Grade 2 and 4 CF classes observed, whereas her Grade 8 class was predominantly teacher-centred. Choral work was only observed during her Grade 2 and 4 CF classes. Like Melissa, Monica reported that she sometimes organized her students in groups or took individual students aside to assess what they could do on their own.

On average, Monica’s CF students spent most of the observed time listening (31%); however, closer examination revealed that different modalities were used at each grade level. For instance, while Monica’s Grade 2 CF students spent most of the time listening (28%), they also spoke chorally with her (speaking and listening = 20%) or completed work at their desks (reading and writing = 18%). The Grade 8 class spent over half of the class listening (63%), but Monica also had them silently read a message that she had written on the board at the beginning of class (reading and listening = 18%), which welcomed me into the class and asking what the date was yesterday, today and tomorrow. In contrast, Monica’s Grade 4 CF class spent the majority of the time reading, either aloud as a class (reading, speaking and listening = 35%) or when reading their own work during a story retell activity that was completed in groups (reading and speaking = 21%). Monica’s version of this particular activity was different from Mary’s (the only other occasion when I observed this activity in action during this study) in that it was briefly modeled by Monica and then completed by students in groups, whereas Mary did it as a shared writing activity with her 4/5 split class.

Compared to the other participating AIM-mandated teachers, Monica contextualized the most amount of observed CF teaching time in the AIM play under study (63%). She was observed initiating the following play-based activities: (a) recitation of the play under study
Table 12 - COLT Observation Data (Monica) – Percentage of Total Observed Time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Organization</th>
<th>ALL Grades (7)</th>
<th>Grade 2 (3)</th>
<th>Grade 4 (3)</th>
<th>Grade 8 (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T – S/C</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T – S/C + Choral</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choral</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S - S/C</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group (same task)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual (different task)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Content Control

| Teacher-Text              | 79             | 80          | 72          | 100         |
| Teacher-Text-Student      | 18             | 13          | 28          | 0           |
| Student                  | 3              | 7           | 0           | 0           |

Student Modality

| Listening                 | 31             | 28          | 23          | 63          |
| Reading + Speaking + Listening | 20       | 12          | 35          | 0           |
| Reading + Speaking        | 13             | 9           | 21          | 0           |
| Speaking + Listening      | 12             | 20          | 7           | 0           |
| Reading + Writing         | 12             | 18          | 6           | 13          |
| Reading + Listening       | 3              | 0           | 0           | 18          |

Materials (type and source)

| Minimal                  | 3              | 3           | 3           | 0           |
| Sentence                | 37             | 30          | 25          | 95          |
| Extended                | 34             | 25          | 56          | 0           |
| Audio                  | 7              | 13          | 3           | 0           |
| Visual                | 30             | 49          | 22          | 0           |
| L2-NNS Textbook        | 65             | 44          | 81          | 78          |
| AIM Resource            | 65             | 44          | 81          | 78          |
| L2-NNS Teacher-made    | 16             | 9           | 3           | 75          |
| Student-made           | 12             | 9           | 18          | 0           |

Teacher Support

| Modeled              | 4              | 4           | 5           | 0           |
| Shared               | 11             | 10          | 14          | 8           |
| Guided               | 7              | 2           | 15          | 0           |
| Independent          | 29             | 27          | 46          | 13          |
| Gesture (all)        | 20             | 22          | 25          | 0           |
| Gesture (specific)   | 73             | 63          | 74          | 100         |

Language Use

| Teacher: L2 only      | 56             | 63          | 63          | 23          |
| Teacher: L2-dominant  | 43             | 37          | 37          | 77          |
| Students: L2 only     | 64             | 79          | 63          | 23          |
| Students: L2-dominant | 36             | 21          | 37          | 77          |

Context

| Text / play           | 63             | 46          | 74          | 77          |
| Students’ lives       | 12             | 14          | 6           | 23          |
| Other                | 26             | 40          | 20          | 0           |
chorally (with and without the text) and individually (roles given to individual students), (b) play presentation practice in groups, and (c) completion of questions related to the play orally and in writing. This trend was also supported by data related to the type and source of text material that Monica was observed using, which was mostly sentence- or extended-level text from the AIM resources. She also used a lot of visual materials in her lower level CF classes, particularly with her Grade 2 students who often participated in play-related activities that were delivered using a Smartboard that was in that classroom (e.g., animation accompanying play-related song lyrics; displaying the script of the play electronically). During this story retell activity, Monica’s Grade 4 CF students were also observed working with the text they were creating (student-made materials = 18%).

Monica only gestured specific words with her Grade 8 students, as opposed to gesturing all of some of her speech with her younger AIM learners. Although this differentiated gesture use with older students is supported by AIM, Monica attributed it to resistance she had experienced with her intermediate students:

The Grade 8s don’t do AIM in the same respect and I’m sure you’ve noticed that I just use the gestures to kind of prompt them through because there’s no way they’re going to speak chorally or gesture.

In terms of language use, Monica was observed enacting the French-only rule more consistently in her Grade 2 (63%) and Grade 4 (60%) CF classes. Monica never used English exclusively during the study period, but she was observed translating instructions and vocabulary (i.e., sandwiching) in all of her classes, and she also used English more for discipline and to explain grammar concepts during the Grade 8 class specifically. In fact, Monica and her Grade 8 students mixed their use of French and English the most during the observation period (77%), which skewed her overall average related to exclusive use of French.

Even though Monica was observed contextualizing much of her CF teaching in the AIM play under study, she also acknowledged that “you can only drag out the play for so long”. Consequently, she said that she “uses the play as the jumping off point” for other themes and non-AIM activities. For example, she described how she liked to introduced themes that connected to what students were learning in other classes (e.g., seasons, Olympics) and to what they were doing outside of the classroom (e.g., studying St. Boniface because her intermediate students were going there for a music competition). After reading a non-AIM book about the
winter season with her Grade 2 class, Monica was also observed initiating the creation of a class book where each student was responsible for drafting their own page and illustration (which was the “arts” component of the activity). She also supplemented the implicit learning of grammar through the play, either through different written activities (e.g., describing a picture of an Olympic athlete using different verbs) or explicit grammar teaching in class:

I sometimes stop AIM with the older kids and teach them the grammar. I know that the grammar is embedded in AIM, but sometimes they need it just done in isolation and you can use the play to support what you just taught them.

Although she said that she would often incorporate AIM vocabulary and use gestures when teaching these activities, Monica maintained that her central objectives in stepping away from AIM in this way were (a) so students could “see French as more than just the four walls here”; and (b) so they could take breaks from the scripted nature of studying the AIM play, saying:

It helps keep their interest level up if you can incorporate something else that’s going on because play, day after day after day, gets monotonous.

Monica felt that she was only able to do AIM differently and supplement in this way because of her extended experience using the method. In fact, her comfort with the scope and sequence of the AIM activities was her main reason for sticking with AIM up to now and for the foreseeable future:

I would hope that [the board] continues to use AIM for quite some time. I mean, I’ve just learned how to get it going. I mean it’s been eight years since I’ve been doing AIM and you just now feel like you could start a new play but you’re not feeling like you’re behind the eight ball when you start. You’re like “I just have to learn the play, and I know how the activities are going to unroll”.

Nonetheless, she seemed uncertain about whether her implementation represented the correct way of using AIM:

I guess I’ve been doing it wrong enough too. I know the natural progression of the activities, so I follow that. But then you’ll say “I guess I did kind of skip all of this” and you’ll jump ahead, or you’ll step away from the play to do a theme for a few weeks and then have to pick it up again from there.

**Challenges using AIM (Monica)**

Monica singled out her intermediate students as being the most challenging to keep interested in AIM, saying that “getting older kids to buy into AIM and stay engaged is always
hard”, especially when they are more and more reluctant to participate in class. She noted that it was particularly difficult when students were first introduced to AIM during the piloting stage in her school, and went on to describe how supplementing the play with different writing activities seemed to keep these students motivated:

My biggest resistance to it at the beginning was when they said we were going to start it from 1 to 8. I was the one here teaching the intermediates and I found it such a struggle because they just were not interested. They just rolled their eyes. I found it harder to manage them, trying to keep them going with the AIM program in the strict way that it was laid out…so we’ve done the activities to go with the play, and now they’re going to do postcards, they’re going to create travel journals, they’re going to do a scrap book page on the trips they’ve taken. So just trying to make them see that it’s beyond, and trying to get more of their own personal experiences into it… it’s also easier to get them to write because it’s highly structured.

Monica attributed the resistance she had experienced to the age of the students, and not so much the limitations of AIM:

The greatest challenge is that, as they get older, those kids may be more self-conscious too, and they don’t want to…being part of the group is one thing, but they get more self-conscious about making mistakes and being cool.

Another major challenge that Monica experienced while implementing AIM was finding different ways to assess and evaluate her students. Like Mary, Monica felt the need to create assessment materials to supplement the AIM resources:

There’s really not a lot in the AIM program that I would say is something you could give to them and say “I’m going to evaluate”. So I find that you’re looking for ways to incorporate and to develop assessment activities.

Monica talked about developing culminating activities based on the AIM play or supplementary themes as assessment tools; however, setting aside time for individual evaluations was often difficult for her to implement at levels when AIM teaching was predominantly whole-class oriented:

I find that until you get to that culminating activity, it’s so guided that you’re lacking in almost an authentic individual evaluation until you get to that activity that you decide to do at the end where they can put all of their knowledge together. So, I would say it’s a lot of being creative...Primary-wise, because it is oral, it’s a little bit easier to evaluate, but still because there’s so much going on chorally, the challenge is getting that individual time to pull them aside and to say show me what you know.
Summary and Discussion

In this chapter, I presented observation and interview data related to each of the four teachers from the board where AIM had been mandated for CF instruction. In order to better understand how AIM is being used in the “AIM-mandated case”, I will now summarize the commonalities and differences between each AIM-mandated teacher’s observed implementation of the method, suggest reasons for the choices they made, and discuss the impact that mandating AIM had on these CF teachers’ practices and perspectives. I interpret the data in relation to existing research throughout, and I conclude by proposing a consolidated synopsis of the AIM-mandated case for the subsequent cross-case comparison in Chapter 8.

Commonalities in AIM implementation

All four of the AIM-mandated teachers began their CF classes with a similar routine that included a rap/song promoting the French-only rule and a small-talk question and answer session (i.e., asking the date, weather, how the students were doing, etc.). Every teacher except Monica was observed using the AIM reward system for reinforcing the French-only rule (i.e., the ticket system). Mary used this system the most consistently, and incorporated different tokens instead of the tickets provided in the AIM materials (i.e., clothespins). Miranda and Melissa reported that maintaining this reward system was a challenging aspect of using AIM, which explains why they did not use the system as consistently as Mary during the observation period.

Data from all four teachers showed that their AIM classes were predominantly teacher-centred, but also multi-modal in nature. Students were observed to be listening, speaking chorally with the teacher, working independently or engaging in shared or guided reading and writing activities. Choral language use was also more predominant in classes with the youngest CF learners (mostly primary), and was virtually absent from intermediate CF classes. In terms of student organization, many of the AIM-mandated teachers acknowledged that the teacher-centred nature of their AIM classroom often limited their ability to gauge what students could do on their own, which led them to purposely organize their class a specific way (i.e., individuals doing different tasks) or create assessment activities that filled the void (e.g., tests, culminating projects). Those teachers who used AIM at the Grade 8 level were also observed to be leading the whole class in activities more often than they did during their junior- and/or primary-level AIM classes.

None of the AIM-mandated teachers were observed exclusively using English during the
study; however, some used French more exclusively than others. Teachers used English for
discipline and to translate instructions and individual vocabulary words. Mary and Melissa used
French more exclusively than Miranda and Monica; however, Miranda and Monica’s averages
were brought down by their increased use of English during their older level CF classes (Grade
4/5 and 8 respectively). Gesture use across all teachers also decreased as the age of the CF
students increased.

While they all expressed confidence in how AIM helped their students to learn French,
findings showed that all four of the AIM-mandated teachers were supplementing their AIM
practice with “non-AIM” activities and materials, and offered a variety of reasons for doing so.
Three of the AIM-mandated teachers elaborated on this during their interviews, saying that they
omitted activities, “stepped away from AIM” or supplemented activities in order to maintain
their students’ motivation to study the same play over a long period of time, or to keep
themselves motivated to repeatedly teach the same play in the same way. Melissa and Miranda
were observed implementing practices and materials they had employed before AIM was
mandated, and reported feeling justified in doing so because those activities and materials had
worked for them in the past. Monica and Mary felt that the AIM resources were lacking in
assessment and cultural materials, leading them to create their own tests and culminating
activities, and to incorporate activities from other Francophone cultural resource packages into
their AIM classrooms. Data related to these two teachers in particular – who had the most AIM
experience out of all of the AIM-mandated teachers – also showed that they had stepped away
from studying the play to include thematic studies (e.g., Monica introducing a unit on the
Olympics in the middle of a play study) or reinforce basic literacy principles (e.g., Mary
introducing a phonics activities in a non-AIM-like manner). During their interviews, Mary and
Monica alluded to the sense of scope they had acquired over their years of using AIM. They also
felt comfortable stepping away because they knew where their AIM students needed to be at the
end of that particular year or AIM unit. Interestingly, while all AIM-mandated teachers
supplemented the method with different materials and activities, observation and interview data
showed that they often did so in an AIM-like manner (e.g., using AIM gestures, connecting to
the play, implementing individual-partner-group work etc.).

Several links can be made between these findings and other studies, including those
where FSL teaching and/or AIM teaching was observed in action. The teacher-centred modal
patterns of AIM classroom life seen in this study are similar to those observed in other AIM inquiries (Arnott, 2005; Carr, 2001). After observing CF teaching at the Grade 5 and 8 levels, Calman and Daniel (1998) also determined that (a) teachers often tried working with small groups and/or individuals in order to make their CF class less teacher-centred, (b) Grade 8 CF classes were more likely to see whole-class groupings, and (c) teachers used less French with their Grade 8s compared to their Grade 5s. Others have also maintained that it is easier to use the L2 with younger students as compared to older learners (Macaro, 1997), which corresponds to Miranda and Monica’s data related to target language use with their oldest CF students. The observed decrease in gesture use with older AIM students can also be explained by data related to more choral language use with younger AIM students, as AIM teachers are strongly encouraged to gesture and speak at the same time during such activities to encourage student repetition of what they are saying (Maxwell, 2006, 2008).

These points of correspondence suggest that AIM classes in the Mandated board are not much different from CF classes depicted in existing studies when it comes to student organization and what these classes look like at the intermediate levels. Some routines and central tenets of AIM (e.g., gesture use, target language use, routines, rewarding students’ French production, etc.) also appear to be common aspects of AIM-mandated teachers’ practices. While each of the AIM-mandated teachers supplemented and omitted aspects of AIM to suit their CF teaching practice, they did so in a variety of different ways. The fact that their practices in this respect were not identical suggests that they were implementing the method to suit their particular context, and the needs of their students, as other researchers have insisted that teachers normally do when implementing instructional methods for second language teaching (e.g., Block 2001; Larsen-Freeman, 1996, 2000b; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Tudor, 2001). As well, throughout their interviews, each of the AIM-mandated teachers simultaneously referred to AIM as a “program”, “approach” and “method”. This varied conceptualization of AIM suggests that teachers may have been engaging and/or disengaging in their own way with AIM along each of its approach, design and procedure levels (Richards & Rodgers, 1985, 1986). Some other noteworthy differences emerged from the data related to the AIM-mandated teachers’ implementation of the method, which I now introduce in more detail.

**Differences in AIM implementation**

When analyzing the AIM plays, activities and strategies introduced by each of the AIM-
mandated teachers, it appears that they were following the general ordering laid out in the AIM materials (e.g., introducing plays that were appropriate for students’ level, progressing through the plays from oral- to text-based, maintaining and/or dropping the gestures at the right time, etc.). However, it is interesting to note that only two of the teachers were observed introducing story retelling – an extension activity that typically follows the intensive study of a play – albeit in different ways (i.e., Mary initiated story retell with her Grade 4/5 class using a shared writing activity; Monica did so by dividing the plot of the play and getting her Grade 4 students to rewrite their part in groups). Alternatively, these activities were not observed in Melissa and Miranda’s AIM classes at the same level (i.e., Grade 4/5). Over the course of the observation period, these two teachers concentrated more on group play presentations and completing total and/or partial questions about the play under study in their Grade 4 and 4/5 CF classes.

In an effort to explain this difference, I delved further into the observation data and found that Mary (51%) and Monica (61%) contextualized their AIM classes in the play under study and used extended-level text (i.e., the play) more often than Miranda and Melissa. In addition, Mary and Monica had more experience using AIM for CF instruction and had more CF class time at their disposal (i.e., 36 and 37 minutes respectively) compared to Miranda (33 minutes) and Melissa (28 minutes). It is not surprising that the teachers with more AIM experience may have felt more comfortable delving into the more complex activities outlined in the method, especially since experienced teachers commonly have more scope and a more diverse repertoire of practices to draw from (Arends, 2004). In regards to CF class time, research (i.e., Marshall, 2011) has also shown that having longer CF classes enables teachers to implement more complex communicative activities, and that the types of oral routines observed during the start of each of the AIM-mandated classes end up shortening the time available for more in-depth teaching, task completion and successful implementation of collaborative tasks. Taking these findings and this research into account, I would propose that having more AIM experience and more CF class time may have enabled Monica and Mary to (a) contextualize more of their AIM class time in the play under study, (b) incorporate more extended-level French text into their CF classes, and (c) progress beyond play presentation to the more complex AIM activities that are meant to extend students’ vocabulary and use of French to less scripted situations (Maxwell, 2006, 2008).

**Advantages and challenges using AIM**

The AIM-mandated teachers in this study acknowledged similar advantages and
challenges related to their use of the method. For instance, they all spoke about how AIM enhanced the oral component of their CF instruction. The three teachers who had to implement an arts-based curriculum also felt that the drama component of AIM was particularly useful to them. Others talked about the difficulty of integrating students who were new to the board and/or new to their class, especially because they rarely knew to what extent other CF teachers in the board were using AIM. Some also reported facing the challenge of resistance to their AIM teaching. Outside of some AIM-mandated teachers who described occasions when parents, older students, or other FSL teachers expressed their intolerance of their use of AIM, the majority of AIM-mandated teachers felt supported by other educators, including their FSL consultant and principal.

One contextual aspect that three of these teachers felt posed challenges to their implementation of AIM was not having their own classroom. Mary (i.e., the only AIM-mandated teacher who had her own classroom) reported feeling fortunate that her principal had ensured that she have her own classroom. On the other hand, the remaining AIM-mandated teachers talked about how using other teachers’ classrooms sometimes limited their AIM teaching practice in terms of space (e.g., restricted space for teacher-led activities), time available for CF teaching after traveling from class to class, and consistent access to audiovisual and computer equipment that they wanted to incorporate into their CF teaching. Monica pointed out that a school-level initiative promoting guided reading (which is part of AIM) helped to ensure that each classroom she taught in was set up in such a way to facilitate this type of activity. While research has shown that it is common for CF teachers not to have their own classrooms, and to be concerned about the negative impact that such a situation has on their CF teaching practice (Lapkin, MacFarlane & Vandergrift, 2006), findings suggest that the success of “à la cart” AIM-mandated teachers depends on how pragmatic their context is for AIM teaching; so, the degree to which they can access things they need from colleagues whose classes they are using, and the compatibility of AIM with other classroom set-ups and school-wide initiatives.

While all of the AIM-mandated teachers believed that the oral emphasis of AIM improved their CF programming, they still reported challenges associated with implementing aspects of the oral component of the method, including (a) maintaining and modeling the French-only rule, (b) getting students to speak more, and (c) being able to stop speaking so much themselves. Although establishing the L2-only rule is argued to be a direct determinant of the speed at which fluency will occur in an AIM classroom (Maxwell, 2006, 2008), CF teachers
from other studies have reported finding it difficult to maintain French as the language of instruction in the CF context (Lapkin, MacFarlane & Vandergrift, 2006; Salvatori, 2007). Teachers using AIM have also underscored the effort and patience required to be a consistent L2-model for students when using AIM (Arnott, 2005). While these teachers highlighted how challenging it was to reduce their L2 modeling and to get them speaking more independently, research has shown that teachers sometimes get ahead of themselves and expect students to do things independently before they have had sufficient practice and feedback to really get good at a skill being modeled (Buel, 2009). Clearly these teachers wanted to decrease the amount of oral scaffolding they were providing, but doing so was more challenging than they had originally anticipated. It seems rational then that teachers felt that more assessment of what students could do independently was needed in their AIM classrooms to get an idea of how much support they needed to provide, which points to the usefulness of the observed practices that some AIM-mandated teachers were employing in this respect (i.e., reorganizing their students; supplementing whole class assessment activities, etc.)

All of the AIM-mandated teachers also stressed how frustrated they were with the lack of AIM-related PD opportunities offered by their board during the year that the study took place. They all attested to the fact that they had benefitted from such opportunities in the past, and some teachers along with their principals insisted that AIM PD was integral to the sustainability of mandating the method for CF instruction. The more experienced AIM teachers (i.e., Mary and Monica) reported the need for higher levels of PD so that teachers like them who had already completed the beginner levels would still be supported. Although more advanced PD is offered by the creators of AIM (AIM Language Learning, 2012a), all of the teachers indicated that they could not afford to pay out of their own pocket to attend any of these types of workshops. Interestingly, all of the AIM-mandated teachers talked about how smaller-scale PLCs could help to address the shortage of AIM-related PD offered by the board, with one admitting that she had in fact created a PLC on her own in order to continue developing her AIM teaching practice through collaboration with fellow AIM teachers in her board. In their national survey of FSL teachers, Lapkin, MacFarlane and Vandergrift (2006) found that, like teachers in this board, local workshops and discussions with colleagues were the most preferred types of PD that FSL teachers seemed to favor. The AIM-mandated teachers in this study also did not suggest any online form of PD as being desirable, which coincides with findings from the Lapkin et. al.
survey, where FSL teachers ranked online formats as fifth on their list of preferred PD formats. Funding was also identified by the survey participants as being integral to their access to desired PD opportunities, which the AIM-mandated teachers identified as the major hurdle preventing them from attending supplementary PD workshops offered by the creators of the method they were mandated to use. These findings suggest that the AIM-mandated teachers wanted more AIM-related PD, and believed they would benefit most from local opportunities that went beyond what was offered in previous years. Findings also indicate that enabling AIM teachers to collaborate with each other locally may be an adequate substitute for the more large-scale PD offerings that would inevitably cost more money.

**AIM-Mandated Teacher Case Typology**

In order to compare AIM implementation across the Mandated and Optional contexts, a more consolidated summary of the data presented in this chapter is required. To this end, Figure 7 summarizes the important points of convergence (i.e., commonalities) and divergence (i.e., differences) that emerged across the four manifestations of AIM observed. It also notes significant advantages and disadvantages reported by AIM-mandated teachers during their interviews. As this figure shows, implementation of AIM looked different in each classroom; however, some general similarities emerged related to how they chose to use the method: (a) they all implemented many of the same AIM routines, techniques, and activities; (b) they all chose to omit certain AIM strategies and materials from their practice; and (c) they all introduced supplementary non-AIM activities and resources in their CF classes.

Considering these findings in light of the theoretical framework guiding this study, it seems that all of the AIM-mandated teachers were exercising their mediated agency while using AIM (i.e., teachers’ possibilities for action were shaped by the mediational means employed). Furthermore, in line with Ahearn (2001), they appeared to be employing different types of agency in relation to AIM. For example, all four teachers in the AIM-mandated case exerted an “agency of fidelity” when adhering to central tenets of the method (e.g., maximized use of L2, decreasing gesture use with older students, etc.). At the same time, each teacher supplemented the AIM materials and techniques in accordance with their sense of plausibility and to suit their context (i.e., “agency of adaptability”). Some cited their experience using AIM in particular as being the main reason they felt confident in adapting the method or integrating advanced activities like story retelling (i.e., “agency of experience”), while others rejected aspects of AIM
### COMMONALITIES

- Beginning routines
- Reward systems
- Teacher-centred classrooms
- French use = exclusive and/or dominant
- Decreased gesture use with older students
- Followed sequence of AIM activities
- Supplemented AIM materials/activities (especially with more AIM experience)
- Picking and choosing from AIM manual (especially beginner CF teacher)
- Feared being told they could not use AIM

### DIFFERENCES

- Use of extended text
- Play as context
- CF class time
- Decreased teacher use of French with older students (Grade 4/5 and 8)
- French use (students)
- Varied progress through AIM manual (e.g., use of extension activities, like story retelling)

### ADVANTAGES

- Oral emphasis of AIM improves CF practice
- AIM and Arts-based Curriculum = compatible
- Supportive school environment

### CHALLENGES

- Making AIM classes less teacher-centred
- Getting students to speak more
- Grade 8 resistance
- AIM-related in-service PD (limited amount and variety)
- External AIM-related PD = too expensive
- Integrating new students
- Implementing AIM without a classroom
- Modeling French-only rule
- Decreasing oral scaffolding
- Using AIM “correctly”

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*Figure 7. AIM-Mandated Teacher Case (Consolidated Observation and Interview Data)*

altogether (i.e., “agency of resistance”) either because of an imbalance between AIM and their existing CF teaching practice, to avert boredom after repeated years of use, or to respond to the resistance or challenges they were experiencing teaching intermediate students.

In terms of a shared meaning, these teachers believed in the dynamic version of AIM they were employing, but also demonstrated confidence in aspects of the static version of AIM described in the materials. They also seemed to agree that supplementing the method was acceptable practice, but differed in how confident they were about the compatibility of AIM with their existing CF teaching practice. Some also felt guilty about how their implementation of AIM compared to the “proper use” described in the manual. They all reported a need for more AIM-related professional development opportunities, and those with more experience felt that a wider variety of workshops was needed to keep them motivated to continue using the method.
Figure 8. Magnification of Theoretical Framework (AIM-Mandated Teacher Implementation).

To summarize, Figure 8 magnifies the teacher “gear” of my theoretical framework introduced in Chapter 3, and incorporates my interpretations of AIM-mandated teachers’ agency and shared meaning that emerged from investigating the subjective realities of CF teachers in this context. A similar figure is presented for the AIM-optional context at the end of Chapter 7. In this case, contrary to the preceding chapter where AIM-mandated educators were influenced by the board-level policy, mandating AIM did not appear to significantly influence teachers’ use of the method. If anything, mandating AIM had more of an effect on teachers’ expectations related to training and PD opportunities than it did their actual implementation, as all of the AIM-mandated teachers were observed to be using AIM in their own ways. In Chapter 8 I discuss how each representation of AIM implementation relates to the subjective realities of principals and FSL consultants within and across cases. At this point, however, I turn to presenting findings from the implementation of AIM in the Optional board.
Chapter 7 - AIM-Optional Teacher Case Vignettes

Introduction

The major objective of this chapter is to introduce themes and patterns that were generated from the isolated analyses of interview and observation data related to the AIM-optional teacher case. I adopt the same reporting process as Chapter 6, where in each participant’s section, I begin by introducing the teacher, how they reported transitioning into becoming an AIM teacher, and the AIM-related training and/or professional development they had experienced to date. I proceed to describe the school context in which they taught CF, citing data related to the support they received from different players (e.g., principals, teachers, parents, students) within and outside of their school environment. Next, I profile each participant’s teaching practices, both AIM and non-AIM related, using data from my field notes, interview data and percentages generated from the observation scheme which are displayed for each participant in the format of a table. Each table displays the averages based on all of their observed CF classes in the first column, and the isolated averages for the grades they taught in the remaining columns. Where applicable, I also differentiate between each teacher’s use of AIM across the levels they taught, and introduce data related to how they supplemented the method or deviated from its directives during the observation period. Each participant’s section ends with a description of the challenges that they identified related to implementing AIM in their CF classroom.

After introducing observation and interview data related to the four teachers who were using AIM in this board and their principals, I report on the non-AIM teacher’s interview data to support and contrast their perspectives and practices where relevant. In the subsequent summary and discussion section, I integrate data from all five teachers from the AIM-optional context and offer a typology of the practices and perspectives that were uncovered.

AIM-Optional Case

Teachers in this school board were permitted to choose whatever method they wanted to use for elementary CF instruction. I was able to recruit, observe and interview five CF teachers from this board – four who had chosen to use AIM (i.e., Odette, Oksana, Olivia and Orianna) and one who had chosen not to use AIM (i.e., Nancy). At each of the schools, CF was the only FSL program offered.
ODETTE

At the time of the study, Odette had been teaching CF for 17 years and had also been a French Immersion teacher for two years during her career. She had been using AIM for CF instruction for the past two years, which is the same amount of time that she had been teaching at her current school (with a population of approximately 300 students). During the study period, Odette was teaching CF at the Grade 4, 5 and 6 levels; however, due to the timing of my visits, only her Grade 4 and 5 CF classes were observed.

After being introduced to AIM during a PD session organized by her board, Odette reported that she was immediately taken by the philosophy of learning that AIM embodied, particularly the belief that SLA should mimic naturalistic language learning (i.e., the Natural Approach). Odette’s data demonstrated that she had a strong connection to this aspect of AIM, so much so that she had posted a sign in her class that represented the ordering in which French was introduced in her CF classroom - “Hear it. Say it. See it”. Not only were her assumptions validated about the importance of allowing ‘natural progression’ to occur during second language learning (e.g., hear the language before seeing it in writing, allowing for errors in the beginning, etc.), but Odette also felt that AIM helped to fill the gaps in the CF program she had used up until that point. She described how, before AIM, she introduced vocabulary items by category (i.e., nouns, then adjectives, then verbs, then prepositions, etc.), and then got students to rewrite existing stories by substituting the vocabulary they had learned (e.g., take a fairy tale and replace the nouns, verbs etc.). While she focused on developing students’ oral skills and grammatical foundation, Odette admitted that at the time she felt she was translating too much and not providing enough contexts in which students could use the vocabulary they were learning. She said that using AIM helped her to “ignore the translation and keep everything in context” and to “stop worrying about the grammatical work and go back to learning vocabulary in context…because the grammar comes by hearing”.

In terms of PD, Odette reported that she had attended all of the AIM-related PD offered by her board. For her, implementing AIM successfully meant having an expert model the method, and not learning from a manual because “you can watch all the videos you want, but you only get out of it what you think you’re supposed to do”. Odette mentioned that she would have liked to attend more advanced AIM workshops that were not offered by her board, but that she could not commit the time or personal funds in order to do so. Nonetheless, she felt strongly
that the board-level AIM workshops she had attended were integral to sustaining its presence and appeal across new and existing CF teachers in her board:

I would like to see them do one [AIM workshop] every year, to keep people motivated because I think there’s so much to the program, that every time I go there’s something new that I pick up. I pick up some new little thing, trick or philosophy to keep me going. Then the new teachers coming into the board get to see that [AIM] is still a viable program, that’s it’s not something that we started five years ago and are not doing anymore.

While Odette stated that she benefited most from the face-to-face PD when she first started using AIM, she felt that those PD experiences provided her with a network of French teachers that she had not had before, and whose support she still solicited via the online AIM forum:

When AIM came along, it was OK to share with people and I connected with other French teachers, which I had never done before….I never had a PLC, people to deal with outside of just me…but with AIM it’s just such a supportive network. They’re like share, share more, you know? I think they also listen in the forum. I mean people write back and talk and share so you get new ideas or questions that we may have. Then all of a sudden you’ll see that one of the AIM experts will have an answer for it. The forum is a very supportive environment; you get all these different ideas, which is really cool.

School context (Odette)

Odette taught her CF classes in a portable classroom, which she felt was a vital aspect of successful AIM implementation:

I have been an advocate for CF teachers having their own space for a long time, even before AIM, but even more so with AIM now because there are so many visual clues. The kids are constantly looking around the room for the visual clues...If I wasn’t in my own classroom I don’t think the program would be as effective because it has to be visual too…and I think you need your own space where you can be loud.

Generally, Odette felt that her school environment supported her use of AIM. She discussed how other teachers responded positively to their students’ eagerness to communicate in French outside of the classroom, and how her consultant encouraged FSL teachers at all levels (primary through to secondary) to at least learn about AIM, regardless of whether they decided to actually use it in their classrooms. She felt that her principal provided her with the necessary funding to buy AIM resources and allowed her to make decisions about how she wanted to teach CF – the same two means of supporting AIM implementation that Odette’s principal described during her interview. Odette also highlighted some frustrations she was experiencing with her
school context, including (a) a shortage of funding for headphones needed to accompany a computer program she was using in tandem with AIM (i.e., Xpress Lab), (b) the challenge of organizing release time for French PLCs within the board, and (c) some pressure she was feeling from other teachers in her school to coordinate her CF teaching with what students were learning in their homeroom classes. Overall, interview findings showed that Odette’s strongest motivation to continue using AIM stemmed from her perception of support from the board, and her belief in the theory of learning inherent to the method:

   My hardest part will be if [the board] tells me I can’t use AIM. That would be my hardest fight, if they tell me I can’t use it. I mean, there may be something that comes up better, I just can’t see how it can because I still go back to the idea of why do I believe in it so much? I believe in it because of where it’s coming from. It is totally following the way their first language was learned.

   Interestingly, Odette also felt strongly that mandating AIM was not a viable solution either, especially if teachers were not using it according to what she deemed to be “correct use”, saying “it could do a lot of damage if [AIM] is not used properly”.

   **Observed teaching practices (Odette)**

   Odette’s Grade 4 and 5 CF classes lasted an average of 47 minutes. The averages presented in Table 13, coupled with the data from my detailed field notes, provide a representative depiction of Odette’s AIM teaching. Looking across the grades that Odette taught, there were no striking differences between how she was observed to be teaching her Grade 4 and Grade 5 CF classes, aside from a slight increase in the percentage of time that her older students spent reading and writing and doing independent work, and a slight decrease in exclusive gesture use with her older students (i.e., Grade 5s).

   While Odette’s AIM classes were predominantly teacher-centred, either with her addressing the class on her own (28%) or initiating choral repetition (25%), the choral language work observed was mostly repetition of (a) instructions she was giving; (b) teacher-led self-expression activities at the beginning of class (e.g., asking what the weather was like outside or how students were doing that day; getting students to say the date aloud or recite one of the AIM raps to reinforce the French-only rule; etc.); or (c) shared reading of questions on the board or sentences being used for a game they were playing. Odette organized positive and negative reinforcement systems in each of her AIM classes, with fake money being handed out to students to reward desirable behaviors (e.g., speaking in French, correcting the teacher, correcting
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>COLT Observation Data (Odette) – Percentage of Total Observed Time.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Organization</th>
<th>ALL Grades (7)</th>
<th>Grade 4 (3)</th>
<th>Grade 5 (4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T – S/C</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T – S/C + Choral</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group (same task)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual (same task)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual (different task)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Content Control |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Teacher-Text | 62 | 63 | 62 |
| Teacher-Text-Student | 38 | 37 | 38 |

| Student Modality |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Reading + Writing | 30 | 26 | 34 |
| Listening | 22 | 19 | 25 |
| Speaking + Listening | 13 | 14 | 12 |
| Reading + Speaking + Listening | 12 | 12 | 11 |
| Speaking + Listening + Gesture | 10 | 9 | 10 |
| Reading + Listening | 7 | 7 | 7 |

| Materials (type and source) |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Minimal | 13 | 10 | 15 |
| Sentence | 54 | 58 | 51 |
| Extended | 10 | 8 | 12 |
| Audio | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| Visual | 17 | 17 | 17 |
| L2-NNS Textbook | 24 | 31 | 29 |
| AIM Resource | 31 | 34 | 29 |
| L2-NNS Teacher-made | 47 | 44 | 47 |
| Student-made | 10 | 6 | 10 |

| Teacher Support |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Modeled | 6 | 1 | 9 |
| Shared | 8 | 8 | 7 |
| Guided | 7 | 8 | 5 |
| Independent | 40 | 33 | 45 |
| Gesture (all) | 28 | 35 | 23 |
| Gesture (specific) | 48 | 49 | 48 |

| Language Use |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Teacher: L2 only | 98 | 97 | 98 |
| Teacher: L2-dominant | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Students: L2 only | 79 | 78 | 80 |
| Students: L2-dominant | 21 | 22 | 20 |

| Context |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Text / play | 33 | 32 | 34 |
| Students’ lives | 9 | 13 | 6 |
| Other | 58 | 55 | 60 |
something written on the board, finishing a task, responding correctly to the teacher’s question, etc.) and a bingo dabber marking the fake money or folders of students who were caught speaking in English.

In terms of target language use, data showed that Odette spoke exclusively in French almost the entire observation period (98%). Her students were observed speaking in French exclusively (78%) or predominantly with some English (22%). During the observed classes, Odette allowed her students to speak in English if they needed to communicate something important; however, they had to ask permission before doing so.

According to my field notes, Odette’s minimal use of English occurred when she chose to compare French and English words, most times by writing a word in English on the board so she did not have to say it orally. For instance, during one of her Grade 5 CF classes, a student asked why the last letters in a French word they had just said chorally was pronounced when the rule Odette had provided them with stated that “99% of the time, last letters are not pronounced in French”. Odette responded to this question by writing the English word “knight” on the board, underlining the “kn-” and “gh” parts of the word, asking the students why those letters/sounds are not pronounced in the English language, and eventually answering her own question by saying that it is just part of the language. During her interviews, Odette rationalized this teaching strategy as being useful for teaching aspects of French implicitly, mirroring how children first learn words by hearing them, then saying them before seeing them in writing:

I stop the class and do a lot of talking about “knee, k-n-e-e”. How bizarre is that? Or “night, n-i-g-h-t”. How bizarre is that? Why do you say “I am”, “he is”, and “you are”? They’re all three different things. So I don’t make them conjugate the verb, but we talk back to that idea of how bizarre it is in English and that that’s just the way it is.

Considered collectively, patterns in Odette’s observation data can be attributed to the recurrence of a routine activity she introduced during the study period. For instance, students were observed to be reading and writing (30%) and listening (22%) during the majority of the time, and Odette organized the class so that students were working independently on the same task (26%) and helping her to lead the class and control the content (38%). She contextualized one-third of her AIM classes in the play under study, but concentrated more than half of the observed time on practicing vocabulary in other contexts (58%). As well, out of all of the options for materials, Odette was observed using mostly sentence-level text (54%) and teacher-made materials (47%) with her CF classes across both grade levels. This data can all be explained by a
routine where, to begin each of the observed CF classes, students entered the portable, retrieved their French folder from their respective bin, and sat down to independently read and write answers to what Odette called the “Questions de Salut” [Welcome Questions]. She crafted different questions of varying complexity for each grade, which were either about characters from the play they were studying or were general in nature (e.g., solving math equations in full sentences, personal yes/no questions, creating bizarre phrases independently, etc.). Observation data showed that students wrote their answers to the questions independently, then showed Odette their work, and finally proceeded to help take the questions up as a class by writing their answers on the board. Odette made sure that the students took a leading role in the class correction by choosing who would read the answer that was written on the board and offering initial judgments as to whether the answer was correct and how it was written (i.e., spelling, grammar etc.). Looking at the COLT data averages, findings showed that this activity took up an average of 36% of the total class time observed.

Odette’s rationale for implementing this routine activity with each of her AIM classes was to supplement the reading they were doing during their play study - to “get them to be able to read more” because “the words are written down, so they will see it contextually in a different context than the play”. As well, she had heard criticism from other teachers that AIM does not have enough of a writing element, and this was Odette’s way of responding to that criticism. This rationale also guided her use of additional texts that she felt were needed to help students “get past the play” and have other opportunities to read and write the vocabulary they were learning in a context other than the play itself. While she appreciated the supplementary readers provided in the AIM resources (which she unfortunately said she could not afford more of because of lack of funds), she described other materials that she had used to fill the void:

I add more of the colloquial stuff, like more activities with la famille [the family], more activities with les parties du corps [parts of the body], or do a little bit more culture of where the Francophone countries are.

Data related to Odette’s use of teacher-made materials, her organization of students working in groups on the same task (12%), and offering a different context than the play to review vocabulary, all reflected her repeated use of games that she had created. While she reported following the order and progression of how AIM was laid out in the teacher manual, and that her CF and AIM experience had enabled her to “see where she needs to be at the end”,
she said that she purposely created different games to provide a context for some necessary activities (i.e., kinesthetic review, play recitation, total/partial questions) and to make them more fun and competitive for her students:

Even though I don’t use the scripts in the manual, it guides me in how I wanted to do the lesson. The kinesthetic review and the oral review where I’m supposed to do the actions and the kids just say or do the words; my students don’t see a purpose to it, but it could be because I don’t see a purpose to it. It’s not my style, and I strongly believe that if I don’t see the purpose, it’s coming through to the students somehow. I also don’t see the context, so I find it challenging to always keep them speaking to review the vocabulary. So I really have to do a lot of games to get them to use the vocabulary.

While Odette felt confident that her games worked to ensure that students were accomplishing the same objective as the activities delineated in the material, she also pointed out that she did not use certain aspects of the method because they did not align with her teaching style or with her ideas on how to keep students motivated throughout the school year. She reported that she did not use the DVD of the gestures being demonstrated individually, nor did she introduce the dances that go with each play. Similar to Melissa from the AIM-mandated context, Odette also felt that forcing her students to memorize the play decreased their motivation and engagement in her CF classes, and was therefore an unnecessary component of her AIM practice:

I would say it’s the whole motivation of keeping motivated with the play, they’re ready to move on. One of the things I learned is that it’s OK if they don’t know it perfectly. It’s OK. Maybe they’ll get it in the next oral presentation that we do.

**Challenges using AIM (Odette)**

While Odette identified keeping students motivated to study the play as her main challenge implementing AIM, she also continually spoke about her struggle to get her students to speak more, especially with her older students. She said that she would try to “slow down, action the words, and let them speak”, but that “releasing some of the speaking to the students works with some, but others still need the support”.

As mentioned earlier, Odette also felt frustrated with the lack of authentic reading materials in the AIM resources, and the fact that she did not have supplementary funds to purchase the additional readers offered through the AIM website. She also stated that this lack of resources impacted her ability to assess students’ fluency and vocabulary knowledge. Odette described how she responded to this challenge by using Xpress Lab (NetSoftware Incorporated,
a computer software program funded by the AIM-optional board that enables teachers to customize and create their own activities and tests to reinforce and assess students’ independent use of the language, including reading and oral skills. Odette also explained how she would sometimes give students copies of written story retells created by other AIM classes to see if they could read and understand text that did not appear in the same format as her AIM resources.

Interestingly, Odette mentioned how she was looking forward to the release of the new CF curriculum because it might resolve the challenges that she was experiencing while using AIM. She talked about how a focus on spontaneous speech in the new curriculum may lead to the introduction of more strategies to help her to get her students speaking more without her having to provide as much assistance. Along these lines, she also noted how the anticipated focus on reading longer passages in the new curriculum would hopefully result in funding for additional readers, saying “with the new curriculum, we’re supposed to be doing more reading, so hopefully I’ll get money for readers so I can include some more reading outside of the play”.

OLIVIA

Olivia had been teaching CF and using AIM for the last seven years, and was in her fifth year of teaching at her current school, which had a population of approximately 150 students. During the study, her Grade 4/5, 6 and 8 CF classes were observed.

Olivia started using AIM after reviewing an old AIM manual during her teacher training, and subsequently attending an AIM workshop with some CF colleagues that was organized by the creators of the method. Olivia described how in the beginning of her CF career, she had noted that her older CF students (i.e., Grade 6s) were demonstrating weak oral skills, and that those skills improved dramatically after she started using AIM. She attributed her continued CF teaching career to AIM and that particular experience, saying that “after that, if it wasn’t for AIM, I wouldn’t be a teacher now”.

In terms of AIM training, Olivia reported that she had attended all of the AIM-related PD workshops offered by her board, and that she had also tried to attend as many additional AIM-related PD sessions outside of her board as possible when she had the time and money to do so. When talking about her ongoing training, Olivia emphasized how she benefited from sessions showing ways that AIM teaching could be “extended beyond the specifics of the AIM program”, but how she also liked repeating beginner-level sessions because “each time you go you hear something different”. Not only did Olivia participate in AIM-related PD sessions, but she also
directed some herself. As she was one of the most experienced AIM teachers in the AIM-
optional board, she had been approached to help mentor other CF teachers who wanted to start
using AIM, and organized AIM- and non-AIM-related PD sessions for CF teachers in her board.
For instance, she felt compelled to present workshops about how the Xpress Lab software could
be used in the CF classroom during board-level training sessions, at conferences for FSL
teachers, and at training sessions offered by the creators of AIM. Olivia and her FSL consultant
were also working together to get high-school level CF teachers more versed in AIM so that they
could be made aware of how high school students who had been in AIM classes were used to
learning French and what they should know when they arrive.

School context (Olivia)

Olivia shared a classroom with the music teacher at her school and reported feeling that
her implementation of AIM had been supported in each of the three school contexts she had been
in over the course of her CF teaching career. She noted that her superintendent’s support of AIM
as an optional method for CF teachers was key to having AIM training included in the board-
wide PD scheduling and to getting the support of school principals for funding for AIM
materials. In her current school, Olivia reported that her principal ensured she had adequate
funds and release time for PD, and also adhered to the French-only rule when entering her
classroom, as she was a former FSL teacher herself. During her interview, Olivia’s principal
referred to these same points when describing her role in the implementation of AIM in her
school, and added that she worked to raise the profile of French in the school and facilitate other
teachers coming to observe Olivia’s AIM practice in action.

Olivia described how she had experienced some resistance from intermediate-level
students and their parents when she first transitioned to her current school. From what she could
gather, she hypothesized that the CF teacher who preceded her had not been implementing AIM
“in an appropriate way”, leading her to have to re-instill confidence amongst the school
community in the method’s effectiveness:

When I first came to this school, even though they had the resources here, [AIM] wasn’t
used and implemented in an appropriate way. It wasn’t really used effectively. So, when I
first came here, I had to explain why I was using it. I had to convince the classes who had
used it that it can be successful when used appropriately…Also, some parents needed to
understand why their kids had to speak French only in class, why we have that rule, that
sort of thing….The beginner intermediate classes when I first came, they said we did this
and it didn’t work. No, you didn’t do it. Just copying the play and giving you the play,
that’s not the program.

Similar to Odette, Olivia ultimately referenced support as being vital to her continued use of AIM, maintaining that the method and the teacher were inextricably linked in her case:

I will use AIM as long as I teach Core French. If I went to a different school and they said you cannot use AIM I’d say well I can’t teach here. I would say that because I can’t imagine teaching any other way.

While AIM worked for her, Olivia was in favor of keeping AIM optional because she felt that teachers needed to be enthusiastic about the method for it to be successful, which would not be a guarantee if it was mandated, saying that “mandating AIM for all teachers would not be beneficial for teachers or students”.

**Observed teaching practices (Olivia)**

Olivia’s CF classes lasted an average of 40 minutes. Throughout each class, she used a reward system of popsicle sticks, which she awarded to students for (a) speaking in French, (b) answering a question posed to the group, (c) listening to the teacher, and (d) speaking with the teacher during teacher-led choral activities. The popsicle sticks that students earned counted towards group points, which were tallied for rewards offered at the end of the month. For her intermediate students, Olivia was also observed using the ticket system from the AIM manual as well as a diminishing points system she had created to reinforce adherence to the French-only rule, saying “I had to bring other systems in to get them to speak”.

Each of Olivia’s observed CF classes followed a similar pattern of activities, regardless of grade; however, the content and duration of each activity varied. Each of her AIM classes began with choral repetition of the AIM entry rap related to following the French-only rule (see Appendix R). Then, Olivia proceeded to draw students’ attention to a question (e.g., how their weekend was, their favorite part of the field trip, etc.) or a message (e.g., teacher describing what she did on the weekend) that she had written on the board, and had them read it chorally as a group. She was observed initiating student responses to the question orally and in writing during the observation period. After this activity, students were invited to sit at the front of the room on the carpet where Olivia led activities that were different for each grade level. Both of these activities varied in length, as Olivia would use the message or question as a springboard for students to use the language spontaneously with her support, and would initiate talk about the language used in student utterances. To end her classes, students returned to their desks to either
practice reciting the play under study as a group or complete written work from their dossiers (e.g., AIM question sheets; play extension activities; French speech writing for an upcoming competition etc.).

Olivia’s observation data helped to illustrate how these activities looked in relation to the scheme categories, and across different grade levels. As Table 14 demonstrates, Olivia spoke French exclusively during the entire observation period with each class. Her AIM classes were also predominantly teacher-centred, with her at the front of the class (41%) or initiating choral repetition (27%) of various things including (a) instructions for the next activity, (b) the lines of the play, or (c) the total and partial questions that they had to answer orally. During her interviews, Olivia talked about how “letting go of control” was an important skill that AIM teachers needed to have, and one that she continually struggled with during her implementation of the method:

> Being able to let go of control, because it is so scripted out and laid out it’s easy to take hold of that and say, this is what I need to do. I need to do this next, next, next. But you have to let the kids take it sometimes, and just give them their time to use what they do know. Let them be the leaders of the beginning part, that sort of thing….that’s one of the areas that I need to do more because I like to be in control.

Data from the remaining categories showed differences between Olivia’s implementation of AIM across the grades that she taught. She was observed initiating more choral language work with her Grade 6 (37%) and 8 (30%) classes when compared to the one observation of her teaching her youngest students (Grade 4/5 = 18%). She also controlled more of the content in her Grade 6 and 8 classes. While averages across all classes showed that Olivia’s students were listening (29%) or speaking and listening (28%) during the majority of time observed, further analysis revealed that this ordering of student modality was not consistent across grade levels. For example, her Grade 4/5 students were listening more than they were speaking chorally, while her Grade 6 and 8 classes were doing the opposite (i.e., more choral speaking than listening). Her Grade 6s in particular were also observed to be gesturing while speaking chorally (22%), bringing their total time spent speaking chorally to more than half of the total class time observed (55%). In terms of context, Olivia’s Grade 4/5 class was contextualized more in the play, and she also used more extended text with them than with her older AIM classes. Olivia’s Grade 8 AIM class was the only class observed to be reading and writing (16%) during the study period; however, they also used more English than her younger CF students did. She also provided more
Table 14  
**COLT Observation Data (Olivia) – Percentage of Total Observed Time.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ALL Grades (6)</th>
<th>Grade 4/5 (1)</th>
<th>Grade 6 (3)</th>
<th>Grade 8 (2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant Organization</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T – S/C</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T – S/C + Choral</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choral</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group (same task)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group (different task)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual (same task)</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual (different task)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content Control</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-Text</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-Text-Student</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Modality</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking + Listening</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading + Writing</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking + Listening + Gesture</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading + Speaking + Listening</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading + Speaking</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Materials (type and source)</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extended</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2-NNS Textbook</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIM Resource</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2-NNS Teacher-made</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-made</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Support</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeled</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gesture (all)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gesture (specific)</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language Use</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher: L2 only</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher: L2-dominant</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students: L2 only</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students: L2-dominant</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text / play</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ lives</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
gesture support for her younger students, gesturing less exclusively as the grade levels increased.

Interview data and field notes help to explain these differences in Orianna’s AIM implementation. Interview findings showed that she was aware of the amount of English spoken by her intermediate students, and felt uncertain as to whether it was her doing or just their age, saying that “once they get into Grade 7 and 8 they start speaking in English more, and maybe that’s because I do more of the speaking instead of gesturing, I don’t know”. Instead of focusing on the play under study with her Grade 6s and 8s, Olivia was observed taking more time to discuss students’ utterances in terms of mistakes they had made, vocabulary they had chosen to use, or grammar points they needed in order to say what they wanted to say. While this often led to rich discussion about the French language, and was necessary according to Olivia because differences in students’ abilities emerged as they develop through the grades, she still felt that doing this led her “off track” from what was scripted in the AIM manual:

I find with my beginner classes especially I stick to the manual more, following the script. And then as my classes get more developed, I find that I have to adapt the class more because I have lower level and higher level students. So I have to adapt what it is I’m saying more as opposed to just sticking right to what is scripted there. But as I said before, the more I do that, the more I tend to get off track.

To continue explaining the observed variation between the grades, during the one Grade 4/5 class that I observed, Olivia did not spend as much time with the students on the carpet; instead, she spent almost half of the class with her students divided into two groups - one practicing their lines of the play chorally with her and the others at their desks practicing their individual lines in groups (group different task = 42%). At the end of the class, they were also allowed to choose what parts of their dossier they wanted to work on. In terms of the Grade 6s and 8s, their time spent at the front of the room was dominated by kinesthetic reviews (i.e., Olivia gesturing and the students repeating or guessing what she’s gesturing; Olivia gesturing words that are opposites and the students repeating, etc.), which may help explain her lack of extended level text use with these students. During her interviews, Olivia talked about how she intentionally organized her students in these ways (i.e., having her students in front of her or working with them individually or in groups) because it facilitated her assessment of quiet students’ skills in particular:

I find it very easy to assess students because it’s so oral, they’re always in front of you performing and achieving and showing you what they can do. There are those students who are very quiet, and that’s where the challenge comes in because sometimes they sit
back and they don’t say anything at all, or you can see that their mouth is moving but you really can’t hear them. So those are the ones that I find are more challenging, and that’s where the one on one interaction becomes more important because then they have to demonstrate to you because no one else is around.

On the whole, Olivia’s observed implementation of AIM seemed to align with her criteria for proper implementation of AIM that she offered during her interviews. Firstly, she emphasized that AIM teachers must do everything orally first and model what they’re saying with gestures. On average, Olivia provided gestural support (either exclusive or specific) for 85% of the observed time and had her students participating in orally-based activities during the majority of class time. In terms of whether students should be gesturing, she emphasized that “the kids should not be gesturing at any time, unless you are teaching a specific gesture or doing a test”. Secondly, she maintained that French needs to be the language of any AIM classroom, which is reflected in her observed exclusive use of French during the study period. Thirdly, Olivia stressed that there should be a frequent change of activities in the AIM classroom, particularly during the kinesthetic reviews, which she said should last no longer than 10 minutes. She was observed using an egg timer during her AIM classes to ensure that she did not exceed the 10-minute maximum; however, she did exceed this time limit during a few classes. Her fourth criterion for proper AIM implementation was the way that the total and partial questions were introduced. Olivia underscored the importance of completing the questions in class and providing corrections, as opposed to sending them home for homework or simply doing them orally. Olivia claimed that she provided written feedback on students’ completion of the question sheets, confessing that it was “hard to keep up with the marking”, but maintaining that it was an essential aspect of her use of AIM. Lastly, Olivia felt that if AIM was being used correctly, then students would be producing French as much as possible and moving towards more independent use. Interestingly, this was the one aspect of “proper implementation” that challenged her the most. As I mentioned earlier, Olivia felt that it was difficult to give up control of her class and stop talking. She linked this in part to her use of gestures, saying that whenever she tried to decrease her use of gestures, the students would not speak as much:

As they do go up higher, I do gesture less and less, and it is expected that they will gesture less and less. But I do know that the less I gesture, then the less the students speak. And they’re not getting that oral practice then.

It is also particularly noteworthy that, during one interview, Olivia stressed that AIM
teachers did not need to use the AIM resources exclusively in order to implement the method correctly:

I would say as long as the kids are still speaking, as long as the kids are still improving on what they can do, as long as you’re still using the AIM materials in an AIM way, or even other stuff, but bringing it in an AIM way [italics added] – then run with it.

Rather, she focused more on the aforementioned procedural aspects of AIM as representing its proper use, and went on to speculate (like Odette did) that the growing trend of improper use would have negative consequences for the method itself:

I know that not all teachers think that they can teach that way. And if that’s the case, then fine, don’t. But [AIM] needs to be taught the way it needs to be taught for it to be effective... and the fact that it’s spreading and that there’s so much excitement about it, my only fear is that it’s not being implemented appropriately. I mean, there are a lot of teachers out there who are, but there are others who are not, because it’s going to get a bad rap or a bad reputation. People are going to say, well, I’m not going to use that. It doesn’t work. I know so-and-so who used it and her kids can’t speak and whatever. .

**Challenges using AIM (Olivia)**

Besides those challenges mentioned thus far (i.e., getting her students to speak, dealing with the large amount of marking to provide feedback on students’ writing), Olivia identified several other challenges to using AIM. For example, she spoke often about her struggle to differentiate her AIM instruction given the AIM resources at her disposal. She said she wished that there were electronic versions of the written exercises so that she did not have to retype them in order to adapt them for her students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Olivia also struggled with the fact that “there was no differentiation in the play scripts themselves”, leading her to implement strategies (e.g., her Grade 4/5 splitting of the class, doing the same lesson twice – once with the group and once with the weaker students, etc.) and use software (i.e., Xpress Lab) to make her AIM teaching more accessible to her weaker students.

Although Olivia was observed structuring her AIM teaching according to the progression of activities outlined in the manual (and not following it to the letter), she said that she struggled to get through all of the activities that she felt were important to implement. She attributed this challenge to her “off track” activities described earlier in this chapter:

I would have to say in my practice of AIM, in my implementation of AIM, that’s where I fall down the most is that I run out of time because I do so much other stuff. Like, our opening routine takes twenty minutes because they’re so into it and they’re talking and I don’t want to stifle that. I want to encourage that, but at the same time I always feel like
we have to keep going and push on…. We’re always circling back and around. It’s like that tornado effect, but it’s always stuff that’s relevant and it’s applicable and that they need.

While getting through the manual was difficult with all of her grade levels, she said it was particularly challenging with her older students “because the plays are longer, but it’s also partly because I put more stuff in, like we spend more time on error correction”. Olivia also reported that her Grade 8s were resisting participating during teacher-led activities taking place at the front of the room. Even though she did not ask her Grade 8 students to sit on the carpet, and instead offered them chairs to sit on, she claimed that she had noticed an overall decrease in their eagerness to participate during these activities.

Olivia reported dealing with most of these challenges by reassuring herself that she could go at her own pace because she taught the same groups of students for each of their five CF years; however, this condition presented challenges of its own. Olivia talked about the laborious organization required to keep track of the plays that students had studied, especially with split classes and students coming from other AIM classes. Every so often, Olivia discussed being presented with the reality that a student would have to study the same play twice.

Oksana

Oksana was in her second year of full-time teaching at the time of the study, and had just started at her current school, which had a population of approximately 400 students. She had begun using AIM when she took over another CF teacher’s classroom halfway through the previous academic year, and had decided to continue using the method. Although she taught CF at the Grade 4, 5 and 8 levels, due to scheduling limitations I was only able to observe her Grade 4 and 5 CF classes.

Oksana had been introduced to AIM during her practicum placement, and reported being “sold on AIM the very first class I stepped into”. She described how observing AIM in action in a primary CF class had piqued her interest about the method, and went on to say that she was particularly struck by how developed the students’ oral communication skills were. Following these observations, Oksana decided to attend the introductory AIM workshop offered by the creators of the method, and starting using the method as soon as she had her own CF classroom. After using AIM for a few months, Oksana attended the same introductory course again, as well as an intermediate-level workshop, which were both offered by the board. While she reported
that doing the same introductory workshop twice was beneficial because she could “see the differences now that I’ve been doing it for a while”, she admitted that she felt overwhelmed by the fact that the advanced workshops were conducted solely in French, saying that:

The thing that scared me with the advanced [workshop], not being bilingual, was that it was all going to be in French…I could understand enough to keep up, but I knew I wasn’t getting everything. Then she started doing a lot of it in English so then it was a lot more relaxing for me…I understand the reasons for using French, but it does make someone like me shy away a little bit, even though I think that I could go and understand the majority of it and get a lot from it.

Outside of the organized PD opportunities, Oksana admitted that she avoided the AIM online forum “because it’s so overwhelming”, and instead opted to solicit help from fellow AIM teachers in the board whenever she had questions. She reported that her developing AIM skills had benefitted most from such interactions, saying “I shudder to think where I would be without having those teachers available to me”.

School context (Oksana)

Oksana had her own classroom, which her principal felt was imperative for any CF teacher to have, regardless of whether they used AIM or not:

I’m a firm believer in whether it’s AIM or traditional type of approach, I think that the French teacher I really like them to have a classroom. I’d like them to be able to have an environment that supports the teaching that they’re doing. I don’t like French “à la cart” [with a cart]. I’m not a big proponent of it, and I’ve done what I can to make sure that they do have two French rooms for them. And that has nothing to do sort of with AIM. Regardless, they need to have that space. (Oksana’s Principal)

In Oksana’s school, she also shared the CF teaching responsibilities with another teacher. Instead of splitting up the classes by grade, they tried to ensure that each teacher taught one of the classes at every grade level. While this led to some valuable collaboration, Oksana expressed some frustration with having to ensure that they were both progressing through the AIM plays and activities at the same rate so that students would not be “offset for the following year” when they might switch to the other teacher’s CF class.

In terms of support, Oksana felt that her choice to use AIM fell in line with what her board supported, saying that even though AIM was optional she had the impression that “the board wants us to use AIM”. She also reported feeling confident that her administration and parents both supported her use of AIM. Although some of her intermediate students had complained about the AIM gestures, she reported that parents usually responded positively to her
explanation of the rationale behind their use (i.e., multiple intelligences, seeing the language, kinesthetic component, etc.). Her principal had come to observe her AIM teaching, and she had recently been given a Smartboard for her classroom after submitting an application rationalizing how her AIM programming would be enhanced by having access to such technology. While Oksana’s principal reported that supplying money for resources was part of her role in the implementation of AIM, she also stated that they did not have enough money that year to ensure that each CF teacher had their own set of AIM materials. During her interview, Oksana described how the principal had recommended that she approach the parent council to solicit funds, which resulted in her getting the funding as well as some positive feedback in support of AIM and her CF teaching:

The one parent on the council said ‘Yeah, whatever you need, we will give you the money. I have two kids at home and they’re talking French around the dinner table and they’re doing the gestures. I’ve never seen anything like AIM, so yeah, anything you need’.

Oksana’s principal also highlighted how she had observed an improvement in student enthusiasm for CF since the implementation of AIM in their school, resulting in fewer behavioral problems and in CF teachers being more motivated:

The kids love French. There’s never ever any balking at going to French class, it’s let’s go. That’s a change from what I’ve seen previously. Typically the joke had always been - have a good French teacher because that’s where most of your behavior issues will come from. They’ll come from French class down to the office because kids do not want to be there. But I don’t see that at all. I don’t think I’ve ever had a student come out of French class since I’ve been here….The kids like French, and I think that’s the big piece why teachers then have more enjoyment about teaching. (Oksana’s Principal)

Oksana felt that this phenomenon allowed her the freedom to implement her CF programming as she saw fit:

If there’s not a steady stream of students to the office for the French period, if the parents aren’t knocking on the door asking what’s going on in French class, if students aren’t complaining, then principals are by and large happy with the French program. And, you know what? I’m OK with that. That gives me the latitude and the freedom to do whatever I want to.

In addition, like Odette and Olivia, Oksana expressed no interest in changing her method of CF teaching, especially since she felt supported by her board and school. She also emphasized how she would react if told that she could not use AIM anymore:
If the principal here were to say I can’t use it, I would use every single venue I could to fight that. I’d be on the phone with my consultant saying this is what I’ve been told. For me, I only did the traditional for a couple of months, and if I had to go back to that, I’d just be like, no, you have to be kidding me. No way.

**Observed teaching practices (Oksana)**

Oksana’s observed Grade 4 and 5 CF classes lasted an average of 34 minutes. Each class began with a song (i.e., Bonjour mes amis [Hello my friends]) and a reminder of the French-only rule, which consisted of either prompting her students to recite the AIM entry rap for speaking only in French, or spending a few minutes at the start of each class distributing tickets from the AIM materials for students to sign. Students retained their signed ticket until the end of class as long as they spoke in French the entire time, at which point they would put their ticket into a box that counted towards a draw at the end of each month for prizes. Oksana also had two other reinforcement systems in place. One consisted of giving students colored buttons representing different point values that would count towards points for each student’s group. Oksana gave these buttons out during teacher-led activities, mostly for participating or answering questions correctly. The buttons also worked to get students speaking in French, such as when they would ask Oksana for “change” (e.g., exchanging 5 one-point buttons for 1 five-point button). The other support system was a sparkly squeeze toy that students called “bijou” [jewel], and students could only play with it if they were able to use their French to ask if they could hold it.

Oksana was also observed introducing different games during the study period, like the AIM game “Madame dit…” [Teacher says…], and other non-AIM games including (a) I spy with my little eye; (b) How many buttons/points do I have in my hand, where students would estimate to practice their numbers in French; and (c) a game called “Frappe les Mots” [Hit the Words], where the teacher would say one of the numerous vocabulary words that was stuck on a magnet on the board and students would compete in pairs to be the first to locate and slap the word that was said with a plastic spatula.

As Table 15 shows, observation data revealed similarities and differences between Oksana’s implementation of AIM across her Grade 4 and 5 CF classrooms. Classes at each level were predominantly teacher-centred, either with Oksana at the front leading the class (46%) or initiating choral work (18%), and she also controlled the content of her CF classes during the majority of time observed (87%). Her Grade 4 and 5 students both spent more than 20% of the observation period completing the same independent tasks, which were always one of the
**Table 15**  
*COLT Observation Data (Oksana) – Percentage of Total Observed Time.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Organization</th>
<th>ALL Grades (6)</th>
<th>Grade 4 (4)</th>
<th>Grade 5 (2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T – S/C</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T – Choral</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S – S/C</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group (same task)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group (different task)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual (same task)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Content Control                           |                |             |             |
|-------------------------------------------|                |             |             |
| Teacher-Text                              | 87             | 86          | 90          |
| Teacher-Text-Student                      | 13             | 14          | 10          |

| Student Modality                          |                |             |             |
|-------------------------------------------|                |             |             |
| Listening                                 | 35             | 37          | 33          |
| Reading + Writing                         | 22             | 22          | 21          |
| Speaking + Listening                      | 15             | 16          | 13          |
| Speaking + Listening + Gesture            | 12             | 7           | 24          |
| Reading + Speaking + Listening            | 7              | 5           | 11          |

| Materials (type and source)               |                |             |             |
|-------------------------------------------|                |             |             |
| Minimal                                   | 20             | 15          | 29          |
| Sentence                                  | 26             | 29          | 21          |
| Extended                                  | 14             | 15          | 11          |
| Audio                                     | 1              | 1           | 0           |
| Visual                                    | 13             | 18          | 5           |
| L2-NNS Textbook                           | 61             | 63          | 59          |
| AIM Resource                              | 61             | 63          | 59          |
| L2-NNS Teacher-made                       | 17             | 18          | 15          |

| Teacher Support                           |                |             |             |
|-------------------------------------------|                |             |             |
| Modeled                                   | 2              | 3           | 0           |
| Shared                                    | 11             | 17          | 0           |
| Independent                               | 33             | 33          | 35          |
| Gesture (all)                             | 22             | 50          | 16          |
| Gesture (specific)                        | 28             | 21          | 42          |

| Language Use                              |                |             |             |
|-------------------------------------------|                |             |             |
| Teacher: L2 only                          | 100            | 100         | 100         |
| Teacher: L2-dominant                      | 0              | 0           | 0           |
| Students: L2 only                         | 99             | 99          | 100         |
| Students: L2-dominant                     | 1              | 1           | 0           |

| Context                                   |                |             |             |
|-------------------------------------------|                |             |             |
| Text / play                               | 43             | 49          | 31          |
| Students’ lives                           | 1              | 2           | 0           |
| Other                                     | 56             | 37          | 69          |
following written activities based on the play under study: (a) total or partial questions; (b) Phrases Bizarres [Bizarre Phrases]; or (c) Mets les Mots en Ordre [Put the words in order]. Students spent the majority of time observed listening (35%), and interacting with forms of text from the AIM materials (61% of the time).

Oksana and her students used French exclusively at least 99% of the time observed. This finding was significant given that Oksana confessed during her interviews that she was not confident in her level of French, but added that using AIM made her feel like her abilities in French were adequate:

For me, not being bilingual, sometimes I don’t feel totally confident. To me, it’s a breath of fresh air knowing that I can do this without being fluent. And, in fact, other things that I’ve been exposed to, or kids who have had fluent teachers, it doesn’t necessarily mean that they’re better in French. Being able to speak it and being able to teach it are still two distinct qualities of a teacher…I’m doing the best that I can and I see the kids making progress and strides. So that’s something I love about the program. I’m sure it’s better if you’re fluent, but you don’t have to be fluent to use AIM.

Data from other observation categories showed differences between Oksana`s Grade 4 and 5 AIM classes. For example, Oksana was observed modeling and prompting shared activities with her Grade 4 class and not once with her Grade 5s. Although she provided less exclusive gestural support with her Grade 5s, her Grade 5 students were observed gesturing while speaking chorally (speaking, listening and gesture = 24%) more often than their Grade 4 counterparts (7%).

In terms of materials, Oksana used mostly sentence-level text (29%) or visuals (18%) with her Grade 4 classes, versus her Grade 5 classes where she used mostly minimal-level (29%) and sentence-level (21%) text. These data can be explained by considering the context of Oksana`s activities in both classes. In her Grade 4 class, almost half of the class time observed was contextualized in the play under study (49%), with students completing AIM activities related to the play (e.g., total and partial questions which often require interaction with sentence-level text) and the teacher using visuals to facilitate those activities (e.g., showing puppets of each character during oral review of play questions). In contrast, Oksana was observed working more with individual vocabulary words during her Grade 5 classes, introducing games, kinaesthetic reviews or grammar points (i.e., double verb construction) in a context outside of the play under study during the majority of the time (“Other” context = 69%). During her interviews, Oksana explained how she tried to follow the progression of activities laid out
in the AIM materials, but had to jump around once in a while, which could explain the
differences observed between her Grade 4 and 5 classes:

I tend to follow the general flow very closely, but it depends how it fits in the day. Like if
one of the teacher-led activities is long but you’ve got some other stuff that they’re still
trying to finish up, like their questions or play practice, then it might not fit. But a lot of
the activities, they’re built to be about ten minutes, but I don’t find that that’s realistic.
They’re often longer, like they suggest getting three done in a class and I rarely get three
done. So it’s just a matter of flow, and what you’re doing and presenting.

Aside from some of the non-AIM games that she implemented, Oksana was not observed
to be supplementing as much as the other AIM-optional teachers. She felt that she was “growing
into the program” and confessed that she welcomed the prescriptions in the manual and the
repetition of plays because they enabled her to get used to implementing AIM and balancing the
demands of her first full year of teaching; however, she could foresee how such repetition could
become tedious:

I feel totally fine doing the plays over and over. That’s just something that’s going to take
place in an AIM classroom. It’s the same thing for every other teacher, right? They’re
going to get used to stuff. There’s a certain amount of familiarity that I’m hoping to get to
because it’s too overwhelming right now, but I imagine at a certain point you’ll be like, oh, geez, I have to go through this again?

**Challenges using AIM (Oksana)**

Getting through the AIM manual was one challenge that Oksana identified throughout
her interviews. She felt that she was falling behind her teaching partner’s pace through the AIM
activities and was worried that she was not getting through the prescribed number of plays:

I don’t know how in the world, honestly, they suggest doing two plays in a year. I’d be
happy just to go through one play, that’s the goal…I’d rather do one well, then race
through it and jump into another one. It’s almost too bad that AIM sort of puts that
pressure on you to do two.

Oksana attributed these pressures to simultaneously being new to AIM and being a new
full-time CF teacher. She was not used to all of the marking, and also described how learning
how to use AIM was a “steep learning curve” that made her feel self-conscious, particularly
when it came to knowing the gestures, saying that she had not “been able to put in the time that
[she] wanted for the gestures.”

Based on her interview data, Oksana also believed that her “younger students like[d]
AIM more than the older ones”, and that they were coping better with the French-only rule than
her intermediate CF students. She considered AIM to be challenging to use with her intermediates, especially those who had entered her class without any AIM experience before, which led her to use AIM differently:

I don’t do much gesturing at all with the Grade 8s, and not as much with the 7s anymore either. They haven’t had it all the way through and I just find that they react to it, it’s hard to get them going.

Oksana reasoned that intermediate students might like AIM more if they had it from the beginning of their FSL learning experience, citing that “there is some research that shows that it’s really hard to just introduce AIM to intermediates.” Oksana described how, with the help of her fellow CF teaching partner, she was trying to “get the younger ones on board now”, and went on to rationalize her efforts with this particular age group when implementing AIM:

To be honest, I am focusing on my Grade 4s and trying to give them a good foundation. The other French teacher and I are really interested in seeing how the 4s do in Grade 5 having just had AIM. We’re interested in seeing how they are, if there’s a difference or not.

Oksana’s principal also talked about this strategy during her interview, and how it was motivating both teachers to use AIM consistently across those grades:

Their biggest excitement, both teachers, is having these Grade 4s and 5s that they’re working with right now moving on. They’re really curious to see what it’s going to be like when they get to the intermediate grades and they’ve had three to four to five years of consistent AIM programming. (Oksana’s Principal)

Instead of highlighting the ways in which these challenges negatively impacted her teaching, Oksana seemed pleased with the way she was using the method and invested in its usefulness in the CF context. She emphasized how believing in AIM like she did was essential to preserving its effectiveness, noting that “if you’re not sold on the program then you are going to butcher it.”

Orianna

Orianna had been teaching CF exclusively during her 20 years of teaching experience, which was the most out of all of the AIM-optional and AIM-mandated teachers in this study. She had been at her current school for 15 years, and she had been using AIM for the past four years. At the time of the study, the school she was teaching in had a population of approximately 200 students. I was able to observe Orianna at least once in each of her Grade 6 to 8 CF classes, as well as one Grade 4/5 split class.
Orianna first heard about AIM after reading a newsletter advertising a workshop that was organized by the creators of the method. During her interview she talked about how, initially, she was simply curious about the method, then went on to describe how after the workshop she realized the clear links she could make between how she had been teaching CF and the practices described in the method, particularly the use of gestures to represent verbs:

I had been using actions – but not AIM actions – before that too, mostly for verbs. I tried to give every verb an action because I felt that the kids understood it better. And they loved it, it got them moving, it got them up. So I’d already been doing that kind of thing to a minor extent with the kids. So when I heard about [AIM] I thought “what”? It’s wonderful with the verbs so I can do everything with an action, I’m sure that they would learn it so much better.

Orianna went on to reflect on how, since that first workshop, using AIM had given her the confidence to maximize her use of French, and to insist that students did the same when in her CF classroom.

Aside from the one-day session offered by the creators of AIM, Orianna claimed that she had also attended each level of AIM-related professional development offered by her board, saying that “the board has been very supportive of AIM, so they’re trying to make it as easy as possible for us”. Lately, however, repetition of workshops and distance from where the PD was being held in her board had kept her from attending more sessions. During her third interview, she said she “felt pressure” that she should have attended more of the PD offered by the board; however, when she considered the repetition in the sessions being offered, she anticipated that she would “get a little resentful with too much driving for too little PD”. Despite her inability to continually attend PD in her board, Orianna went on to reflect on how valuable those initial sessions were to her continued AIM practice, saying “I don’t know how I would have done it without all of the PD”. She felt that the sessions she had attended had motivated her to continue using AIM, and that she appreciated the ideas she got from other AIM teachers about “how they’d tweaked [AIM] or do it this way or that”. She also admitted that consulting the official AIM website was occasionally helpful when she needed new ideas or wanted to see how other teachers were using AIM, but went on to note that what was posted on the board-based online support (i.e., a space for AIM on the email interface for the whole board) was no longer applicable to how she was using AIM, saying “there really hasn’t been anything added to that for a long time that is useful for the units I’m doing now…so I kind of forgot about it”.
**School context (Orianna)**

Like the other AIM Optional teachers, Orianna had her own classroom to teach CF, which she attributed to her principal’s supportive efforts. Her principal highlighted in her interview how fortunate Orianna was to have a classroom, and warned that this reality was subject to change even though she felt it was important, adding that she herself had been an itinerant French teacher prior to becoming a principal:

> As you know, not all French teachers have their own classroom. We’ve been fortunate. It will be the first classroom to go if we ever need it for a regular classroom, but we’ve been fortunate that we have the extra room because I know, as being a former French teacher, I was itinerant and it’s not the best. (Orianna’s Principal)

Orianna also reported that her AIM implementation was supported by her principal and other teachers within her school, mostly because “they kind of let the French teachers do their own thing, nobody really worries about us”. She received the funding she needed from her principal for materials and claimed to successfully coordinate her AIM teaching with the other CF teacher who was teaching Grade 4 CF using AIM. Orianna also noted that she had particularly appreciated the support she had received from other AIM teachers outside of her school when she first started using the method four years ago (i.e., tests, games etc.); however, now she declared that she did not need as much support because she had more experience with the method and was in fact “not using AIM as much as [she] did initially”.

**Observed teaching practices (Orianna)**

Orianna’s CF classes lasted an average of 40 minutes. Each of the observed classes began with the teacher initiating choral repetition of the AIM rap related to the French-only rule, followed by her asking students about the date, the weather, and how they were each feeling that day. She rewarded students for speaking in French by giving them fake money or tickets from the AIM resources, which all counted towards prizes awarded at the end of each month.

As Table 16 demonstrates, Orianna’s observed CF classes were predominantly teacher-centred, either with her at the front leading the class (48%) or leading the students in choral language work (11%), and she normally controlled the content of each lesson (80%). Students from each grade that Orianna taught (i.e., Grade 4/5, 6, 7 and 8) were observed listening during the majority of the study period (48% of the observed time), and speaking chorally (14%) or reading and writing (12%) during much of the remaining time, although her intermediate students spent more time reading and writing than the other grades (e.g., they completed a test
Table 16
COLT Observation Data (Orianna) – Percentage of Total Observed Time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ALL Grades (6)</th>
<th>Grade 4/5 (3)</th>
<th>Grade 6 (1)</th>
<th>Grade 8 (2)</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Participant Organization</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T – S/C</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T – S/C + Choral</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choral</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S – S/C</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group (same task)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual (same task)</td>
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<td><strong>Content Control</strong></td>
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<td>80</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>81</td>
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<td><strong>Student Modality</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>53</td>
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<tr>
<td>Speaking + Listening</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading + Writing</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<td><strong>Materials (type and source)</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>29</td>
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<td>Sentence</td>
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<td>Audio</td>
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<td>L2-NNS Textbook</td>
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<td>50</td>
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<td>AIM Resource</td>
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<td>50</td>
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<td>Gesture (all)</td>
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<td>Gesture (specific)</td>
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<td><strong>Language Use</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher: L2 only</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Text / play</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students’ lives</td>
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<tr>
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<td>57</td>
<td>72</td>
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</table>
and independent desk work during the observed classes). Orianna (99%) and her students (89%) were observed speaking almost exclusively in French during the study, with the student average being brought down by some isolated use of English during their group work. She was observed providing the least amount of gesture support with her intermediate students.

Findings from the observations revealed some interesting differences between Orianna’s use of AIM at each grade level. For instance, she was observed modeling over half of the time with her Grade 4/5 students (59%), and almost never with the other grades. Students in her Grade 6 class also completed more group work (25% of observed time), while her intermediate students spent the same amount of time completing work independently. Also, the type and source of text she used with each grade level differed, as she was observed using predominantly AIM-based sentence-level text with her Grade 6s (50%) and intermediate students (51%), while using a combination of minimal (22%), sentence-level (28%) and extended (6%) text with her Grade 4/5 students that was mainly teacher-made. This varied use of text contributed to her Grade 4/5 classes being less contextualized in the AIM play under study (4%) than her other AIM classes (32% for Grade 6 and 37% for Grade 7 and 8 respectively). This pattern in the data can be attributed to the fact that Orianna was observed initiating a lot of non-AIM games that she had created herself involving (a) isolated vocabulary words, grammar conjugation or extended song lyrics in the case of the Grade 4/5s; and (b) sentence-level text with her older students, often using total/partial questions or phrases from the AIM play they were studying.

Observation data revealed that Orianna allowed her students to lead the class between 14% and 18% of the time observed, which was the most of any of the participating teachers from either case context. This data relates directly to an activity that she introduced at the beginning of each of her AIM classes, and that she said she used in response to an aspect that she found was missing from the accompanying resources. Like Odette, Orianna felt that the AIM materials were too centred on the play, resulting in a lack of opportunity to assess how students could actually use their French outside of this context. In response, she was observed implementing an activity routinely with all of her CF classes called the “Chaise Chaude” [Hot Seat]. During this activity, a student would volunteer to sit at the front of the room on the “hot seat”, and the rest of the class was required to ask them general questions about themselves and their lives. Students were expected to ask and answer questions in full sentences, reading from a sheet of “question starters” that they had collaboratively created at the beginning of the year. Orianna sat at the back of the
class assessing individual students’ abilities to use their French independently, as she reported feeling that this activity and using other non-AIM materials helped her to assess students’ true fluency as opposed to their ability to recite what they had memorized:

So I want to know if they can, in another situation, take what they know and create sentences and communicate, and I don’t find that AIM offers that opportunity, even with rewriting the story or retelling the story. It’s still a lot of the same structures and so that’s why I do a lot of other things like the Chaise Chaude [Hot Seat], or I have a picture on the board and they have to tell me or write what they see.

Orianna described other activities and resources that had worked for her in the past that she now used to compensate for aspects of AIM she felt were missing or to supplement the method. For instance, she reported feeling that there were not enough reading and writing activities in the AIM materials. For the reading in particular, she wanted her students to practice reading with non-AIM materials, especially seeing as the vocabulary they were learning was not exclusive to the AIM materials:

That’s one great thing about AIM it’s all encompassing vocabulary. It can be applied in many other situations, which is great. The books I have, the things I have, they are really old, but I don’t care. They work and the kids understand it so I supplement with that for the reading.

Orianna also felt that teaching grammar explicitly was important, although it was not something that was particularly promoted by AIM. She described how she introduced explicit grammar activities throughout the grades (e.g., verb conjugation with Grade 4/5s and 6s observed during this study) to prepare students for high school, because “their focus is really on grammar and AIM is more on the communication part”. She also talked about how she would consciously try to introduce explicit grammar activities in an AIM way, either by doing so in French instead of English, or using AIM vocabulary:

Sometimes I think you just need to talk about how this is the way things go and why we do this in French but we don’t do it in English, and do some grammar worksheets on it to practice it. I mean, anytime I teach a grammar lesson, it’s still in French. And I still try and incorporate the AIM vocabulary. That’s where AIM is great, because anything I’m doing, whether it’s AIM or not, I’m still using the AIM vocabulary and actions. So the kids are understanding it because we’re taking what they already know, and then applying it to new contexts.

Orianna acknowledged that, although AIM “comes more naturally to [her] now” after four years of experience, she would most likely “be supplementing with any program [she]
used”. While she predicted that she would continue to use AIM as long as she was teaching CF, Olivia acknowledged that she had successfully integrated it into her own teaching practice, so much so that she felt validated in her decisions regarding what she used and did not use from AIM (e.g., gestures):

I want to use AIM forever. It may evolve…. At first I was focused on AIM all the way and everything had to be a gesture. And then it just depends on the situation now, I don’t feel obligated always to do a gesture for everything I’m doing because their comprehension is so good that I don’t need to. They know what I’m saying without it and I’m sure that will change over time too. Every class is different. Certainly with the Grade 4s, I don’t see that changing at all because it’s such a great start.

Despite feeling justified, Orianna’s interview data revealed that she was not entirely confident that her supplementing of AIM represented an ‘appropriate’ use of the method. She felt that she was doing what was right for her, but was not as certain that she could be characterized as a typical AIM teacher:

I may not be using AIM just like in the video, but I do believe that the kids are learning and AIM is helping me, so I don’t think it’s a bad thing for me to use it the way it works for me… Even when I offered my classroom to you for this study, I thought, ‘Am I an AIM teacher?’, because how much of it do I follow to the letter? Do I stray too much to be an AIM teacher? I don’t know.

Ultimately though, she felt that every teacher could benefit from using AIM to some extent, but that “[AIM] is not the be all and end all”.

**Challenges using AIM (Orianna)**

Aside from the challenges associated with attending AIM-related PD sessions offered by the board, and addressing aspects that she felt were missing from AIM and the accompanying materials (e.g., grammar teaching, materials for assessment and reading and writing, etc.), Orianna’s interview data revealed additional challenges that she experienced while implementing AIM. Like Olivia, she described how teaching split classes throughout students’ CF learning experience inevitably led to having students with different ranges of vocabulary knowledge, and required elaborate organization and tracking of the plays they would study so as to avoid subsequent repetition:

I’m feeling a little frustrated with AIM right now in the Grade 4/5 class, because of the split and some had French last year, because I have to look at what plays have been done in the past, and what plays I have to do in the future. We’re doing a play right now that we don’t actually have all of the supplies for.
Transferring control to her students was also a challenge she identified in each of her interviews. Although she viewed herself as the “facilitator”, and felt that she had taught her students the essential vocabulary and that “they had all the tools they need, so now it’s their job to take over”, Orianna went on in subsequent interviews to describe the challenges associated with her perceived role as a facilitator, claiming that she was having difficulty “taking a step back” and “backing off on how much I’m at the front”.

Like many of the other AIM-optional teachers, Orianna made specific reference to the challenges associated with using AIM with intermediate students, particularly those at the Grade 8 level. She noticed a decline in their motivation to participate in her AIM classes, and attributed this to the longer AIM plays they had to study and the fact that “the gestures aren’t cool with Grade 8s anymore”. Orianna went on to describe how she reacted to this challenge by decreasing the amount that she gestured in her Grade 8 classes. She also talked about breaking up the play into sections; however, this did not always work, saying that “even then they found that it was too much...they did not end up putting the effort into it that they would have normally”.

**NANCY**

Nancy was recruited to participate in this study because she had chosen not to use AIM for CF teaching in the AIM-optional board. At the time of the study, Nancy had been teaching CF for 11 years, mainly at the Grade 5 to 8 levels. During her interview, she explained that she had first been introduced to AIM when she was a member of the FSL committee in her board. During those meetings, she described how many of her colleagues were offering their opinions about the method without having observed it in use or having tried it themselves. Nancy stated that she did not want to “comment [on AIM] based on no experience”, so she bought some of the resources and began using the method in her Grade 4/5 CF class. While she admitted that her use of the method was limited due to the fact that she had not attended any formal PD workshops offered by the board or the creators of the method, after a year of following the directives in her AIM resources Nancy noticed an improvement in her students’ speaking skills and vocabulary base:

I loved [AIM] with my Grade 4s and 5s because they were speaking in French. And I had felt for years that… I was missing some repetition of language. I always wished if I could take some sort of basic language and keep building on it, which is AIM right? Pared down language. So I loved that aspect of it and I thought the Grade 4s and 5s loved it. They just ran with it and they were such good speakers. So that’s a huge strength.
Although Nancy was drawn to AIM because of its potential to fill a void in her CF teaching practice, she stated that she was discouraged by the “rules and regulations” associated with the method. Nancy maintained that she had always brought her own ideas and intuitions to any textbook or fixed program she had used in the past, and that AIM was no different. She described how she had tried to combine some plays and strategies from AIM with a textbook that had worked for her in the past (i.e., *Visages*) to offer her students variety and prevent them from getting bored of the same method:

So what I would do is just maybe do one play with the Grade 3/4s for fun…For me, I always thought that if I could take that beautiful pared down language, and that way of introducing it, and make it consistent throughout and then build that in with *Visages*, with the variety? Because I felt like, by the time they’ve done that for a couple of years, by the time they get to Grade 7 and 8 they are so blasé about everything anyway that I think they would just reject AIM. Even though they’d go along with it, they’d go, is there something else? Like a little variety, take all that wonderful rich language and combine that with the beauty of multiple intelligences, I think you’d have the perfect method….So I try to almost kind of do that myself.

While she conceded that this “was certainly not how AIM is meant to be delivered”, she felt it was the best she could do in the face of her desire for variety, and also the limiting contextual factors inherent to the CF program (e.g., organizing the plays around split classes, the inevitable presence of transient students who entered or left her CF classes at various points during the school year). She also identified a lack of research evidence that AIM was superior, saying that anecdotal evidence would have been all she had to go on when making decisions about her teaching practice.

That was one thing that I kept asking, is there any research? Is there more evidence, because research informs and enriches for sure. And the answer seemed to always be no. Just a lot of, you know, your own anecdotal stuff.

Nancy felt that CF teachers should be viewed as the “captain of the ship”, and consequently supported her board’s policy on leaving AIM as an optional method for CF teachers to use or not. She felt that mandating AIM would negatively affect both teacher and student motivation, and questioned the method’s effectiveness if it was forced on teachers as the only method at their disposal:

If you have a teacher in there and you’re forcing a program or a method or anything on them, they’re driving that classroom and if they feel resentful or unhappy, that’s going to play out and the kids are going to feel it and that’s not fair. It’s not going to be productive…and maybe there’s a recognition too that, you know what? If we try to force
this on you, is it really going to work?

Overall, Nancy acknowledged that AIM was “another tool in her tool chest of teaching”, doubting that “one best method” even existed. She declared that pedagogy evolves over time and that teachers have to adjust their practices to the ever-changing context and different students that are in their classes:

Honestly, I really have mixed emotions about what is the best method. And I guess as a teacher that maybe you do that your whole career, keep questioning. And, maybe that’s a good thing, keep informing yourself about what’s effective or what works, and what works with one class isn’t necessarily going to work with another. And maybe there isn’t one method, I don’t know if there is.

Summary and Discussion

In this chapter, I have presented observation and interview data related to each of the four teachers from the board where AIM was left as an optional method for CF teachers to use. I also reported on data from Nancy’s interview (i.e., the CF teacher in this board who chose not to use AIM). In order to better understand how AIM is being used in the “AIM-optional case”, I will now summarize the commonalities and differences between each AIM-optional teacher’s observed implementation of the method, suggest reasons for the choices they made, and discuss the impact that keeping the method optional had on these CF teachers’ practices and perspectives. I will integrate Nancy’s interview data where relevant, and also begin to compare and contrast findings from these teachers to those from the AIM-mandated context described in Chapter 6. I will conclude by proposing a consolidated synopsis of teacher implementation in the AIM-optional case that facilitates the subsequent cross-case comparison in Chapter 8.

Commonalities in AIM implementation

Considered collectively, some of the commonalities between AIM-optional teachers’ implementation of AIM are similar to those from the AIM-mandated teachers’ observed practice. For instance, implementation in all of the AIM-optional contexts was predominantly teacher-centred. Similar to the AIM-mandated teachers, all four of the AIM-optional teachers consistently implemented the same entry routine in each of their AIM classrooms, including getting students to recite the date, the weather, how they were feeling that day and initiating choral repetition of an AIM entry rap associated with following the French-only rule in their classroom. In addition, they each instituted a reward system to motivate their students to speak in French; however, they used a variety of tokens, including fake money, popsicle sticks, colored
buttons and the AIM ticket system, all of which represented class-specific point values. Two AIM-optimal teachers were also observed incorporating negative reinforcement strategies to deal with students who did not follow the French-only rule in their AIM classroom, including a diminishing points balance (Olivia) and a scheme where students’ work was marked with a bingo dabber if they broke the rule (Odette).

Another commonality in the AIM-optimal teachers’ observed implementation which resembled that of the AIM-mandated teachers’ was the use of AIM at the intermediate level, particularly Grade 8. Each teacher from the AIM-optimal context who taught Grade 8 CF using AIM (i.e., Olivia, Oksana and Orianna) was observed providing the least amount of gesture support with this group of students. While this practice is expected at later stages of AIM implementation (Maxwell, 2006, 2008), participating teachers appeared to be doing this for additional reasons, mainly because Grade 8 students were demonstrating resistance to the teacher’s gesturing and to any expectation that students would have to gesture as well. Some AIM-optimal teachers went on to identify consequences of this resistance, saying that their Grade 8 students were not speaking as much during their AIM classes because they were gesturing less, or that they were focusing more of their efforts on their younger AIM students in order to get them on board early and circumvent the kind of opposition they were experiencing at the intermediate grades. Research on student perspectives towards AIM (Mady et al., 2009) showed that Grade 8 AIM students were similarly resistant to the gestures associated with the method, and were commonly opposed to them because they thought the gestures were ‘childish’.

On the whole, these findings suggest that teachers’ offering of gestural support at the older grades was as much affected by student attitudes as it was by a desire to adhere to the central tenet of AIM that teachers should need to gesture less as students proceed through the AIM units and build their core vocabulary.

Similar to the AIM-mandated teachers, the AIM-optimal teachers were observed supplementing the method by introducing their own materials and non-AIM activities, and extending or avoiding certain AIM activities and strategies. Like the AIM-mandated teachers, they often included the use of AIM gestures, vocabulary sequencing, and reference to the AIM play under study in the majority of their customized activities. While the AIM-optimal teachers used different materials and activities than their AIM-mandated counterparts (e.g., computer software promoted by the board), their interview data showed that most of their reasons for doing
so were similar (i.e., need to add reading materials beyond the play; increase opportunities for writing; help assess students’ independent use of French; keep students motivated). Different motives included Olivia’s need to supplement in order to provide differentiated instruction, and Orianna’s insistence on introducing explicit grammar lessons to help students transition to the Grade 9 CF classroom, which she felt was often more grammar-focused. In her interview, Nancy also described how she had tried to pick and choose aspects of AIM that she found desirable and combine them with non-AIM materials in order to diversify her teaching and prevent students from getting bored of one method. One important difference between the Mandated and Optional cases was how the beginner CF teacher in both contexts supplemented their AIM practice. Although Oksana admitted to sometimes jumping around through the sequenced activities in the AIM manual, she was not observed to be supplementing as much as the other AIM-optional teachers and reported that she found comfort and confidence in her AIM teaching practice by following the manual as closely as possible. Interestingly, the other AIM-optional teachers recalled how they too had followed the manual more during their beginning years using the method, and did not follow it as much now. In contrast, Miranda (the first year CF teacher from the AIM-mandated context) avoided following the AIM manual as her ‘teaching bible’, and instead used her French Immersion resources extensively. On the whole, it is clear from these findings, coupled with those from the AIM-mandated teachers that AIM teachers generally supplement and omit aspects of the method when implementing it for CF instruction. The different ways in which they were observed to be doing so also support the consensus in the literature (e.g., Bell, 2007; Block 2001; Larsen-Freeman, 1996, 2000b; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Tudor, 2001) that teachers conduct their L2 teaching in diverse ways to suit their context, their existing practice, and their students’ needs, regardless of what method they claim to be employing.

Another commonality between the AIM-optional teachers – and a point where they differed from the AIM-mandated teachers - was that they each of them used French almost exclusively, and either never used English during their observations (i.e., Olivia and Oksana) or hardly at all (i.e., Odette and Orianna). Orianna and Odette both rationalized that the only reason they used English in their AIM classroom was to highlight differences between English and French, a reason for using students’ first languages in the L2 classroom that teachers in other studies have endorsed (e.g., Arnett, 2001; Duff & Polio, 1990; Polio & Duff, 1994; Rolin-Ianziti
Contrary to the AIM-mandated teachers, AIM-optional teachers did not use less French with their older students; rather, they remained consistent throughout the grades they taught on this criteria. Considered collectively, these findings are particularly interesting in the case of Oksana, who was new to both AIM and CF teaching, and who continually reported feeling self-conscious about the inadequacy of her fluency in French and whether it measured up to the expectations of the AIM method. According to Salvatori (2007), Oksana’s insecurities are common with non-native speakers of French who teach CF.

Students’ use of French in the AIM-optional classes highlight a similar pattern to the teachers, with AIM-optional students observed using French more exclusively than students in the AIM-mandated context. Levine (2003) would argue that the AIM-optional students were using the target language more than the AIM-mandated students because they were accustomed to its use in the classroom and therefore experienced less target language anxiety. While researchers are still at odds as to how much the target language should be used in the L2 classroom (c.f. Cummins, 2007; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002), these findings suggest that the AIM-optional teachers were invested in the French-only central tenet of AIM, and were observed adhering to this rule to a higher degree than their AIM-mandated counterparts. On the whole, the findings across AIM-optional and AIM-mandated contexts imply that using AIM may enable teachers to maximize the use of French in the CF classroom.

Differences in AIM implementation

The observation data for the AIM-optional teachers revealed some differences between their individual implementation. For example, while findings showed that the AIM-optional classrooms were all multi-modal in nature, the predominant “modes” were often different for each teacher. During the majority of time observed, Oksana and Orianna’s students were listening, Odette’s students were reading and writing, and Olivia’s students were almost equally listening and speaking chorally (i.e., speaking and listening). As discussed in their separate sections, these patterns in student modality can be explained by their preference for teacher-led activities (e.g., Olivia’s welcome message and ensuing teacher-led self-expression episodes; Oksana’s whole class games and entry routines) or the lengthy non-AIM routine activities they presented in their classroom (e.g., Orianna’s ‘Hot Seat’ activity, Odette’s ‘Welcome Questions’ activity).

The AIM-optional teachers were also observed using different types of text materials across grades. Orianna and Odette introduced predominantly sentence-level text across each of
the grades they taught, and used more materials that they had created themselves. In contrast, Oksana and Olivia used mostly AIM-based text materials; however, they varied in the type of text used across grades – (a) Oksana introduced more minimal-level text with her Grade 5s and more sentence-level with her Grade 4s; and (b) Olivia went from using mostly extended level text with her Grade 4s, to mostly minimal-level with her Grade 6s, and finally to mostly sentence-level text with her Grade 8s. Certainly, as I mentioned in Chapter 4, the number of observations I was able to conduct is limited in the extent to which they represent each teacher’s habitual implementation of AIM over the course of the entire school year. Also, I was unable to observe any participating teacher’s AIM implementation right from the beginning of the school year, when it would have been more likely that they were introducing the play in its entirety in order to familiarize students with it (Maxwell, 2006, 2008). However, despite these limitations, the differences observed do suggest that as the school year progresses, the AIM-optional teachers varied in the way that they integrated the base AIM text (i.e., the play) into their AIM classrooms, either in its full form (extended), in sentential parts (sentence) or in separate vocabulary units (minimal). Also, in the AIM-optional context, teachers with more CF teaching experience (i.e., Orianna and Odette), but not necessarily more AIM experience (as was the case in the AIM-mandated context), were observed integrating more non-AIM materials and activities into their CF classes. Odette and Orianna both attributed their confidence in supplementing to their extended CF experience (17 and 20 years) and their more recent AIM experience (2 and 4 years), saying that both experiences had collectively provided them with the scope required to know where their students needed to end up at the end of the year. Interestingly, contrary to the AIM-mandated context, experience using AIM and more CF teaching time did not result in teachers using more extended level text or contextualizing their CF classes in the AIM-play under study to a greater extent. However, the AIM-optional teacher with the most AIM experience (i.e., Olivia) was the only teacher observed to be initiating the more detailed play extension activities in her CF classroom (e.g., story extension, story rewrite). Perhaps in this case, as Prabhu (1990) would suggest, CF teaching experience was most influential in activating the AIM-optional teachers’ sense of plausibility when it came to supplementing; however, AIM experience still influenced whether teachers introduced the more detailed play extension activities in their AIM classrooms.

Observation and interview data revealed that the AIM-optional teachers seemed to have
different degrees of concern for how their use of AIM compared to how the method was portrayed in the materials. For instance, Odette felt that as long as her practices fell in line with her interpretation of the underlying philosophy of AIM (i.e., that second language acquisition should mimic first language acquisition, where learners hear French first, then speak French, and only after that do they see French in writing), then any supplementing or omitting or activities was still representative of good AIM teaching. Olivia felt confident that her adherence to the sequence of activities and techniques described in the AIM materials was acceptable, despite her reported challenge of organizing time appropriately to fit them all in. Olivia also suggested that implementing the method using “non-AIM materials” (ironically similar to how Nancy described her use of the method) was not only feasible but acceptable practice, as long as teachers who did so followed her list of criteria for proper AIM implementation (e.g., French-only; introduce vocabulary orally first with gesture support, etc.). In contrast, while Orianna and Oksana were both confident that how they were using AIM was right for them, they were not as certain as the others that they could be characterized as “AIM teachers”. Oksana reported feeling guilty that she was not able to get through the prescribed two plays per school year, and sensed that she was not as good an AIM teacher as those with more experience because she had yet to master all of the gestures. Orianna was not convinced that supplementing to the extent that she did still made her a true ‘AIM teacher’. Nancy also reported that she considered the way she had experimented with the method to see if it was a good fit for her as not being “the real method”. What is most interesting about this aspect of the AIM-optional teacher data is that many of these same teachers also condemned those who used AIM improperly or who were not 100% invested in its use for doing damage to the method itself, even though they themselves varied in the extent to which they believed that their own AIM teaching represented proper or improper use of the method. According to Prabhu (1990), this type of insecurity and contradiction is indicative of a more “frozen” sense of plausibility, where teachers strongly believe in the method they are following, but also feel threatened by questions about how they are using it instead of confident in the changes they bring to its realization.

**Advantages and challenges using AIM**

The AIM-optional teachers felt that using AIM was advantageous because it enabled them to maintain French as the language of communication. While the AIM-mandated teachers reported the same, they also added that maintaining a French-only environment was challenging, which was evident from their observation data. In contrast to the AIM-mandated teachers, all of
the AIM-optional teachers also had access to their own classroom space in which to implement the method; however, there was no consensus as to whether this was exclusively advantageous to their AIM teaching or to CF teaching in general. Odette argued that having this space was integral to the successful implementation of AIM, while the AIM-optional principals thought it was more generally essential to effective CF teaching, regardless of whether AIM was being used or not. Most of the AIM-optional teachers explicitly credited their space to the efforts of their principal, with some of them acknowledging that their principal’s previous FSL teaching experience also made them more sympathetic to the challenges of teaching ‘à la cart’ [with a cart]. Many of the AIM-optional principals reported noticing a positive change in CF student engagement since the implementation of AIM, which might also explain their willingness to guarantee classroom space for AIM teachers in their school. While there did not appear to be any significant differences between the AIM implementation observed in ‘à la cart’ contexts and contexts where teachers had their own classroom space (aside from the logistical constraints identified by AIM-mandated teachers), those who had their own space did say it helped them to implement activities that required advanced preparation (e.g., writing messages or questions on the board before students arrive), something that theoretically would have been more time consuming in an ‘à la cart’ situation.

In terms of challenges, the AIM-optional teachers had similar concerns to those reported by their AIM-mandated counterparts related to making their AIM classrooms less teacher-centred, getting students to speak more, and dealing with resistance from Grade 8 students. Some AIM-optional teachers also identified different challenges, including the difficulty of offering differentiated CF instruction (Olivia) and organizing what play to introduce when teaching split grade CF classes (Orianna, Olivia, Nancy). Dealing with varied abilities within the CF classroom was the challenge most often cited by CF teachers in the national survey conducted by Lapkin et al. (2006). Interestingly, the AIM-optional teachers in this study did not simply abandon using AIM to reach these students; rather, they felt that strategic supplementing and adapting of the method helped to address these challenges (e.g., Orianna talked about her ‘Hot Seat’ activity getting students speaking more; Olivia using the computer software more in her class to accommodate those students who had special learning needs).

Similar to the AIM-mandated teachers, the AIM-optional teachers expressed the same desire for more face-to-face PD opportunities, and comparable frustration that workshops offered
by the creators of the method (AIM Language Learning, 2012a) were too expensive for them to
attend. Although teachers from this context did not feel that their board needed to offer more
AIM-related PD per se, most (particularly those with more AIM experience) felt that they would
benefit from more variety in the workshops that were being. While everyone but Oksana
reported that they had progressed to a point where they had attended all of the sessions being
offered by the board, the rest of the AIM-optimal teachers differed in their opinions about the
usefulness of attending sessions a second time. Some felt that repeating sessions was not
logistically sensible (Orianna), while others stated that repeating sessions still served a purpose
because they got to share ideas and strategies with other AIM teachers in their board (Odette,
Olivia).

AIM-Optional Teacher Case Typology

Figure 9 represents a consolidated typology of AIM implementation in the AIM-optimal
board that is based on the findings presented in this chapter. This figure highlights the significant
features of the AIM-optimal case, and shows the important similarities and differences between
the four manifestations of AIM observed. Similar to the AIM-mandated teachers, findings show
that participating AIM-optimal teachers: (a) implemented some of the same AIM routines,
techniques, and activities; (b) chose to omit certain AIM strategies and materials from their
practice; and (c) at times, introduced supplementary non-AIM activities and resources in their CF
classes. The types of agency exhibited are also comparable to the Mandated case, with AIM-
optional teachers following some of the same central tenets of the method (i.e., agency of
fidelity), albeit to different degrees (e.g., less exclusive use of the target language observed). Of
particular note for this case were the observation and interview findings showing that AIM-
optional teachers believed in the importance of exercising their agency of fidelity when
beginning to use AIM for CF instruction (i.e., following the AIM manual as closely as possible).
Still, the AIM and non-AIM teachers in the Optional board did exert their “agency of resistance”
when refusing to follow the manual to review gestures in isolation (i.e., kinesthetic reviews), or
when deciding how to progress through the plays in terms of speed and detail. Each of the AIM-
optional teachers also created their own activities or materials to supplement the method (i.e.,
agency of adaptability); however, their reasons for doing so were not all the same as the AIM-
mandated teachers. Most supplemented either in response to a perceived lack of materials, or due
to challenges they were experiencing while using AIM, including resistance from intermediate
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<tr>
<th>COMMONALITIES</th>
<th>DIFFERENCES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Beginning routines</td>
<td>- Use of AIM texts (extended/sentence/minimal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Reward systems <strong>(positive and negative reinforcement)</strong></td>
<td>- Practice = “proper” use of AIM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Teacher-centred classrooms</td>
<td>- Varied progress through AIM manual (e.g., use of extension activities, like story retelling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>French use (teacher) = exclusive (all grades)</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- French use (students) = exclusive (all grades)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Decreased gesture use with older students</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Followed sequence of AIM activities</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>(especially beginner CF teacher)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Supplemented AIM materials/activities</td>
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<td><strong>(especially with more CF experience)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Picking and choosing from AIM manual</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>(both AIM and non-AIM teachers)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>ADVANTAGES</td>
<td>CHALLENGES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- AIM helped teachers to maintain French as language of CF classroom</td>
<td>- Making AIM classes less teacher-centred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Classroom space (advantageous to AIM and CF)</td>
<td>- Getting students to speak more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Supportive principals (especially those with previous FSL teaching experience)</td>
<td>- Grade 8 resistance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- AIM-related in-service PD (lacking variety)</td>
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<td>- External AIM-related PD = too expensive</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Teaching AIM with split classes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Differentiated instruction using AIM materials</td>
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*Figure 9. AIM-Optional Teacher Case (Consolidated Observation and Interview Data)*

students, teaching split grade classes, adopting differentiated instruction strategies, getting students to speak more or making their AIM classroom less teacher-centred. Interestingly, the non-AIM teacher who reported having tried the method reported that she too had exerted her agency of adaptability when choosing aspects of the method that she found desirable and combining them with non-AIM materials to diversify her teaching and to prevent her students from getting bored with the repetition. Findings related to the “agency of experience” were also different from the Mandated case, with CF teaching experience (as opposed to more AIM experience in the case of the Mandated teachers) being linked to the supplementing and adapting that was observed. Nonetheless, similar to Mary (i.e., the AIM-mandated teacher with the most AIM experience), AIM experience was still important when considering the implementation of more advanced strategies like story retelling, as Olivia (i.e., the AIM-optional teacher with the most AIM experience) was observed to be progressing further through the manual in this respect than her AIM-optional colleagues.
The AIM-mandated and AIM-optional teachers also shared some perspectives on the method related to its implementation, which has implications for their shared meaning. Like their AIM-mandated counterparts, the AIM-optional teachers also believed in the dynamic version of AIM they were employing, and the efficacy of the static version of AIM described in the materials. They also seemed to agree that adapting and supplementing the method was acceptable practice, but the AIM-optional teachers differed in how they felt this represented “proper” use of the method despite observations showing that their implementation of AIM was often more dynamic in nature.

To summarize, Figure 10 magnifies the teacher “gear” and incorporates my interpretations of AIM-optional teachers’ agency and shared meaning that emerged from investigating the subjective realities of CF teachers in the AIM-optional context. On the whole, the findings related to teacher implementation in both cases strengthen the proposed idea from Chapter 5 that AIM teachers believe in a more evolutionary or “mutual-adaptation” perspective related to the method. Regardless of whether AIM is mandated or not, teacher practices and beliefs reflect the view that implementation is most efficient when they are able to make their own decisions and adaptations in relation to the pure version of the method, resulting in change that is determined by the combination of the idealism represented by the “pure” version of AIM and their specific context. In the next chapter, findings from these three preceding chapters are examined in more detail to determine how teachers’ shared meaning and agency-related findings correspond to the perspectives of other participating educators (i.e., principals, FSL consultants, Ontario Ministry Representative). Cross-case analysis findings comparing the AIM-mandated and AIM-optional case findings are also discussed, and the implications for the theoretical frameworks embedded in my lens, as well as other applicable theories, are presented.
Figure 10. Magnification of Theoretical Framework (AIM-Optional Teacher Implementation).
Chapter 8 – Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion

Introduction

The major point of comparison between the two groups of Core French (CF) teachers in this study is that AIM had been mandated in one board and left optional in the other. In the first half of this chapter, I briefly consider the findings from the previous three chapters to examine the overall influence that the Mandated and Optional policies had on AIM implementation in this study. Following this analysis, I propose a consolidated representation of the “Quintain” (Stake, 2006) – in other words, a customized and expanded version of Figure 2 (see Chapter 3) that takes into account the overlapping features and distinct characteristics of the Mandated and Optional contexts. In the second half of this chapter, I begin discussing the amalgamated representation of AIM implementation in more detail considering the theoretical frameworks guiding this study, and then reflect on the implications of this discussion for the theoretical concepts involved.

Influence of Mandating AIM

The majority of AIM-mandated consultants and principals in this study were generally supportive of the mandate in place – if it was not their decision to mandate AIM, they commonly believed that those who had originally proposed the mandate must have had good reason to do so, so they supported its widespread use. What was interesting, however, was the defensive nature of their responses when speaking to the overall effectiveness of AIM or its value for CF instruction in their board, especially given their lack of knowledge regarding the AIM materials, previous research that had been conducted on AIM, and what AIM represented (e.g., program, method, approach etc.). This defensive tone was particularly evident during the consultant focus group, when mention of potential challenges or limitations of AIM put forth by some AIM-optional consultants was met with targeted justifications by others who had mandated the method or who were encouraging its widespread implementation. As Fullan (2007) would contend, this indicates that the AIM-mandated consultants and principals had cultivated a strong affective connection to AIM, but were maybe not as strongly connected to the cognitive dimension of the change (i.e., knowledge about AIM) beyond the board-level research they cited.

As for the AIM-mandated teachers, findings showed that they had established a similar connection to AIM along the affective dimension of meaningful change. When asked how long they envisioned using the method to teach CF, they all wanted to continue using AIM both because of the mandate and in spite of it. They also reported a desire for more AIM-related PD
opportunities, not so much to further their knowledge about the method, but more for
guidance, inspiration and validation from “AIM experts” and/or fellow AIM teachers from their
board. In terms of the cognitive dimension, interview findings suggested that the Mandated
teachers gained the majority of their knowledge about the method from using it and
incorporating it into their existing CF teaching practice. With this in mind, it is not surprising
that the AIM-mandated teachers did not use the method in a completely uniform way, nor did
they think they had to just because the method had been mandated. Some AIM-mandated
teachers did question whether they were using the method “incorrectly”, and findings showed
that most felt more accountable to the creators of the method or the directives in the manual than
they did to the board. None of the teachers reported that their use of AIM was being monitored
or regulated, with some even indicating that they knew of CF teachers who were not using AIM,
even though they were teaching CF at the AIM-mandated levels (i.e., Kindergarten to Grade 6).
The lack of AIM-related PD opportunities reported by the AIM-mandated teachers also led them
to question the board’s commitment to supporting the mandate in place, and reflect on the
reasoning behind the mandate itself.

As Tudor (2001) maintained, the act of mandating AIM suggests the belief in a linear
relationship between AIM and student learning. In this study, the Mandated board’s actions (as
described by the teachers) and educator perspectives from other Mandated boards reflect a more
complicated and uncertain view of the role that AIM on its own plays in student learning. For
example, teachers, consultants and principals did not agree on whether the accompanying AIM
materials should be considered prescriptive or supportive during implementation of the method.
Also absent were any explicit guidelines, coordinated monitoring or collaborative reflection
related to the use of the method that had been mandated. All in all, it did not seem as if a uniform
implementation of AIM was desired, as teachers were ultimately left to use AIM as they saw fit.
In my opinion, this indicates that the AIM-mandated board did not view AIM classrooms as
controllable learning environments, and implicitly accepted that teachers would exert their
agency in order to implement the method given their subjective realities. Acknowledging the
supportive and prescriptive nature of the materials also implies that they did not believe that
AIM on its own would lead to success; rather, they seemed to agree that the teacher was key and
that “methodology does contribute to classroom realities, but it does so dynamically, in
interaction with various aspects of context” (Tudor, 2001, p. 133).
Influence of Keeping AIM Optional

While the consultants and principals in this context reported a similar lack of knowledge related to the AIM materials and previous AIM-related research as their Mandated counterparts, they seemed to be more open to critical discussion on the usefulness of the method for CF instruction. Nonetheless, this willingness to critically reflect on the utility of AIM did not appear to have translated into any collective commitment to ongoing reflection or monitoring of how the method was being used across their board for CF instruction.

Emphasizing the importance of the teacher and the affective connection to AIM was not lost on educators from the AIM-optional board. Support for AIM implementation in this context was linked strongly to the notion of teacher investment and agency. Optional consultants and principals were open to supporting teachers who expressed interest in using the method with money for resources, time to attend PD workshops offered by the board, and classroom space to conduct their CF program as they saw fit. While there was no evidence that the AIM-optional board explicitly supported or opposed the use of AIM for CF instruction, the participating AIM-optional teachers felt strongly that they would not have been able to use AIM the way they did without the kind of acceptance and support they had experienced from their school and the board. Interestingly, what seemed to agitate the Optional teachers most of all was the thought of being told that they could not use AIM; a hypothetical scenario that they reported would cause them to seek support for their use of AIM elsewhere, in other schools or boards.

On the whole, these teachers felt that keeping AIM optional for CF teachers acted as a safeguard, ensuring that only those who genuinely believed in it would be using it. It is worth mentioning that these same teachers went on to caution that mandating the method would not guarantee this same level of investment, and would consequently lead to improper use, decreased teacher motivation, or even a “butchering” of the method. The irony of this finding is that, like the AIM-mandated teachers, the AIM-optional teachers also took liberties with how they implemented the method. While they all seemed to be invested in the version of AIM presented to them in the manual, the AIM-optional teachers simultaneously felt self-assured about their use of the method and guilty that it might not represent true AIM teaching – a feeling of shame that the AIM-mandated teachers were also not immune to. In both contexts, this points to a possible disconnect between the teachers’ confidence in their “dynamic” implementation of AIM (i.e., loyalty to central tenets coupled with individualized adaptations and supplementing) and their
belief in the effectiveness of the “static” version of the method described in the materials.

**A Consolidated Representation of AIM Implementation**

As the cross-case analysis suggests, teacher implementation of AIM and educator perspectives on the method did not vary significantly based on whether AIM was mandated or optional for CF instruction. Although there were some noteworthy differences between both contexts, the majority of variation that emerged from the data cannot be attributed solely to the micro-level policy in each context. With this in mind, I propose that these findings need not be characterized solely by the micro-level policy in place; rather, as Figure 11 (and its more detailed version, Figure 12) demonstrate, the important factors influencing educator perspectives and AIM implementation in this study can be better explained using a consolidated graphic that represents these findings through the theoretical lens guiding this study.

Looking at the enlarged prism graphic in both figures, we see the line underneath the heading “External Factors” remains solid to reflect my interpretation of the incidental impact that the Ontario Ministry of Education’s perspective had on perspectives and implementation at the school level. Although the Ontario Ministry Representative said that it is at the discretion of each school board to use or mandate AIM, none of the participants explicitly mentioned that this leniency had directly influenced their decisions, perspectives or actions related to its use. Also, while the Ministry seemed to be open to different methods, their mandate about what materials can or cannot be used in Ontario elementary CF classes did not seem to impact CF programming that included AIM in this study. The materials that accompanied the AIM method are not listed on the Trillium List (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012); however, findings showed that they were being used in the majority of contexts where the method was being implemented. As well, while the Ontario Ministry Representative emphasized the importance of monitoring the use of AIM if government funds were being used to support its use, findings showed that such systematic monitoring or reflection were lacking in both contexts.

The thick dotted line and two thin arrows above “Board-level Policy” reflect the minor influence that mandating or keeping AIM optional had on educator perspectives, and insignificant influence on teacher implementation. For example, while mandating AIM seemed to restrict the ability of consultants to critically consider both the benefits and the challenges of using the method for CF instruction in their board, critical reflection about the valuable and impractical aspects of AIM was not beyond the scope of the AIM-mandated teachers. While
AIM-optional educators considered the strategic aspect of their policy as ensuring teacher investment in AIM, the teachers in this context felt that the lack of overt support for the method they had chosen meant that they were still vulnerable to possibly being told that they could not use AIM any more. Nonetheless, this did not seem to impact how they used the method in their day-to-day teaching.

Of paramount importance to this study are the enlarged teacher gear and four thick arrows and thinner dotted line below “Characteristics of AIM”. As findings from the previous three chapters show, whether implicit or explicit, teacher agency played a central role in how AIM was implemented and how it was perceived by educators in this study. In terms of the characteristics of AIM, the consensus amongst all of the educators seemed to be that AIM fulfilled a long-time need for more French in the CF classroom, a kick-start at the beginning of CF programming, and added motivation towards CF in general. Aside from these reasons for using AIM, the types of long-term objectives (e.g., improved student learning, new skills, satisfaction, etc.) emphasized by Fullan (2007, p.66) as being vital to the survival of an educational change beyond the phase of implementation were rarely mentioned. The fact that
educators used various terms to describe AIM throughout their interviews (i.e., program, method, approach, strategy, resource) is also indicative of a lack of clarity related to what AIM represents, but may also suggest that the distinction between these concepts is not relevant to their practical discourse (Akbari, 2008). In terms of complexity, despite the AIM teachers’ willingness to adapt the method for older students (particularly Grade 8s), using AIM with older grades emerged as an ongoing “wrench” that influenced how it was used and educators’ opinions
about its viability beyond the initial elementary CF grades. Other studies have also highlighted the negative impact that teacher-centred classroom environments like those observed in this study can have on adolescent student motivation and engagement in the learning process (Barber & Olsen, 2004; Eccles et al., 1993; Marshall, 2011; O’Connell Schmakel, 2008), which might explain the resistance that teachers reported experiencing when using AIM gestures during teacher-led activities with their intermediate students. The fact that teachers reported supplementing and changing the way they used AIM in response to this resistance, instead of abandoning their use of it altogether, speaks to their belief in its utility at the intermediate level which addresses previous findings questioning whether Grade 8 is an optimal level at which to use AIM (Mady et al., 2009), as well as claims that methods are often limited in their relevance beyond the first lessons of mainly lower level classes (e.g., Brown, 1997; Bell, 2003).

The theoretical lens guiding this study is informed by Sociocultural Theory and Michael Fullan’s framework of Meaningful Educational Change. In the next sections, I use each of these theories to further explain the consolidated findings, and then reflect on how these new understandings affect the ongoing evolution of the theories themselves, thus making analytical generalizations (Yin, 1989, 2009) to the domain of both implicated theories. For example, each of the eight participating teachers were observed to be exercising the theoretical principle of mediated agency, which as Yin (2009) would contend, represents a convincing “theoretical replication” (p.55) of a general phenomenon that would warrant analytical generalization.

**Sociocultural Theory**

The notions of mediated agency and internalization, as well as aspects of critical sociocultural theory are all useful tools for expanding the explanation of findings from this study.

**Mediated agency**

The sociocultural concept of mediated agency proposes that mediational tools enable humans to function in a range of contexts and carry out a variety of cultural activities that would otherwise be impossible (Wertsch et al., 1993). According to these findings, one important aspect of CF instruction that was made possible with AIM, and has otherwise been lacking, according to previous CF research (c.f. Lapkin et al., 2009), was the maximized use of French as the language of the classroom. Participating teachers attributed their regular use of French to AIM, and even the non-AIM teacher reported using more French when she was experimenting with the method. However, teachers also found it challenging to decrease the amount of
linguistic scaffolding and modeling that they were providing to the students in order to maintain this French-only learning environment. Although findings showed that students were often speaking almost as much French as their teachers during the majority of observed AIM classes, many of the teachers reported that they were struggling to develop their mediated agency beyond the teacher-centred stage of the method. They stated that older students in particular were resisting their attempts to transfer responsibility for maintaining the French-only rule over to the students, mainly because of the choral work and/or gestures that were seen to facilitate their willingness to use French as much as possible. As Lantolf and Thorne (2006) would suggest, this demonstrates that the idealized transfer from teacher-centred organization to student-centred organization that AIM envisions becomes complicated by teacher-student negotiations concerning the usefulness of AIM as a mediating tool for student learning. This negotiation could account for the majority of reported resistance of older students to AIM seen here and in other AIM research (Mady et al., 2009).

It is interesting to note that the majority of participating AIM teachers continued to negotiate beyond this threshold with their older students, and exercised their agency by adapting the method to barter a compromise where AIM was still being used and students’ needs were still being met. Interestingly, this was not the only type of agency that participating teachers were observed to be exercising during their implementation of AIM. Following Ahearn’s (2001) recommendation that classifying agentive acts can help illustrate the multidimensional nature of agency within structures of power, findings demonstrate that the mediated agency observed can be classified in four different ways. As Table 17 shows, participating teachers in both cases followed some of the same routines and activities prescribed by the mediational means employed (agency of fidelity), opted out of others as they saw fit (agency of resistance) and adapted certain activities and materials to supplement the method (agency of adaptability). The teacher with the least amount of CF and AIM experience also seemed more inclined to exert her agency of fidelity when starting to use the method, which was a strategy that the other AIM teachers reported practising when they first began using AIM. However, those same teachers credited their accumulating CF or AIM experience as validating their decisions on how to use AIM, and integrated practices that had worked for them in the past with those from the method (agency of experience).
Internalization

As Johnson (2009) would agree, agency played an important role in determining what aspects of AIM were internalized by the participating teachers. More specifically, their focus on taking ownership of the method suggests that their internalization of AIM was more about appropriation than mastery (Wertsch, 1998). Although they strove to follow the manual closely when first starting out, and often felt guilty about how their practice measured up to the version of AIM described in the manual and presented at PD workshops, they were more focused on mastering the integration of AIM into their existing practice and adapting it to suit their contextual needs. In this sense, teachers’ sense of plausibility (Prabhu, 1990) could be considered to have been highly engaged, particularly in the case of those with more AIM and CF teaching experience. While experienced teachers commonly have a more diverse repertoire of practices to draw from (Arends, 2004), observations showed that AIM teaching across all participants was more “real” than “mechanical” as teachers extracted aspects of the method that worked or did not work for them:

> When the sense of plausibility is engaged, the activity of teaching is productive. There is then a basis for the teacher to be satisfied or dissatisfied about the activity, and each instance of such satisfaction or dissatisfaction is itself a further influence on the sense of plausibility, confirming or disconfirming or revising it in some small measure, and generally contributing to its growth or change. (Prabhu, 1990, p. 172)

The guilt that teachers reported is also evidence that they were engaged in a “doubting and believing game” (Elbow, 1973), contemplating what aspects of AIM they agreed or disagreed with, and acknowledging those that challenged their notions about effective CF teaching. While participating teachers justified their appropriation of AIM, and consultants and principals supported such appropriation by accepting teacher agency, many teachers remained uncertain about how their AIM teaching measured up to the pure characterization of the method, with some condemning those who used AIM improperly or who were not completely invested in its use for doing damage to the method itself. According to Prabhu (1990), this type of insecurity is indicative of a more “frozen” sense of plausibility, where teachers strongly believe in the method they are following, but also feel threatened by doubts about how they are using it instead of confident in the changes they bring to its realization. Although the promotion of teacher agency in this study does well to “thaw” their sense of plausibility, these findings suggest
Table 17

AIM Teacher Agency Typology

<table>
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<th>Agency Type</th>
<th>Supporting data</th>
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| **Fidelity** | • Teacher-centred pedagogy  
• General use of AIM materials  
• Sequencing of AIM activities  
• AIM routines (raps, rewards, small talk)  
• AIM play questions (oral and written activities)  
• Choral activity  
• French use (exclusive or dominant)  
• Decreased gesture use as students progress through units  
• Following the manual closely when first starting to use AIM |
| **Resistance** | • Avoid gesture reviews  
• Few extended text activities (e.g., story retelling)  
• Reduction of time spent studying the AIM play  
• Taking break from AIM (e.g., Olympic unit) |
| **Adaptability** | • Use of non-AIM materials  
(e.g., *French comic books*, *Xpress Lab software*, etc.)  
• Use of teacher-made materials  
(e.g., *Plays*, *French Pictionary*, *Welcome messages*, etc.)  
• Use of supplementary activities and formative assessment  
(e.g., *games*, *welcome questions*, “Hot Seat” activity, etc.)  
• Adapting AIM for older grades  
(e.g., *explicit grammar*, *different writing activities*, etc.) |
| **Experience** | • Supplementing and adapting the method with more AIM experience  
• Integrating previous CF practices with AIM teaching  
(e.g., *French Immersion phonics activity*, *old CF thematic units*, etc.) |

that teachers still feel guilty about how their implementation measures up to the static version of mastery depicted in the AIM materials, which remains the idealized standard – an ideal that is disconnected from the real, appropriated internalization that is characteristic of these teachers.

**Dynamic relationship between ‘teacher’ and ‘method’**

According to Wertsch et al. (1993), implementing a method affects both the teacher and the method being employed. This contention is supported by Larsen-Freeman (1986, 2000b) and Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) who insisted that instructional methods are no longer static once they have been implemented by a teacher because any method put into practice “will
be shaped at least by the teacher, the students, the conditions of instruction, and the broader sociocultural context” (Larsen-Freeman, 2000b, p. 182). Like other second language teachers (Bell, 2007), both the AIM and non-AIM teachers in this study considered the prescriptive method of AIM to be a pragmatic resource for their overall methodology (Akbari, 2008), picking and choosing whatever procedures or techniques that worked for them and helped to realize learning objectives or solve problems in their classroom. While postmethod enthusiasts might argue that teachers in this study were exhibiting the autonomy that is typical of postmethod pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2001), these findings showed that the teachers’ senses of plausibility were often connected to AIM. For example, teachers were simultaneously using AIM-based pedagogies alongside what could be considered to be representative of post-method pedagogies (e.g., adapting their teaching to suit their contextual needs) for CF instruction, following many central tenets of the method, while also delivering non-AIM activities and using teacher-made resources in an AIM-like manner (e.g., using AIM gestures, connecting to the play, etc.). They believed that they were optimizing their students’ learning of French by tailoring this prescriptive method to their context, suggesting that developing context-sensitive pedagogic theory and practice in conjunction with select prescriptions from the method was more important than following AIM to the letter. For them, the concept of method was not dead (Bell, 2003; Brown, 2002); rather, they engaged in a dialectical relationship with AIM, welcoming some practices imposed by the method and constructing others based on their own sense of plausibility. Bell (2003) would consider this to represent the “liberating of teaching practices” in that two necessary forces were being mediated, “the one imposing methodological coherence [and] the other deconstructing the totalizing tendency of method from the perspective of local exigencies” (p. 334). By doing this, teachers were not only appropriating their own AIM teaching practice, but reinventing AIM to represent more than its idealized characterization in the instructional materials.

Instead of characterizing AIM as an “unvarying diet” (Nunan 1991, p. 243), these findings suggest that AIM could also be characterized more in relation to its adaptability (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008), whereby the degree to which teachers exercise their agency while internalizing AIM to satisfy different conditions and maintaining certain central routines and tenets could be used to represent “successful” implementation. As Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008) stress in their Complexity Theory approach to L2 teaching, acknowledging such
a ‘complexity-compatible’ approach to L2 teaching does not mean that ‘anything goes’ in language teaching. Rather, instead of considering the use of AIM as “causing” learning, successful implementation of AIM should be seen as whether its use: (a) invites engagement with the professional beliefs of others (which is important to keeping teaching practice alive), (b) prompts reflection on how the global ideas of others affect their enactment of local practice, and (c) creates learning opportunities that contribute to the “quality of life” (Allwright, 2003) in the CF classroom. Doing this may lessen the degree to which teachers feel guilty for breaking from the AIM regimen, and provide a more realistic picture of classroom-based language learning as being one with micro- and macro-level influences that inevitably make the passage of prescriptive methods from theoretical principle to pedagogical reality context dependent.

**Critical sociocultural theory**

Acknowledging that power relations and agency are strongly intertwined, Moje and Lewis (2007) proposed that agency in schools was a product of negotiation between agents, the school or “institution”, and the hegemonic ideologies that are embedded within it. Findings from this study show that educators were often happy to support AIM because of the reported increase in teacher and student engagement in CF that they were seeing since its implementation, which is not surprising given the prevalence of negativity and frustration that has often been the story of CF programming in schools (e.g., Lapkin et al., 2006). In practice, teachers exercised their mediated agency across each of the institutional structures in this study, and they were all supplied with the AIM materials to draw from in spite of the macro-level policy (i.e., the Trillium List) in place related to the resources, and the micro-level policies in place related to the method’s status (i.e., mandated or optional). Despite this appreciation for teacher action, findings showed that there were still some power dynamics at play within the participating school structures that limited AIM implementation. For example, there were reports of funds lacking for AIM-related PD opportunities in the Mandated board, and too much repetition in the PD being offered in the Optional board. These constraints made it challenging for AIM teachers to feel like they could keep up to date on any new AIM materials or strategies, or how the method was being used throughout their own board. The allocation of classroom space was also uneven across the AIM teachers in this study. Although they did not report that it constrained their practice significantly, those without a classroom did identify some aspects of AIM that they changed or simply avoided because it was too arduous to organize in somebody else’s space.
Overall, educators (i.e., consultants, principals and teachers) exerted their agency when it came to forming opinions and making decisions within the school-based structures of power that were present in this study. The power-laden discourse of the AIM materials also emerged as a structure of power that influenced the participating teachers’ identities as AIM teachers, and was also transformed as a result of its use. As C-SCT enthusiasts (Moje & Lewis, 2007) would agree, the fact that teachers had internalized some of the power-laden discourse of the AIM teaching materials (e.g., teachers must use AIM properly), but also contradicted it by using AIM differently than described in the materials (as exemplified by the agency typology) suggests that the systemic structure and discourse of AIM was being disrupted as teachers appropriated new ideas, practices and discourses (i.e., “making and remaking themselves”) through their implementation of the method. The fact that those in more powerful positions (i.e., consultants and principals) appreciated such agency implies that they supported “teachers operating with AIM” as much, if not more than AIM on its own. The degree to which this support is meaningful within the context of AIM as educational change is discussed in the next section. For now, I present some implications of these insights for the SCT concepts covered in this section.

**Theoretical implications**

Considering these findings through the lens of SCT could be considered to have helped develop the theory in many ways. For example, the typology of teacher agency introduced in this study shows that agency can be classified into types, and strengthens the distinction between mastery (e.g., knowing how to use AIM) and appropriation (e.g., taking ownership of AIM) that is central to the SCT concept of internalization. Prabhu’s notion of “sense of plausibility” (1990) was also useful when considering the sociocultural construct of agency in relation to teacher pedagogy, implying its potential complementarity in future SCT-oriented classroom-based studies. These findings also show how critical sociocultural theory (C-SCT) can be applied outside of its original field of L2 literacy, which bodes well for its usefulness in explaining power-laden discourse, relationships and actions that may emerge during other school-based SCT investigations.

Integrating Fullan’s educational change framework (2007) into my theoretical lens demonstrates its compatibility with SCT, and its potential usefulness in future studies investigating the impact of methodological innovations on school-based agents. In this case, whether or not the mediated agency observed is “meaningful” is a central issue that requires a
complementary theoretical perspective, which I will now consider in the next section.

**Educational Change**

Interpreting these findings through the lens of meaningful educational change described by Fullan (1982, 1991, 2001, 2007) helps me to explain my findings and consider the implications of participants’ perspectives and AIM practices beyond the phase of implementation and for the theoretical framework itself.

**Bias for action**

In this framework, Fullan (2007) maintained that change needs to be put into action in order to determine its value or meaning. Findings from this study showed that there was a clear bias for action towards AIM at the beginning stages of CF instruction (i.e., primary grades or Grade 4) in both Mandated and Optional contexts. However, the bias for action in the older grades (namely, at the intermediate level) was weaker overall. Despite this skepticism, participating teachers who taught CF at the intermediate level were observed to be supplementing and adapting AIM in order to reconcile their desire to try using whatever they could from AIM with the uncertainty and/or resistance they reported being up against, particularly from Grade 8 students (e.g., resistance to the gestures, using French only, disengagement in CF altogether, etc.).

Also central to Fullan’s bias for action approach is the idea that agents can only gain a realistic picture of how change should be refined and strengthened to suit the local context by monitoring the action (i.e., monitoring the ‘fire’ part of his ‘ready-fire-aim’ approach to get a clearer vision of how to ‘aim’). In this study, findings showed that the teachers were reflecting on their own AIM practice, while also reporting an absence of ongoing monitoring where their feedback was sought regarding AIM implementation and/or its utility for CF instruction. In the case of the AIM-mandated teachers in particular, this lack of monitoring made them question the relevance of the mandate itself. Some consultants reported gathering intermittent board-level research (i.e., surveys, tracking of grades, interactions with AIM teachers) in order to support their decisions and opinions, while principals said that they relied heavily on their CF teachers to keep track and inform them of whether AIM was working or not, with some reporting positive results based on observed student and teacher engagement or in some cases simply because students were no longer in their office during CF periods.

Although these findings show that participating educators were monitoring AIM
implementation to some degree, through the lens of this framework it does not seem to be as direct, recurrent, or collaborative as it should be with such a bias for action in place. According to Fullan (2007), “what people do and don’t do [during implementation] is the crucial variable” (p. 85) that makes change meaningful, and without such monitoring teachers will “know not to take change seriously unless central administrators demonstrate through actions that they should” (p. 94). This does not mean that teacher practice should be scrutinized or formalized; rather, educators in positions of power need to facilitate the sharing of information about change implementation across the board, school and classroom levels (Fullan, 2007), a collaborative process which was not overtly evident across the contexts in this study. In order for monitoring to be effective, Fullan also emphasized that educators need to be open to critical discussion and analysis about the change in question, which some participating consultants seemed to find challenging after their decision to adopt and/or mandate AIM. Fullan stressed that teachers in particular need to participate in interactive monitoring with other teachers who are experiencing the same process of change implementation so they can learn from one another and develop their practice as it relates to their specific context. The fact that the majority of AIM teachers in this study reported lacking available time and support for such face-to-face PD opportunities – particularly those in the AIM-mandated board who had not had any AIM-related PD organized for them during the study period – seems to imply that the adoption of AIM may be more important than its implementation, which inevitably affects the information upon which decisions related to its subsequent continuation are based. The value placed on collaborative monitoring of the implementation of AIM is one of many important indicators of whether a shared meaning was achieved, which I will discuss more now.

**Shared meaning**

According to Fullan, instead of moving through the process of change based on one individual’s vision, it is vital that each educator’s voice and subjective reality is taken into account in order to reach a “shared meaning” on the change and its implementation. The goal is not to blindly implement every change that is adopted, but rather to engage in an ongoing vetting of the factors and shared realities involved in the process of implementation to come to a shared meaning related to the change. If, as Fullan suggests, the factors of implementation are meant to “reinforce or undercut each other as an interrelated system”, then what becomes most important is finding a balance that works for all shared realities and that fosters a repeated reassessment of
what works best for each context in relation to the educational changes that come their way:

It takes a fortunate combination of the right factors – a critical mass – to support and guide the process of relearning, which respects the maintenance needs of individuals and groups and at the same time facilitates, stimulates, and prods people to change through a process of incremental and decremental fits and starts on the way to institutionalizing (or, if appropriate, rejecting) the change in question. (2007, p. 105)

Considering the findings through this lens, it could be said that the educators in this study had attained a shared meaning related to some aspects of AIM implementation, such as their consensus on the value of teachers being able to exercise their agency while implementing the method, and the general usefulness of AIM during the beginning stages of CF instruction. However, shared meaning beyond these factors came with much complexity. For example, findings contrasted the relativist and pluralist positions that can be assumed towards methods (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011), as educators were at odds as to whether AIM was equally suited to all situations at least as part of CF instruction (i.e., pluralist), or whether it was suitable only for beginner-level students (i.e., relativist). On the whole, the findings from this study show that the lack of collective reflection, communication and monitoring discussed earlier, coupled with discrepancies about the characteristics of AIM emerged as significant factors that limited the establishment of shared meaning related AIM. Most elusive was shared meaning on what needs to change and the ultimate objectives of using AIM; however, I argue in the next sections that shared meaning can be only be achieved in these cases by embracing the complexity found in this study, and by moving from a vision of ideology (i.e., that there is ‘one best method’) to a commitment to inquiry (Larsen-Freeman, 2000a) that ultimately renders the strong belief in teacher agency worthwhile.

**What needs to change?**

Fullan (2007) operationalized a meaningful implementation process as taking place across three possible dimensions, including the use of new or revised materials, new teaching behaviors and/or the alteration of beliefs. While it is possible that agents may implement a combination of these three dimensions, Fullan insisted that changes that do not practically embrace these dimensions are considered to be trivial, and unrepresentative of meaningful change. According to these findings, the implementation of AIM initiated engagement across all three of these dimensions; however, this engagement was not uniform: (a) the AIM materials were used in each context, but were often being supplemented in different ways; (b) the more
they used the method, the more participating teachers engaged in a trial and error implementation of the activities and strategies, checking which ones worked and did not work for them; and (c) some educators embraced the pedagogical assumptions of AIM, while others did not. Although Fullan would posit that this inconsistency is unrepresentative of meaningful change, this is in fact how methodological implementation has been characterized in the literature. Educators connect with methods on different levels, and often strive to find their own acceptable balance between the ideal and the real (in this case, between the characteristics of AIM and the local realities) as opposed to striving for uniformity in methodological implementation (Larsen-Freeman, 2000b; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Prabhu, 1990; Stern, 1983; Tudor, 2001), making widespread use of the same method a complicated process. Although the AIM materials are clear on what teachers ideally should be doing, teacher agency and contextual needs dictated how AIM was implemented in CF classrooms in this study. In fact, teachers were observed to be engaging in figurative conversations along these three dimensions, striving to balance their sense of plausibility and establish balance between the over-routinization of AIM and their existing beliefs and practices. By doing this, teachers were molding their own AIM teaching practice, and also reinventing AIM to represent more than its idealized characterization in the instructional materials. Not only does this imply that reliance on the AIM materials for clarity may be futile, but also that AIM itself should no longer be considered to be a static object. Consequently, when instructional methods are involved in the educational change process, determining what needs to change implicates both the change agents involved and the change itself. Ultimately, as Fullan would agree, the only way that this complexity and the belief in teacher agency can be considered to be meaningful is if they are paired with consistent, collaborative monitoring and a shared understanding of the objective(s) of using AIM in the first place.

What is the objective of using AIM?

In this study, participating educators generally felt that using AIM addressed a need in CF programming for teaching that improved L2 oral fluency as well as teacher and student morale and motivation toward CF. While these are valid objectives, absent in the data was evidence of any clear, systematic push to explicitly link the use of AIM to these objectives or to student learning during the phase of implementation. Fullan stressed that decisions made about an educational change during this phase must be strongly linked to student performance, saying: “many judgments can and should be made during implementation, as long as they are based on
evidence linking teacher practices with student performance” (2007, p. 23). While Fullan conceded that providing information on outcomes alone limits the value of the reflective implementation process, they are nonetheless vital to gauging the impact of the change on students. Initiating collaborative inquiry also necessitates a clear link to improved student learning, as “collaboration makes a positive difference only when it is focused on student performance for all and on the associated innovative practices that can make improvement happen for previously disengaged students” (2007, p. 285). Although board-level research informed the majority of consultant decisions related to AIM during the adoption and implementation stages in this study, most of what participants described was qualitatively-based (e.g., surveys, interviews), with only a few consultants reporting analysis of student grades pre- and post-implementation of AIM. Participating AIM teachers also raised some classroom-based issues related to fulfilling the shared objectives mentioned above, such as the risk of teachers and students getting bored with AIM, and the challenge of motivating students to become more independent users of the target language once teachers decrease their linguistic and gesture-based scaffolding during the prescribed transition to a more student-centred AIM classroom.

Seeking the kind of evidence that Fullan referred to involves attempting to isolate AIM as the principal influence on student outcomes, which researchers have cautioned is challenging, if not impossible (e.g., Brumfit, 1984; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008; Prabhu, 1990; Stern, 1983). Previous studies comparing AIM and non-AIM student performance reflect their conviction, as overall findings were inconclusive (Bourdages & Vignola, 2009; Maxwell, 2001; Michels, 2008). However, looking at these studies with the findings from this research in mind emphasizes that something was missing – the researchers in previous studies did not observe what was happening in the AIM or non-AIM contexts that might have been influencing student test scores. Instead, they assumed that teachers were implementing AIM as it was described in the instructional materials, a “pure” version of method implementation that these findings, and those from other method comparison studies, suggest is unrepresentative of what really goes on in L2 classrooms (c.f. Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Nonetheless, if such evidence is necessary to determine the meaningfulness of AIM as an educational change, then these findings suggest that it would be better to contextually operationalize the implementation of AIM in each classroom, compare it across classrooms within the same board, and eventually arrive at a local representation that reflects the dynamic use of the method across multiple local contexts. Acknowledging that
methods involve both thoughts and actions (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011) would also necessitate listening to educators explain what they think AIM represents, and listening to teachers talk about their implementation and provide reasons for why they do what they do, as was done in this study. This way, student learning, or any objective for that matter, could be tied to locally-created standards and realities that reflect the kind of dynamic implementation reported in this study, and decisions related to the continued use of AIM could receive the careful thought that is warranted when deciding about what methods to use for L2 teaching:

[Making] choices that are informed and not just intuitive or ideological [require] expend[ing] no little effort first in identifying our own values, next in tying those values to an appropriate set of larger aims, and only then devising or rejecting, adopting or adapting techniques. (Stevick, 1993, p. 434)

**Theoretical implications**

Interpreting these findings using Fullan’s framework helped to reiterate some of its central tenets, while also highlighting ways in which considering AIM as the educational change in question helped to develop the theory itself. For instance, the characteristics of AIM influenced the implementation observed in this study to a greater extent than the rest of the factors listed by Fullan, supporting his notion that some factors are more “intractable” than others, making “successful change a highly complex and subtle social process” (2007, p. 86). Certainly, the complexity found in this study is not a ‘new’ characteristic to Fullan’s theory; however, these findings show how the specific emphasis on student outcomes in determining whether a change is meaningful or not presents unique challenges when an instructional method is the educational change being investigated.

Generally, there is no doubt that CF programming could benefit from change; however, in order for AIM to be more than a novel and trendy pedagogical idea, considering these findings within this framework has shown that educators included in this study (as well as those who were not – e.g., students, parents, etc.) need to be engaged in establishing a shared meaning related to the global ideas of AIM and how they translate into local practice and influence student performance. I will now move to suggesting specific implications of these findings and explicitly answering my research questions considering the overall results of this study.
Chapter 9 – Concluding Remarks and Implications

Introduction

In this final chapter, I draw on the findings and interpretations presented in the previous chapters to (a) formally answer my original research questions; (b) suggest implications for policy, pedagogy, teacher education and second language (L2) theory and research; and (c) make recommendations for future studies focusing not only on AIM but also on L2 pedagogy more generally.

Question #1: Present practices

What are the present practices of Ontario school boards with respect to supporting different methodologies, including AIM, for CF instruction?

Findings from the FSL consultants showed a clear bias for action (Fullan, 1982, 1991, 2001, 2007) towards AIM and the use of the accompanying materials (Maxwell, 2006, 2008) at the beginning stages of CF instruction (i.e., primary grades or Grade 4) in the three Mandated boards and twelve Optional boards represented in the survey data. Although AIM was still the most popular method being used in the Optional boards, when given the choice, other methods (i.e., Multidimensional Project-Based Teaching, Total Physical Response, Grammar Translation, Total Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling) and non-AIM materials (i.e., Acti-Vie, Visages, other teacher-made materials) were also in use to facilitate CF instruction at the Kindergarten to Grade 8 levels.

When making decisions about AIM, participating consultants stated that they relied primarily on board-level research and anecdotal input; however, minimal detail was offered in relation to these inquiries. Those who had mandated the method asserted that they had “experienced positive results” and “seen improvements” in students’ oral fluency and overall teacher and student engagement in the CF program. While consultants from the Optional context also pointed to board-level research as having informed the choices they had made, their impetus for keeping the method optional stemmed from three lines of reason: (a) a desire to ensure that teachers were invested in their method of choice; (ii), the high cost of AIM resources and professional development that would be required if a mandate was in place; and (iii) the fact that the Ministry of Education had not formally added the AIM resources to their Trillium list of approved materials. This last point is noteworthy because although the AIM materials are not present on this list, survey and observation findings showed that they were being used in the
majority of contexts where the method was being implemented. This suggests that the Ontario Ministry’s process of authorization about resources, coupled with their reportedly lenient perspective on methods chosen for CF instruction, had limited impact on decisions and actions related to AIM at the level of implementation.

**Question #2: Educator perspectives**

*How do elementary-level educators in AIM-mandated and AIM-optional contexts feel about the method in regards to its (a) utility for CF instruction, (b) instructional materials, and (c) growing popularity across Canada?*

Considering the interview, focus group and survey data collectively, triangulated findings showed that educator perspectives (i.e., consultants, Ontario Ministry of Education representative, principals, teachers) differed more across participants than they did across Mandated and Optional cases. While the majority of educators in both cases felt that AIM was more useful for improving attitudes toward CF and developing students’ oral fluency from the beginning grades than during the intermediate grades, participating educators disagreed about whether the AIM materials supported CF teaching or dictated how the method should be used. Each group also adopted a variety of different terminologies to refer to AIM during their interviews (i.e., program, approach, method, strategy and/or resource), suggesting that clarity and consistency on this point is not relevant to their practical AIM-related discourse (Akbari, 2008). Although all of the participants generally characterized the growing popularity of AIM across Canada in a positive light, discussion about this trend exposed a range of emotions within the participant groups, including (a) openness and resistance to critical analysis of the method amongst the consultants; (b) confidence and fear amongst the teachers about many educators using AIM at the same time, and doing so ‘properly’ and/or ‘improperly’; and (c) optimism and skepticism amongst all participants about whether AIM is the best method, whether one best method even exists, or whether AIM should simply be used as part of a CF program. On the whole, these discrepancies represented significant factors that limited the establishment of shared meaning related to AIM (Fullan, 1982, 1991, 2001, 2007). Most elusive was shared meaning on what needs to change and the ultimate objectives of using AIM; however, these findings suggest that shared meaning can be only be achieved in the case of instructional methods by moving from a vision of ideology (i.e., that there is ‘one best method’) to a commitment to inquiry that would render participating educators’ belief in teacher agency worthwhile.
Question #3: AIM implementation

*How are elementary-level CF teachers in AIM-mandated and AIM-optional contexts implementing the method?*

Findings from the classroom observations and teacher interviews revealed that teacher implementation of AIM did not vary significantly based on whether AIM had been mandated or left optional for CF instruction. Rather, considering AIM as representing an educational change (Fullan, 1982, 1991, 2001, 2007), findings showed that its implementation in these contexts was more significantly affected by characteristics inherent to the method itself (e.g., need, clarity, complexity, quality and practicality). While some AIM routines, activities, and strategies were implemented by all (including maximized target language use, which CF teachers often find challenging), the eight participating teachers also exercised their mediated agency (Wertsch et al., 1993) while using AIM, especially those with more experience teaching CF and using AIM. They all supplemented and adapted AIM for different reasons, some having to do with the understandable conflict of integrating a new method into one’s existing teaching practice, and others related to expected challenges and perceived limitations of the method and its resources. Despite their willingness to adapt the method for older students (particularly Grade 8s), using AIM with older grades emerged as an ongoing challenge that influenced how it was used and teachers’ opinions about its viability beyond the initial CF grades. Overall, teachers were striving to balance the routinization of AIM with their locally constructed realities, suggesting that the methods-based and postmethods-based pedagogies observed in these contexts are more compatible than incompatible (Bell, 2003), that the notion of method is not dead for L2 teachers (Bell, 2007; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011) and that AIM teachers should not be characterized as mere executors of the method, but rather “users and creators of legitimate forms of knowledge who [make] decisions about how best to teach their second language students within complex socially, culturally and historically situated contexts” (Johnson, 2006, p. 239).

Considering the other participant perspectives (i.e., consultants, principals, the Ontario Ministry Representative, the non-AIM teacher in the Optional context), findings showed that this type of teacher agency was valued both explicitly and implicitly by those in the AIM-mandated context (i.e., no evident standards of use related to AIM implementation; teachers were left to implement AIM as they saw fit); whereas those in the AIM-optional context explicitly identified the notion of teacher choice as being central to their beliefs and choices regarding if and how AIM should
be used. Although the majority of participants envisioned AIM being part of their CF programming over the long-term, findings suggest that the survival and meaningfulness of AIM as an educational change beyond the phase of implementation (i.e., continuation) rests on the establishment of clear objectives related to student outcomes, and the integration of collaborative monitoring and reflection initiatives that implicate all school-based stakeholders (i.e., consultants, principals, teachers, students, parents, community, etc.).

**Implications for FSL Education**

The findings from this study present important implications not only for CF policy and pedagogy, but also FSL teacher training and future research endeavours focusing on AIM and L2 pedagogy in general.

**Policy**

One of the main points of comparison in this study was whether micro-level policy related to AIM impacted educator perspectives and teacher implementation. As these findings have demonstrated, mandating or keeping AIM optional had minimal influence on educator perspectives and even less impact on teacher implementation of the method. Educators implicitly and/or explicitly valued teacher investment and agency, implying that standardized use was not the objective of either policy. In fact, the teacher implementation data suggest that any policy striving for uniformity in the use of AIM across multiple contexts would be futile, if not impossible.

In this study, boards were basing their policy decisions about AIM on research they had conducted in their own context. While it is encouraging that locally developed policy is being informed by classroom-based inquiries, I think it is unfortunate that this research is not being disseminated more widely, and that educators are not becoming more informed about other research that has been done on AIM, including the existing academic studies described in Chapter 2. In my opinion, if consultants continue acknowledging AIM in their policies related to CF instruction, then they should be as informed as possible about what other inquiries have found, both within academia and across other boards, while remaining open to discussing findings that both support and challenge their contextual beliefs and realities. Efforts could be made to better disseminate such published and unpublished findings via FSL-oriented professional associations (e.g., Ontario Modern Language Teachers Association, 2012; Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers, 2012) or using the professional sharing networks
made available to teachers through the AIM website (AIM Language Learning, 2012a).

In addition, these findings strongly suggest that policies related to AIM need to be tied to initiatives that measure their impact on student outcomes; however, such a focus on student achievement must be tied to locally-created standards and objectives that reflect the kind of dynamic implementation seen in this study. For example, it would be ideal if educators in positions of power could listen to school-based stakeholders explain what they understand about the AIM-related policy in place, and then work together with teachers to contextually operationalize the implementation of AIM in as many different classrooms as possible, eventually arriving at a representation that reflects the dynamic use of the method across multiple local contexts. Reaching such a context-based idea of success for CF instruction means that any measurement of student outcomes would be linked to the dynamic “teachers operating with AIM” unit of analysis (Wertsch et al., 1993), and decisions advocating for a mandated or optional use of AIM could become more transparent than they were for the participants in this study (particularly for those in the AIM-mandated context). Consequently, the bias for action toward AIM observed in this study could develop beyond the phase of adoption, prioritize the monitoring of implementation, and eventually lead to more informed decisions about its continuation (Fullan, 1982, 1991, 2001, 2007).

**Pedagogy**

These findings show that AIM teaching needs to be understood as representing more than the descriptions put forth in the accompanying resources, especially when the complexities of classroom-based teaching and teacher agency are taken into account. The fact that eight different teachers were observed to be using AIM in different ways is a testament to its adaptability (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008), which these findings show should be regarded as more of an asset than a limitation. As stated earlier, this does not mean that “anything goes” or that AIM implementation is best when teachers are left on their own without any guidance or mentorship; rather, these findings point to the benefits of investigating and experimenting with AIM, not only because doing so seems to help CF teachers maintain French as the language of instruction, but also because it engages their sense of plausibility, and prompts active and continued reflection that leads to the creation of more effective, locally-constructed pedagogy. Adopting such a perspective, and pairing it with collaborative monitoring and professional networking initiatives, would go a long way to: making teachers feel less guilty about how they translate the static
representation of AIM into practice, and pragmatically addressing pedagogical challenges identified by AIM teachers in this study (e.g., lack of time, dealing with boredom, decreasing oral/gestural scaffolding, etc.). Embracing the complexity of AIM implementation may also extend the conversation about effective CF instruction beyond the “pro-AIM versus anti-AIM” discourse, and toward a more unifying, critically-oriented discussion of best practices that are informed by both method- and postmethod-based pedagogies.

**Teacher education**

With the macro-level findings in this study showing a tendency for boards to support and/or mandate the use of AIM for CF instruction, the question arises of how best to address its increasing popularity within FSL teacher education programs. Research suggests that analyzing meditational tools and concepts like AIM during L2 teacher education programs can serve to cultivate reflection on teacher candidates’ assumptions, values and beliefs about L2 teaching (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011), and help to “externalize [their] current understandings of concepts, reconceptualize and recontextualize them, and develop alternative ways of engaging in the activities associated with those concepts” (Johnson, 2009, p.15). As these findings suggest, in addition to discussing its static representation, integrating observations of a variety of novice and experienced AIM teachers, as well as perspectives of both AIM and non-AIM teachers into FSL teacher preparation programs could also help to characterize the method based on how participating AIM teachers in this study viewed it and used it (i.e., as more of a mediating tool for CF instruction, as opposed to the ‘recipe for success’ portrayal in the AIM materials).

Whether or not teacher candidates decide to use AIM or not when they have their own classroom, this approach would strive to shift the focus of AIM discussions in teacher education programs beyond behavior-based strategies and towards the thinking and reasoning that is often believed to motivate external practices observed in L2 classrooms (Freeman & Richards, 1993), and help teacher candidates understand that L2 instruction involves recreating personal meaning in one’s practice as opposed to reproducing a ready-made package or blindly following the global ideas of others (Freeman & Richards, 1993; Johnson, 2006, 2009; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

**Research and theory**

These findings present implications for the ever-developing theoretical understandings of second language pedagogy, and continued research into AIM and other second language
teaching methods. In terms of theory, teacher implementation results confirm what Stern (1983) and others (Danesi, 2003; Larsen-Freeman, 1986, 1996, 2000b; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Sierra, 1995; Tudor, 2001) have been emphasizing for years, that “much more is included under the name ‘method’ than the feature that has given it its name” (Stern, 1983, p. 451). In fact, these findings support the view that the notion of ‘method’ is not entirely dead for L2 teachers and educators (Bell, 2007), and go on to suggest that method- and postmethod-based pedagogies are in fact more compatible than postmethod theorists might have led us to believe (Bell, 2003). As Akbari (2008) would agree, this study highlights the need to for future studies examining the postmethod condition to consider how their central theoretical principles and concepts (e.g., death of methods; contention that L2 teaching can be captured by a list of macro-strategies, etc.) (c.f. Kumaravadivelu, 2001, 2003, 2006) are being realized and interpreted by teachers who must deal with the complex day-to-day realities of classroom-based instruction.

In terms of research, if studies continue trying to isolate AIM or other methods as one of the main independent variables affecting second language acquisition, these findings would call into question the usefulness of such inquiries that did not include multiple detailed observations of how the method in question is being implemented, or did not acknowledge the long-standing understanding in the field of L2 education that teachers’ beliefs about methods have a strong influence on how they plan their lessons (Kalaja & Barcelos, 2003; Woods, 2003). To this end, future research pairing teacher observations with stimulated recall sessions would help to explicitly connect teacher beliefs about AIM to the instructional practices that they employ while using the method. Investigating AIM teachers’ belief-practice congruency in more detail would also yield interesting insights into the role they think AIM should or should not play in CF teaching. Furthermore, although this study was the first to consider multiple educator beliefs about AIM in detail, the opinions and perspectives of AIM students in particular have yet to be comprehensively examined, especially over a long period of time. This would certainly be a valuable line of research that would complement any student outcome-based studies, and could shed more light on the impact that AIM use is having on student attitudes towards CF, and attrition rates when FSL learning is no longer an obligatory subject of study (c.f. Mady et al., 2009 for some insights in this regard).

**Concluding Remarks**

Overall, I feel strongly that this research functions as a great start to explaining the
growing popularity of AIM, and refocusing our attention to allocating equal credit to the creators of AIM, and the teachers who use it in their attempts to develop and improve CF programming across Canada. As Bell (2003) put it best, although the universal claims behind the business of methods may be troublesome, “as vehicles for change, let us hope that methods never stop challenging our practices” (p. 332).
References


Turnbull, M., & Lawrence, G. (2001). *Core French teachers and technology: Classroom application and belief systems.* Report prepared for the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers, Ottawa, ON.


Appendices

Appendix A

Recruitment Email (FSL Consultants – Survey)

Dear FSL Consultant/Coordinator,

My name is Stephanie Arnott, and I am a doctoral student in the Second Language Education Program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. For my PhD thesis project, I want to learn more about the present practices of different school boards when recommending different methodologies and/or resources for CF instruction, particularly at the elementary level (Grades K-8). I am also interested in your perspectives related to the use of the Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM) for Core French (CF) instruction in Ontario elementary schools.

You are a suitable candidate for my study because you are an FSL consultant or FSL program coordinator for an elementary school in an Ontario school board. Your participation in this study will involve completing a survey. The survey will include open- and close-ended questions. Like all participants in this study, your involvement is completely voluntary and you may refuse to answer questions or withdraw from the study at any time. Please rest assured that your privacy, and the privacy of your school board will be protected at all times. The beginning of the survey will prompt you to supply your email address so that you can be sent a link that will allow you to return to your (partially) completed survey if you are unable to complete it in one attempt. Your email will not be distributed to any third party and will be removed from the system once the survey study is complete. Near the end of the survey, you will also be asked to identify the school board in which you work. This information will be used to get an idea of the Ontario regions that are represented the survey participant sample. Simply put, at no time will I be able to link you to the survey responses you provide.

The raw data gathered through this survey will be kept confidential, known only to me and the members of my thesis committee. Be also assured that your identity, and that of your board, will be kept confidential in my thesis and in any subsequent presentations or publications. I will take great care to ensure that all identities are not revealed in any other fashion, such as through background information. I hope that you will agree to participate in my study as it may prove beneficial to French as a Second Language (FSL) teachers and to the second language educational community in Ontario and across Canada.

If you would like to receive more information about the study, you may contact me or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Antoinette Gagné. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

The survey should take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. Once you have finished, a copy of your responses will be sent to me with a number attached so as to protect your identity during my analysis. If you are willing to participate in my study, please copy and paste the following link into your web browser, and you will be connected directly to the survey.
LINK TO SURVEY PROVIDED

Thank you so much in advance for your time and effort.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Arnott
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
Appendix B

Consent Letter (FSL Consultants – Focus Group)

*printed on OISE letterhead*

September 2009

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Stephanie Arnott, and I am a doctoral student in the Second Language Education Program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. As part of my thesis research, I want to learn more about stakeholder perspectives related to the use of the Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM) for Core French (CF) instruction in Ontario elementary schools. I also want to explore how teachers are implementing AIM in contexts where it has been mandated for CF instruction at the elementary-level (Grades 4-6), and others where it has not been mandated.

I am writing to officially recruit you to participate in my thesis research study, which will be taking place from October 2009 through to May 2010. You are a suitable candidate for my study due to the fact that you are an FSL consultant or FSL program coordinator for an elementary school in an Ontario school board. Your participation in this study will involve participating in a focus group.

If you consent to participate in the focus group, questions will concentrate more on eliciting reasons for your recommendations, and discussing their foreseen impact on CF teachers in your school board. Each focus group will be comprised of 4-6 participants, will last approximately one hour, and will be audiotape recorded for subsequent transcription and analysis. I will coordinate a time and place that is convenient for all focus group participants to meet, at a time that does not interfere with your professional responsibilities.

Like all participants in this study, your involvement is completely voluntary and you may refuse to answer questions or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without having to provide a reason. Please rest assured that your privacy, and the privacy of your school board will be protected at all times. The raw data gathered through this study will be kept confidential, known only to me and the members of my thesis committee. My findings will be published in my doctoral thesis which will be made available to the board, the school and the teacher upon request. A summary of the thesis will also be made available upon request.

Be also assured that the identity of the board, the school, the teacher and the students will be kept confidential in the thesis and in any subsequent presentations or publications. Focus group participants’ names will be replaced by a pseudonym. I will take great care to assure that all identities will not be revealed in any other fashion, such as through background information. The tapes of the focus groups will be destroyed after publication of this thesis. Transcripts made from the tapes will be kept in a locked cabinet at my residence and/or in my personal password-protected computer for five years and then destroyed.

I hope that you will agree to participate in my study as it may prove beneficial to French as a
Second Language (FSL) teachers and the second language educational community in Ontario and across Canada. If you accept, I will proceed with making all of the necessary arrangements with you, which will include scheduling the focus group at your convenience.

Please complete the attached consent form, and return it to (NAME) as soon as possible. Please also keep a copy of the information letter for your own reference. If you would rather offer your consent orally, please contact me by telephone or email. If you would like to receive more information about the study, you may contact me or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Antoinette Gagné. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

I would sincerely appreciate your cooperation.

Thank you for your time,

Stephanie Arnott
c/o Centre for Educational Research in Languages and Literacies (OISE) 
252 Bloor Street West Toronto, Ontario M5S 1V6.

CONSENT FORM
(to be signed by FSL consultant)

Title of the Research: Why AIM?: Educator perspectives and implementation of a new instructional method for teaching Core French as a second language in Ontario.

Name of the Researcher: Stephanie Arnott

Institutional Affiliation: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

Please complete, sign and return to (NAME) to participate in the study.

☐ I, _____________________________, agree to participate in the FOCUS GROUP part of this study, as described in the attached letter.

Signature: _____________________________

Name (please print): _____________________________

Date: _____________________________

Email (please print clearly): _____________________________
Appendix C
Recruitment Email (Ontario Ministry of Education Representative)

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Stephanie Arnott, and I am a doctoral student in the Second Language Education Program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto.

I am writing this email to officially recruit you to be a participant in my thesis research study, which will be taking place from October 2009 through to May 2010.

For this project, I want to learn more about stakeholder perspectives related to the use of the Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM) for Core French (CF) instruction in Ontario elementary schools. I also want to explore how teachers are implementing AIM in contexts where it has been mandated for CF instruction at the elementary-level (Grades 4-6), and others where it has not been mandated.

Please read the attached information letter for more details regarding your participation. If you wish to participate, please let me know and I will bring a hard copy of the attached consent form for you to sign when we meet to conduct the interview. Alternatively, you may also feel free to send me a scanned copy of the signed consent form by email to this address if you prefer.

Thank you so much for your time.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Arnott
c/o Centre for Educational Research in Languages and Literacies (OISE)
252 Bloor Street West Toronto, Ontario M5S 1V6.
Appendix D
Consent Letter (Ontario Ministry of Education Representative)
(printed on OISE letterhead)

September 2009

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Stephanie Arnott, and I am a doctoral student in the Second Language Education Program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. As part of my thesis research, I want to learn more about stakeholder perspectives related to the use of the Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM) for Core French (CF) instruction in Ontario elementary schools. I also want to explore how teachers are implementing AIM in contexts where it has been mandated for CF instruction at the elementary-level (Grades 4–6), and others where it has not been mandated.

I am writing to officially recruit you to participate in my thesis research study, which will be taking place from October 2009 through to May 2010. You are a suitable candidate for my study due to the fact that you work for the Ontario Ministry of Education, and your job responsibilities relate directly to French as a Second Language (FSL) programming in Ontario, including CF. Your participation in this study will involve taking part in one interview. I will ask questions about your professional experience related to FSL and your knowledge and opinions regarding instructional methods being used to teach CF in Ontario, including AIM. The interview will last approximately 30 minutes, and will be audiotape recorded for subsequent transcription and analysis. You and I will work together to schedule the interview at your convenience, and at a time that does not interfere with any of your professional responsibilities.

Like all participants in this study, your involvement is completely voluntary and you may refuse to answer questions or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without having to provide a reason. Please rest assured that your privacy, and the privacy of the Ministry will be protected at all times. The raw data gathered through this study will be kept confidential, known only to me and the members of my thesis committee. My findings will be published in my doctoral thesis which will be made available to the board, the school and the teacher upon request. A summary of the thesis will also be made available upon request.

Be also assured that your will be kept confidential in the thesis and in any subsequent presentations or publications. Your name will be replaced by a pseudonym, and I will take great care to assure that all identities will not be revealed in any other fashion, such as through background information. The interview tapes will be destroyed after publication of this thesis. Transcripts made from the tapes will be kept in a locked cabinet at my residence and/or in my personal password-protected computer for five years and then destroyed.

I hope that you will agree to participate in my study as it may prove beneficial to French as a Second Language (FSL) teachers and the second language educational community in Ontario and across Canada. If you accept, I will proceed with making all of the necessary arrangements with you, which will include scheduling the interview at your convenience.
Please complete the attached consent form, and return it to me either by email (i.e. print off a hard copy; sign it; scan the signed copy; email as an attachment) or by mail to the address below. Please also keep a copy of the information letter for your own reference. If you would rather offer your consent orally, please contact me by telephone or email. If you would like to receive more information about the study, you may contact me or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Antoinette Gagné. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

I would sincerely appreciate your cooperation.

Thank you for your time,

Stephanie Arnott
c/o Centre for Educational Research in Languages and Literacies (OISE)
252 Bloor Street West  Toronto, Ontario  M5S 1V6.

CONSENT FORM
(to be signed by Ontario Ministry of Education representative)

Title of the Research: Why AIM?: Educator perspectives and implementation of a new instructional method for teaching Core French as a second language in Ontario.

Name of the Researcher: Stephanie Arnott

Institutional Affiliation: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

Please complete, sign and return to the researcher to participate in the study. Please use the self-addressed stamped envelope when mailing.

☐ I, ________________________________, agree to participate in the INTERVIEW part of this study, as described in the attached letter.

Signature: _____________________________________________

Name (please print):______________________________________________

Date: _______________________________
Appendix E
Recruitment Email (Mandated and Optional School Boards)

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Stephanie Arnott, and I am a doctoral student in the Second Language Education Program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto.

I am writing this email to officially recruit you to be a participant in my thesis research study, which will be taking place from October 2009 through to May 2010.

For this project, I want to learn more about stakeholder perspectives related to the use of the Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM) for Core French (CF) instruction in Ontario elementary schools. I also want to explore how teachers are implementing AIM in contexts where it has been mandated for CF instruction at the elementary-level (Grades 4-6), and others where it has not been mandated.

Please read the attached information letter for more details regarding your participation. If you wish to have your school board participate, please sign a hard copy of the attached consent form and send it by mail to the following address: Modern Language Centre; 252 Bloor Street West; Toronto, Ontario; M5S 1V6. Alternatively, you may also feel free to send me a scanned copy of the signed consent form by email to this address if you prefer.

Thank you so much for your time.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Arnott
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto
Appendix F
Consent Letter (AIM-Mandated Principals)
(printed on OISE letterhead)

September 2009

(Name and address of the school)

Dear (name of administrator)

My name is Stephanie Arnott, and I am a doctoral student in the Second Language Education Program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. As part of my thesis research, I want to learn more about stakeholder perspectives related to the use of the Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM) for Core French (CF) instruction in Ontario elementary schools. I also want to explore how teachers are implementing AIM in contexts where it has been mandated for CF instruction at the elementary-level (Grades 4-6), and others where it has not been mandated.

I am writing to officially request your permission to conduct research in your school from October 2009 through to May 2010. Your school is a suitable site for my study due to the fact that teachers in your school board are expected to be using AIM to teach CF at the elementary-level. More specifically, I am requesting your permission to allow me to recruit one elementary-level CF teacher from your school. At this time, I would also like to formal invite you to participate in a short interview, to be conducted at your convenience at some point during the study period. Interview questions will centre on how you see your role in the implementation of AIM in your school, as well as your general perspectives about the method. Your involvement in this study is voluntary and, like all participants, you may withdraw at any time without penalty and without providing a reason.

Over the course of the study period, the participating teacher will take part in four interviews, and four observation sessions. Each session will typically last one half of the school day, and include observations of the participating teacher instructing each of his/her Grade 4, 5, and 6 CF classes. I will work to schedule all data collection at the teacher and school’s convenience. The observations will take place during school time, and I will conduct the interviews on school property before or after class. Each observation period will last the entire class (approximately 40 minutes), and the teacher interviews will last approximately 30 minutes. All interviews and observations will be audiotape recorded for subsequent analysis. The observations will focus exclusively on teacher practices and organization. I will not be collecting any data related to individual students in any of the classrooms. The interviews are meant to determine how teachers view their role in implementing AIM, apparent challenges, the support systems and PD opportunities available to them, and other general perspectives about the method. The involvement of teachers in this study is voluntary and they may refuse to answer questions or withdraw at any time without penalty. Teachers will also receive a $40 gift certificate to Chapters/Indigo at the conclusion of the data collection process. If you allow me to conduct my study in your school, I will request permission from the teacher to proceed with the above mentioned observations and interviews.
Please rest assured that your privacy, and the privacy of the school and its teachers will be protected at all times. The raw data gathered through this study will be kept confidential, known only to me and the members of my thesis committee. My findings will be published in my doctoral thesis which will be made available to the board, the school and the teacher upon request. A summary of the thesis will also be made available upon request.

Be also assured that the identity of the board, the school, the teacher and the students will be kept confidential in the thesis and in any subsequent presentations or publications. Yours and the teacher’s name will be replaced by a pseudonym and I will take great care to assure that all identities will not be revealed in any other fashion, such as through background information. The tapes of the interviews will be destroyed after publication of this thesis. Transcripts made from the tapes will be kept in a locked cabinet at my residence and/or in my personal password-protected computer for five years and then destroyed.

I hope that you will agree to allow me to conduct this study in your school, and to interview you, as it may prove beneficial to French as a Second Language (FSL) teachers and the second language educational community in Ontario and across Canada. If you accept, I will officially contact a CF teacher in your school and seek further consent. Upon receipt of stated consent, I will proceed with making all of the necessary arrangements which will include scheduling your interview, and each of the teacher observations and interviews.

Please complete the attached consent form, and return it to me either by email (i.e. print off a hard copy; sign it; scan the signed copy; email as an attachment) or by mail to the address below. Please also keep a copy of the information letter for your own reference. If you would rather offer your consent orally, please contact me by telephone or email. If you would like to receive more information about the study, you may contact me or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Antoinette Gagné. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

I would sincerely appreciate your cooperation.

Thank you for your time,

Stephanie Arnott

c/o Modern Language Centre, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE/UT)
252 Bloor Street West  Toronto, Ontario  M5S 1V6.
CONSENT FORM
(to be signed by Principal from AIM-mandated school)

Title of the Research: Why AIM?: Educator perspectives and implementation of a new instructional method for teaching Core French as a second language in Ontario.

Name of the Researcher: Stephanie Arnott

Institutional Affiliation: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

Please complete, sign and return to the researcher to participate in the study.
Please use the self-addressed stamped envelope when mailing.

☐ I, ______________________________, give permission for the study described in the attached letter to be carried on in ________________________________ (name of school).

☐ I, ______________________________, do not give permission for the study described in the attached letter to be carried on in ________________________________ (name of school).

☐ I, ______________________________, agree to participate in the INTERVIEW part of this study, as described in the attached letter.

Signature of school’s administrator: _____________________________________________

Name (please print):________________________________________________________

Date: ________________
Appendix G
Consent Letter (AIM-Mandated Teachers)
(printed on OISE letterhead)

September 2009

(Name and address of the school)

Dear (name of teacher)

My name is Stephanie Arnott, and I am a doctoral student in the Second Language Education Program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. As part of my thesis research, I want to learn more about stakeholder perspectives related to the use of the Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM) for Core French (CF) instruction in Ontario elementary schools. I also want to explore how teachers are implementing AIM in contexts where it has been mandated for CF instruction at the elementary-level (Grades 4-6), and others where it has not been mandated.

I am writing to officially request your permission to conduct my research in your Grade 4, 5, and 6 CF classrooms from October 2009 through to May 2010. Your classroom is a suitable site for my study due to the fact that you use AIM, and teachers in your school board are expected to be using AIM to teach CF at the elementary-level. Your participation in this study will involve taking part in four interviews, and four observation sessions. For every observation session, I will observe and take notes while you are teaching each of your Grade 4, 5, and 6 CF classes. The observations will focus exclusively on your teaching practice (e.g. classroom organization, feedback, materials etc.). I will not be collecting any data related to individual students in any of the classrooms. Each observation period will last the entire class (approximately 40 minutes) and will be audiotape recorded to verify my notes and observation data if needed. The interviews are meant to determine how teachers view their role in implementing AIM, apparent challenges, the support systems and PD opportunities available to them, and other general perspectives about the method. Each interview will last approximately 30 minutes, and will be audiotape recorded for subsequent transcription and analysis. You and I will work together to schedule all data collection at your convenience, and at a time that does not interfere with any school activities. The observations will take place during school time, and I will conduct the interviews on school property before or after class.

Please rest assured that your privacy, and the privacy of the school and its teachers will be protected at all times. The raw data gathered through this study will be kept confidential, known only to me and the members of my thesis committee. My findings will be published in my doctoral thesis which will be made available to the board, the school and you upon request. A summary of the thesis will also be made available upon request.

Like all participants in this study, your involvement is completely voluntary and you may refuse to answer questions or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without having to provide a reason. You will also receive a $40 gift certificate to Chapters/Indigo at the conclusion of the data collection process.
Be assured that the identity of the board, the school, the teacher and the students will be kept confidential in the thesis and in any subsequent presentations or publications. Your name will be replaced by a pseudonym and I will take great care to assure that all identities will not be revealed in any other fashion, such as through background information. The tapes of the interviews will be destroyed after publication of this thesis. Transcripts made from the tapes will be kept in a locked cabinet at my residence and/or in my personal password-protected computer for five years and then destroyed.

I hope that you will agree to participate in my study as it may prove beneficial to French as a Second Language (FSL) teachers and the second language educational community in Ontario and across Canada. If you accept, I will proceed with making all of the necessary arrangements with you, which will include scheduling your observations and interviews at your convenience.

Please complete the attached consent form, and return it to me either by email (i.e. print off a hard copy; sign it; scan the signed copy; email as an attachment) or by mail to the address below. Please also keep a copy of the information letter for your own reference. If you would rather offer your consent orally, please contact me by telephone or email. If you would like to receive more information about the study, you may contact me or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Antoinette Gagné. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

I would sincerely appreciate your cooperation.

Thank you for your time,

Stephanie Arnott
c/o Modern Language Centre, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE/UT)
252 Bloor Street West  Toronto, Ontario  M5S 1V6.
CONSENT FORM
(to be signed by Teacher from AIM-mandated school)

Title of the Research: Why AIM?: Educator perspectives and implementation of a new instructional method for teaching Core French as a second language in Ontario.

Name of the Researcher: Stephanie Arnott

Institutional Affiliation: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

Please complete, sign and return to the researcher to participate in the study.
Please use the self-addressed stamped envelope when mailing.

☐ I, _____________________________, agree to participate in the Teacher observation and interview parts of this study, as described in the attached letter.

☐ I, _____________________________, do not agree to participate in the Teacher observation and interview parts of this study, as described in the attached letter.

Signature of Teacher: ____________________________________________________________

Name (please print): ______________________________________________________________

Date: ______________________________
Appendix H
Consent Letter (AIM-Optional Principals)
(printed on OISE letterhead)

September 2009

(Name and address of the school)

Dear (name of administrator)

My name is Stephanie Arnott, and I am a doctoral student in the Second Language Education Program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. As part of my thesis research, I want to learn more about stakeholder perspectives related to the use of the Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM) for Core French (CF) instruction in Ontario elementary schools. I also want to explore how teachers are implementing AIM in contexts where it has been mandated for CF instruction at the elementary-level (Grades 4-6), and others where it has not been mandated.

I am writing to officially request your permission to conduct research in your school from October 2009 through to May 2010. Your school is a suitable site for my study due to the fact that teachers in your school board have the option of using AIM to teach CF at the elementary-level. More specifically, I am requesting your permission to allow me to recruit one elementary-level CF teacher from your school who uses AIM. At this time, I would also like to formally invite you to participate in a short interview, to be conducted at your convenience at some point during the study period. Interview questions will centre on how you see your role in the implementation of instructional methods at your school, as well as your general perspectives about AIM. Your involvement in this study is voluntary and, like all participants, you may withdraw at any time without penalty and without providing a reason.

Over the course of the study period, the participating teacher will take part in four interviews, and four observation sessions. Each session will typically last one half of the school day, and include observations of the participating teacher instructing each of his/her Grade 4, 5, and 6 CF classes. I will work to schedule all data collection at the teacher and school’s convenience. The observations will take place during school time, and I will conduct the interviews on school property before or after class. Each observation period will last the entire class (approximately 40 minutes), and the teacher interviews will last approximately 30 minutes. All interviews and observations will be audiotape recorded for subsequent analysis. The observations will focus exclusively on teacher practices and organization. I will not be collecting any data related to individual students in any of the classrooms. The interviews are meant to determine how teachers view their role in implementing AIM, apparent challenges, the support systems and PD opportunities available to them, and other general perspectives about the method. The involvement of teachers in this study is voluntary and they may refuse to answer questions or withdraw at any time without penalty. Teachers will also receive a $40 gift certificate to Chapters/Indigo at the conclusion of the data collection process. If you allow me to conduct my study in your school, I will request permission from the teacher to proceed with the above mentioned observations and interviews.
Please rest assured that your privacy, and the privacy of the school and its teachers will be protected at all times. The raw data gathered through this study will be kept confidential, known only to me and the members of my thesis committee. My findings will be published in my doctoral thesis which will be made available to the board, the school and the teacher upon request. A summary of the thesis will also be made available upon request.

Be also assured that the identity of the board, the school, the teacher and the students will be kept confidential in the thesis and in any subsequent presentations or publications. Yours and the teacher’s name will be replaced by a pseudonym and I will take great care to assure that all identities will not be revealed in any other fashion, such as through background information. The tapes of the interviews will be destroyed after publication of this thesis. Transcripts made from the tapes will be kept in a locked cabinet at my residence and/or in my personal password-protected computer for five years and then destroyed.

I hope that you will agree to allow me to conduct this study in your school, and to interview you, as it may prove beneficial to French as a Second Language (FSL) teachers and the second language educational community in Ontario and across Canada.

If you accept, I will officially contact a CF teacher in your school and seek further consent. Upon receipt of stated consent, I will proceed with making all of the necessary arrangements which will include scheduling your interview, and each of the teacher observations and interviews.

Please complete the attached consent form, and return it to me either by email (i.e. print off a hard copy; sign it; scan the signed copy; email as an attachment) or by mail to the address below. Please also keep a copy of the information letter for your own reference. If you would rather offer your consent orally, please contact me by telephone or email. If you would like to receive more information about the study, you may contact me or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Antoinette Gagné. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

I would sincerely appreciate your cooperation.

Thank you for your time,

Stephanie Arnott
c/o Modern Language Centre, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE/UT)
252 Bloor Street West  Toronto, Ontario  M5S 1V6.
CONSENT FORM
(to be signed by Principal from AIM-optional School)

Title of the Research: Why AIM?: Educator perspectives and implementation of a new instructional method for teaching Core French as a second language in Ontario.

Name of the Researcher: Stephanie Arnott

Institutional Affiliation: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

Please complete, sign and return to the researcher to participate in the study.
Please use the self-addressed stamped envelope when mailing.

☐ I, ______________________________, give permission for the study described in the attached letter to be carried on in ________________________________ (name of school).

☐ I, ______________________________, do not give permission for the study described in the attached letter to be carried on in ________________________________ (name of school).

☐ I, ______________________________, agree to participate in the INTERVIEW part of this study, as described in the attached letter.

Signature of school’s administrator: ______________________________________________

Name (please print): ____________________________________________________________

Date: ______________________________
Appendix I
Consent Letter (AIM-Optional Teachers)
(printed on OISE letterhead)

September 2009

(Name and address of the school)

Dear (name of teacher)

My name is Stephanie Arnott, and I am a doctoral student in the Second Language Education Program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. As part of my thesis research, I want to learn more about stakeholder perspectives related to the use of the Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM) for Core French (CF) instruction in Ontario elementary schools. I also want to explore how teachers are implementing AIM in contexts where it has been mandated for CF instruction at the elementary-level (Grades 4-6), and others where it has not been mandated.

I am writing to officially request your permission to conduct my research in your Grade 4, 5, and 6 CF classrooms from October 2009 through to May 2010. Your classroom is a suitable site for my study due to the fact that that you use AIM, and teachers in your school board have the option of using AIM to teach CF at the elementary-level. Your participation in this study will involve taking part in four interviews, and four observation sessions. For every observation session, I will observe and take notes while you are teaching each of your Grade 4, 5, and 6 CF classes. The observations will focus exclusively on aspects of your teaching practice (e.g. classroom organization, feedback, materials etc.). I will not be collecting any data related to individual students in any of the classrooms. Each observation period will last the entire class (approximately 40 minutes) and will be audiotape recorded to verify my notes and observation data if needed. The interviews are meant to determine how teachers view their role in implementing AIM, apparent challenges, the support systems and PD opportunities available to them, and other general perspectives about the method. Each interview will last approximately 30 minutes, and will be audiotape recorded for subsequent transcription and analysis. You and I will work together to schedule all data collection at your convenience, and at a time that does not interfere with any school activities. The observations will take place during school time, and I will conduct the interviews on school property before or after class.

Please rest assured that your privacy, and the privacy of the school and its teachers will be protected at all times. The raw data gathered through this study will be kept confidential, known only to me and the members of my thesis committee. My findings will be published in my doctoral thesis which will be made available to the board, the school and you upon request. A summary of the thesis will also be made available upon request.

Like all participants in this study, your involvement is completely voluntary and you may refuse to answer questions or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without having to provide a reason. You will also receive a $40 gift certificate to Chapters/Indigo at the
conclusion of the data collection process.

Be assured that the identity of the board, the school, the teacher and the students will be kept confidential in the thesis and in any subsequent presentations or publications. Your name will be replaced by a pseudonym and I will take great care to assure that all identities will not be revealed in any other fashion, such as through background information. The tapes of the interviews will be destroyed after publication of this thesis. Transcripts made from the tapes will be kept in a locked cabinet at my residence and/or in my personal password-protected computer for five years and then destroyed.

I hope that you will agree to participate in my study as it may prove beneficial to French as a Second Language (FSL) teachers and the second language educational community in Ontario and across Canada. If you accept, I will proceed with making all of the necessary arrangements with you, which will include scheduling your observations and interviews at your convenience.

Please complete the attached consent form, and return it to me either by email (i.e. print off a hard copy; sign it; scan the signed copy; email as an attachment) or by mail to the address below. Please also keep a copy of the information letter for your own reference. If you would rather offer your consent orally, please contact me by telephone or email. If you would like to receive more information about the study, you may contact me or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Antoinette Gagné. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

I would sincerely appreciate your cooperation.

Thank you for your time,

Stephanie Arnott
c/o Modern Language Centre, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE/UT)
252 Bloor Street West  Toronto, Ontario  M5S 1V6.
CONSENT FORM  
(to be signed by AIM Teacher from AIM-optinal school)

Title of the Research: Why AIM?: Educator perspectives and implementation of a new instructional method for teaching Core French as a second language in Ontario.

Name of the Researcher: Stephanie Arnott

Institutional Affiliation: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

Please complete, sign and return to the researcher to participate in the study. Please use the self-addressed stamped envelope when mailing.

☐ I, ______________________________, agree to participate in the Teacher observation and interview parts of this study, as described in the attached letter.

☐ I, ______________________________, do not agree to participate in the Teacher observation and interview parts of this study, as described in the attached letter.

Signature of Teacher: _____________________________________________

Name (please print):________________________________________________________

Date: _______________________________
Appendix J
Non-AIM Teacher Consent Letter (AIM-Optional)

(Name and address of the school)

Dear (name of teacher)

My name is Stephanie Arnott, and I am a doctoral student in the Second Language Education Program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. As part of my thesis research, I want to learn more about stakeholder perspectives related to the use of the Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM) for Core French (CF) instruction in Ontario elementary schools. I also want to explore how teachers are implementing AIM in contexts where it has been mandated for CF instruction at the elementary-level (Grades 4-6), and others where it has not been mandated.

I am writing to officially recruit you to participate in my research study, which will be taking place from October 2009 through to May 2010. You are a suitable candidate for my study due to the fact that you do not use AIM, and that teachers in your school board have the option of using AIM to teach CF at the elementary-level. Your participation in this study will involve taking part in one interview. I will ask questions about your experiences as an elementary-level CF teacher, what instructional methods you are using to teach CF, and your perceptions related to aspects of the AIM method for teaching CF. The interview will last approximately 30 minutes, and will be audiotape recorded for subsequent transcription and analysis. You and I will work together to schedule the interview at your convenience, and at a time that does not interfere with any school activities. I will conduct the interviews on school property before or after class.

Please rest assured that your privacy, and the privacy of the school and its teachers will be protected at all times. The raw data gathered through this study will be kept confidential, known only to me and the members of my thesis committee. My findings will be published in my doctoral thesis which will be made available to the board, the school and you upon request. A summary of the thesis will also be made available upon request.

Like all participants in this study, your involvement is completely voluntary and you may refuse to answer questions or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without having to provide a reason. Be assured that the identity of the board, the school, the teacher and the students will be kept confidential in the thesis and in any subsequent presentations or publications. Your name will be replaced by a pseudonym and I will take great care to assure that all identities will not be revealed in any other fashion, such as through background information. The tapes of the interviews will be destroyed after publication of this thesis. Transcripts made from the tapes will be kept in a locked cabinet at my residence and/or in my personal password-protected computer for five years and then destroyed.

I hope that you will agree to participate in my study as it may prove beneficial to French as a
Second Language (FSL) teachers and the second language educational community in Ontario and across Canada. If you accept, I will proceed with making all of the necessary arrangements with you, which will include scheduling your interview at your convenience.

Please complete the attached consent form, and return it to me either by email (i.e. print off a hard copy; sign it; scan the signed copy; email as an attachment) or by mail to the address below. Please also keep a copy of the information letter for your own reference. If you would rather offer your consent orally, please contact me by telephone or email. If you would like to receive more information about the study, you may contact me or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Antoinette Gagné. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

I would sincerely appreciate your cooperation.

Thank you for your time,

Stephanie Arnott
c/o Modern Language Centre, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE/UT)
252 Bloor Street West  Toronto, Ontario  M5S 1V6.

CONSENT FORM
(to be signed by Non-AIM Teacher from AIM-optional school)

Title of the Research: Why AIM?: Educator perspectives and implementation of a new instructional method for teaching Core French as a second language in Ontario.

Name of the Researcher: Stephanie Arnott

Institutional Affiliation: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

Please complete, sign and return to the researcher to participate in the study. Please use the self-addressed stamped envelope when mailing.

☐ I, ________________________________, agree to participate in the Teacher interview part of this study, as described in the attached letter.

☐ I, ________________________________, do not agree to participate in the Teacher interview part of this study, as described in the attached letter.

Signature of Teacher: ________________________________

Name (please print): ________________________________

Date: ________________________________
Appendix K
FSL Consultant Survey

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the "Ontario FSL Consultant/Coordinator Survey" component of my PhD thesis study.

I would like to ask you a few questions about the Core French program in your school board. More specifically, I want to know more about the instructional method(s) being used by junior level (Grades 4-6) Core French teachers in your board.

An instructional method is defined as a set of principles and methods (i.e. processes, activities, tasks etc.) inherent to one's instruction.

I will also ask some questions related to the Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM) - a method being used across Canada for Core French instruction.

There will be space provided at the end if you would like to elaborate on any of your responses or provide additional comments.

Thank you again for participating!

1. Have you ever heard of the Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM) for teaching French as a Second Language?

Please select one of the following:

Yes
No

2. What instructional methods are junior level (Grades 4-6) Core French teachers in your board using to teach French? (Please check all that apply).

Please select all that apply:

Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM)
Total Physical Response Method (TPR)
Total Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS)
Multidimensional Project-Based (MPB) or Communicative-Experiential
Grammar Translation Method
Audiolingual Method
Silent Way / Silent Method
Direct Method
Community Method
OTHER - check this box, then type your answer in the space below.
I don't know

3. If you checked OTHER, please specify. Otherwise, move on to the next question.

________________________________________
4. Does your board mandate the use of any of these methods at the junior level (Grades 4-6)?
   Please select one of the following:
   
   Yes
   No
   I don't know

5. You answered YES to the previous question.
   Please indicate which of the methods have been mandated for Core French instruction at
   the junior level (Grades 4-6) in your board. (Check all that apply).
   Please select all that apply:
   
   Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM)
   Total Physical Response Method (TPR)
   Total Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS)
   Multidimensional Project-Based (MPB) or Communicative-Experiential
   Grammar Translation Method
   Audiolingual Method
   Silent Way / Silent Method
   Direct Method
   Community Method
   OTHER - check this box, then type your answer in the space below.
   I don't know

6. If you checked OTHER, please specify. Otherwise, move on to the next question.
   ____________________________________________

7. Are any of these methods being used at other grade levels besides junior (Grades 4-6)?
   (Please check all that apply).
   Please select all that apply:
   
   Yes - Grades K-3
   Yes - Grades 7-8
   Yes - Grades 9 and above
   No
   OTHER - check this box, then type your answer in the space below.
   I don't know

8. If you checked OTHER, please specify. Otherwise, move on to the next question.
   ____________________________________________
9. What resources are junior level (Grades 4-6) Core French teachers in your board using to teach French? (Please check all that apply).
Please select all that apply:

- Acti-Vie 1
- Acti-Vie 2
- Acti-Vie 3
- Histoires en action! #1
- Histoires en action! #2
- Histoires en action! #3
- Visages 1
- Visages 2
- Visages 3
- Teacher-Made Resources
- OTHER - check this box, then type your answer in the space below.
- I don't know

10. If you checked OTHER, please specify. Otherwise, move on to the next question.
_________________________________________

11. Does your board mandate the use of any of these resources at the junior level (Grades 4-6)?
Please select one of the following:

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

12. You answered YES to the previous question.
Please indicate which of the resources have been mandated for Core French instruction at the junior level (Grades 4-6) in your board. (Check all that apply).
Please select all that apply:

- Acti-Vie 1
- Acti-Vie 2
- Acti-Vie 3
- Histoires en action! #1
- Histoires en action! #2
- Histoires en action! #3
- Visages 1
- Visages 2
- Visages 3
- Teacher-Made Resources
- OTHER - check this box, then type your answer in the space below.
- I don't know
13. If you checked OTHER, please specify. Otherwise, move on to the next question.

_________________________________________

14. Please indicate how you found out about AIM. (Check all that apply).
Please select all that apply:

Other FSL Consultant(s) / Coordinator(s)
French Teachers in my board
Parents in my board
Students in my board
Professional Conference
Publication (i.e. newspaper, professional newsletter, etc.)
AIM workshop
AIM mailing
OTHER - check this box, then type your answer in the space below.

15. If you checked OTHER, please specify. Otherwise, move on to the next question.

_________________________________________

16. Do you know of any academic research that has been conducted on AIM?
Please select one of the following:

Yes
No

17. You answered YES to the previous question.
Please describe the research you are aware of.
Include as much detail as possible (e.g. findings, results, names of researchers, title of research, etc.)

18. In your opinion, is AIM an appropriate method for Core French instruction at the primary level (Grades K-3)?
Please select one of the following:

Not Appropriate
Somewhat Appropriate
Appropriate
Very Appropriate

19. Please briefly explain the reasoning for your answer using the box provided.
20. In your opinion, is AIM an appropriate method for Core French instruction at the junior level (Grades 4-6)?
Please select one of the following:

Not Appropriate
Somewhat Appropriate
Appropriate
Very Appropriate

21. Please briefly explain the reasoning for your answer using the box provided.

22. In your opinion, is AIM an appropriate method for Core French instruction at the intermediate level (Grades 7-8)?
Please select one of the following:
Not Appropriate
Somewhat Appropriate
Appropriate
Very Appropriate

23. Please briefly explain the reasoning for your answer using the box provided.

24. Please indicate the level(s) at which AIM is currently being used for Core French instruction in your board. (Check all that apply).
Please select all that apply:

Primary (K-3)
Junior (4-6)
Intermediate (7-8)
Senior (9 and up)
OTHER - check this box, then type your answer in the space below.
I don't know
AIM is not being used for Core French instruction in my board.

25. If you checked OTHER, please specify. Otherwise, move on to the next question.

26. Are teachers at these levels using the Histoires en Action series of AIM resources?
Please select one of the following:

Yes - all AIM teachers are using these resources.
Yes - some AIM teachers are using these resources.
No - these resources are not being used in my board.
OTHER - check this box, then type your answer in the space below.
I don't know
AIM is not being used for Core French instruction in my board.
27. If you checked OTHER, please specify. Otherwise, move on to the next question.

________________________________________

28. In your opinion, how closely should AIM teachers follow the directives in the AIM instructional materials? 
   Please select one of the following:
   - Not at all
   - Somewhat Closely
   - Closely
   - Very Closely
   - At the discretion of the teacher

29. Does your board MANDATE the use of AIM at one or more grade levels for Core French instruction? 
   (i.e. Is it obligatory for Core French teachers in your board to use AIM?)
   Please select one of the following:
   - Yes
   - No

30. Please briefly describe how your board came to this decision.

31. Please indicate the level(s) at which AIM is mandated for Core French instruction in your board. (Check all that apply).
   Please select all that apply:
   - Primary (K-3)
   - Junior (4-6)
   - Intermediate (7-8)
   - Senior (9 and up)
   - OTHER - check this box, then type your answer in the space below.
   - I don't know

32. If you checked OTHER, please specify. Otherwise, move on to the next question.

________________________________________

33. At those levels where AIM is mandated, is it also obligatory for teachers to use the Histoires en Action series of AIM resources? 
   Please select one of the following:
   - Yes
   - No
   - I don't know
34. Please briefly describe how your board came to the decision not to mandate AIM for Core French instruction.

35. What instructional methods are junior level (Grades 4-6) Core French teachers in your board using to teach French? (Please check all that apply).

Please select all that apply:

Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM)
Total Physical Response Method (TPR)
Total Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS)
Multidimensional Project-Based (MPB) or Communicative-Experiential Grammar Translation Method
Audiolingual Method
Silent Way / Silent Method
Direct Method
Community Method
OTHER - check this box, then type your answer in the space below.
I don't know

36. If you checked OTHER, please specify. Otherwise, move on to the next question.

_________________________________________

37. Does your board mandate the use of any of these methods at the junior level (Grades 46)? Please select one of the following:

Yes
No
I don't know

38. You answered YES to the previous question. Please indicate which of the methods have been mandated for Core French instruction at the junior level (Grades 4-6) in your board. (Check all that apply).

Please select all that apply:

Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM)
Total Physical Response Method (TPR)
Total Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS)
Multidimensional Project-Based (MPB) or Communicative-Experiential Grammar Translation Method
Audiolingual Method
Silent Way / Silent Method
Direct Method
Community Method
OTHER - check this box, then type your answer in the space below.
I don't know
39. If you checked OTHER, please specify. Otherwise, move on to the next question.

______________________________

40. Are any of these methods being used at other grade levels besides junior (Grades 4-6)? Please select one of the following:

Yes - Grades K-3
Yes - Grades 7-8
Yes - Grades 9 and above
No
OTHER - check this box, then type your answer in the space below.
I don't know

41. If you checked OTHER, please specify. Otherwise, move on to the next question.

______________________________

42. What resources are junior level (Grades 4-6) Core French teachers in your board using to teach French? (Please check all that apply). Please select all that apply:

Acti-Vie 1
Acti-Vie 2
Acti-Vie 3
Histoires en Action 1 (AIM)
Histoires en Action 2 (AIM)
Histoires en Action 3 (AIM)
Visages 1
Visages 2
Visages 3
Teacher-Made Resources
OTHER - check this box, then type your answer in the space below.
I don't know

43. If you checked OTHER, please specify. Otherwise, move on to the next question.

______________________________

44. Does your board mandate the use of any of these resources at the junior level (Grades 4-6)? Please select one of the following:

Yes
No
I don't know
45. You answered YES to the previous question. Please indicate which of the resources have been mandated for Core French instruction at the junior level (Grades 4-6) in your board. (Check all that apply).

Please select all that apply:

- Acti-Vie 1
- Acti-Vie 2
- Acti-Vie 3
- Histoires en Action 1 (AIM)
- Histoires en Action 2 (AIM)
- Histoires en Action 3 (AIM)
- Visages 1
- Visages 2
- Visages 3
- Teacher-Made Resources
- OTHER - check this box, then type your answer in the space below.

I don't know

46. If you checked OTHER, please specify. Otherwise, move on to the next question.

__________________________________________________________________________

BACKGROUND INFORMATION
In order to better interpret your answers, I would ask you to answer the following questions about your school board and your background as an FSL consultant/coordinator. Your answers will be treated with the strictest confidence. Neither you nor your school board will be identified in any way in my final thesis report.

47. In your board, does Core French instruction begin in Grade 4?
Please select one of the following:

- Yes
- No

48. You answered NO to the previous question. Please specify the starting grade for Core French instruction in your board.

__________________________________________________________________________

49. How long are Grade 4 Core French classes in your board? Please select one of the following:

- Less than 20 minutes
- 20-30 minutes
- 30-40 minutes
- 40-50 minutes
- More than 50 minutes
50. How often are Grade 4 Core French classes held?
Please select one of the following:

Daily
4 days a week / per cycle
3 days a week / per cycle
Less than 2 days a week / per cycle

51. How long are Grade 5 Core French classes in your board?
Please select one of the following:

Less than 20 minutes
30-40 minutes
40-50 minutes
More than 50 minutes

52. How often are Grade 5 Core French classes held?
Please select one of the following:

Daily
4 days a week / per cycle
3 days a week / per cycle
Less than 2 days a week / per cycle

53. How long are Grade 6 Core French classes in your board?
Please select one of the following:

Less than 20 minutes
30-40 minutes
40-50 minutes
More than 50 minutes

54. How often are Grade 6 Core French classes held?
Please select one of the following:

Daily
4 days a week / per cycle
3 days a week / per cycle
Less than 2 days a week / per cycle
55. Please indicate if any changes have been made in the last 5 years to the Core French program in your school board with respect to... (Check all that apply).
Please select all that apply:

Starting Grade for Core French
Length of Core French classes
Scheduling of Core French classes (e.g. Intensive French, Block Scheduling etc.)
Core French Curriculum Expectations
PD Training for Core French teachers
OTHER - check this box, then type your answer in the space below.
I don't know

56. If you checked OTHER, please specify. Otherwise, move on to the next question.

_________________________

57. How long have you been an FSL consultant/coordinator with your current board?
Please select one of the following:

Less than 1 year
1-5 years
More than 5 years

58. Have you ever served as an FSL consultant/coordinator elsewhere?
Please select one of the following:

Yes
No

59. You answered YES to the previous question.
Please list the other board(s) in which you have served as FSL consultant/coordinator.

60. Are you currently teaching in addition to being an FSL consultant/coordinator with your board?
Please select one of the following:

Yes
No

61. You answered YES to the previous question.
Please indicate which subject(s) and grade level(s) you currently teach.
62. Please indicate the length of your previous teaching experience.
Please select one of the following:

Less than 4 years
4-9 years
10-15 years
15-20 years
More than 20 years
I have no previous teaching experience.

63. Please indicate the length of your previous FSL teaching experience.
Please select one of the following:

Less than 4 years
4-9 years
10-15 years
15-20 years
More than 20 years
I have no previous FSL teaching experience.

64. Please check the program(s)/format(s) in which you have previous FSL teaching experience.
(Check all that apply).
Please select all that apply:

Core French
French Immersion
Extended French
Intensive French
OTHER - check this box, then type your answer in the space below.

65. If you checked OTHER, please specify. Otherwise, move on to the next question.
_________________________________________

66. Please check the grade level(s) in which you have previous FSL teaching experience.
(Check all that apply).
Please select all that apply:

Primary (K-3)
Junior (4-6)
Intermediate (7-8)
Senior (9 and up)
OTHER - check this box, then type your answer in the space below.

67. If you checked OTHER, please specify. Otherwise, move on to the next question.
_________________________________________
68. What is the name of your school board?
I am asking this question so that I can make sure that this survey adequately represents the views of FSL consultants/coordinators across regions, in large and small, and urban and rural school districts. Results of this survey will NOT be reported by school board/district. Your school board will not be identified at any time.

69. Additional Comments?
Please use this space if there is anything else you would like me to know about the Core French programming or policies in your school board.

Thank you so much for participating in my survey!
Appendix L
FSL Consultant Focus Group Protocol

1. Opening Question
   – Please say your name and the school board you represent as an FSL consultant.
   – Describe how you first found out about AIM.

2. Need
   – What prompted teachers in your boards to use AIM (or not use AIM)?

3. “Consultant” Role
   – How do you monitor decisions made about the Core French program in your board?
     (AIM and non-AIM related)
   – Describe what you do to support Core French teachers in your board, whether they use AIM or not.

4. Resources
   – What do you think about the AIM instructional materials (i.e. HEA kits)?

5. Quality and practicality of the change
   – What challenges or complexities does the implementation of AIM present at the board level?
   – Do you see the implementation of AIM as being more of a short- or long-term change for your particular board?

5. Growing popularity across Canada
   – More and more Core French teachers across Canada are using AIM. Considering your experiences in your board, what do you think about this growing trend?
Appendix M

AIM Teacher Interview Protocol

Interview #1

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Today, I would like to ask you a few questions about your experiences as an elementary-level AIM teacher, and your perceptions related to certain aspects of its implementation. Specifically, today we will talk about your teaching context, and how you came to use AIM to teach CF. Also, I will ask you a set of questions that relate to the progression of your implementation of AIM at the time of our interview, and whether anything has changed in that respect since the last interview. Please keep your elementary-level students (Grades 4-6) in mind when answering the questions, as your teaching experience with AIM in that context is most relevant to this study.

Background information

– How long have you been an elementary-level CF teacher?
– Do you have other French Second Language teaching experience (i.e. French Immersion)?
– Do you have other teaching experience (e.g. English homeroom)?
– How long have you been teaching elementary-level CF at this school?

AIM-related background information

– How long have you been teaching elementary-level CF using AIM?
– Describe how you first found out about AIM.

Teaching context

– Why are you using AIM in your elementary-level CF classroom?
– How do you feel about your school board’s policy related to teachers choosing an instructional method for CF (i.e. choice left up to teachers or mandated)?
– Why do you think this policy is in place?
– In your opinion, should all elementary-level teachers be using AIM to teach CF? Why or why not?

Utility

– In your opinion, is AIM a useful method for teaching elementary-level CF?
– In your opinion, is AIM a useful method for teaching junior- and/or senior-level CF?

Need

– What priority needs does the implementation of AIM meet in your classroom?
– Has the implementation of AIM at your school led to any changes or revisions at the curriculum, policy or school levels?

Local Characteristics – Part A

– Describe your role in the implementation of AIM at this point in the school year.
– Are you finding anything challenging about using AIM at this point in the school year?
– How do you think your students are reacting to AIM at this stage of L2 acquisition?
Interview #2

Today, I would like to ask you a few questions about the AIM instructional materials and how your practice has changed since you started using AIM. We will also talk again about the progression of your implementation of AIM this year, and whether anything has changed in that respect since the last interview.

Instructional Materials

– What do you think about the AIM instructional materials (i.e. *Histoires en Action* kits)?
– How closely do you follow the directives and activities outlined in the AIM materials?

Complexity

– What changes did you have to make to your teaching practice in order to implement AIM?
– What skills do AIM teachers need in order to implement the method effectively?
– Would you consider it easy or difficult to implement AIM?

Local Characteristics - Part B

– Since we spoke last…
  – Has your role in the implementation of AIM changed?
  – Have there been any other challenges you’ve faced while implementing AIM?
  – Have there been any changes in how your students are reacting to AIM?

Interview #3

Today, I would like to ask you a few questions about your professional development opportunities and the kind of support you are receiving related to AIM. Again, we will also talk about the progression of your implementation of AIM this year, and whether anything has changed in that respect since the last interview.

Support

– How has your school supported the implementation of AIM?
– Has anyone ever challenged your use of AIM to teach CF?
– To what extent do other teachers in your school support or challenge your implementation of AIM?
– Are you receiving support from other teachers outside of your school environment (e.g. professional learning communities)?

Professional Development

– Please describe the AIM professional development opportunities that you have had a chance to participate in (e.g. AIM workshops, AIM Summer Institute, etc.)
– Do you find these PD opportunities helpful with respect to your implementation of AIM?

Local Characteristics – Part C

– What role does your FSL consultant play in the implementation of AIM in your school?
– What role does your principal play in the implementation of AIM in your school?
– What role do the parents play in the implementation of AIM in your school?
– Since we spoke last…
  – Has your role in the implementation of AIM changed?
  – Have there been any other challenges you’ve faced while implementing AIM?
  – Have there been any changes in how your students are reacting to AIM?
Interview #4

Today, I would like to get your perspective about the growing popularity of AIM, and where AIM fits into your long-term professional plans. Again, we will also talk about the progression of your implementation of AIM this year, and whether anything has changed in that respect since the last interview.

Growing popularity across Canada
  – More and more CF teachers across Canada are using AIM. What do you think about this growing trend?

AIM-related background information
  – Are you aware of any of the academic research that has been conducted on AIM?

Quality and practicality of change
  – How long do you foresee AIM being a part of your CF teaching practice?

Local Characteristics – Part D
  – Since we spoke last…
    – Has your role in the implementation of AIM changed?
    – Have there been any other challenges you’ve faced while implementing AIM?
    – Have there been any changes in how your students are reacting to AIM?
Appendix N
Principal Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Today, I would like to ask you a few questions about your perceptions related to aspects of the AIM method for teaching CF, and its implementation in your school. Please keep your elementary-level students and teachers (Grades 4-6) in mind when answering the questions, as this particular context is most relevant to this study.

Background Information
- How long have you been a principal at this school?
- Please describe your previous teaching experience (i.e. grade levels, subjects etc.)

Knowledge about AIM
- What did you know about AIM prior to it being used by elementary-level CF teachers in your school?
- Are you aware of any of the academic research that has been conducted on AIM?

Utility
- Have you ever had a chance to observe any of your elementary-level CF teachers using AIM? If yes, please describe your general impressions of what you saw.
- In your opinion, is AIM a useful method for teaching elementary-level CF? Why or why not?
- In your opinion, is AIM a useful method for teaching junior- and/or senior-level CF? Why or why not?

Instructional Materials
- What do you think about the AIM instructional materials (i.e. Histoires en Action kits)?

Implementation
- Have you observed any changes in your CF teachers since the implementation of AIM?
- Has the implementation of AIM required any change or restructuring at the school-level?
- What role do you play in the implementation of AIM in your school?
- Describe what you do to support CF teachers in your school, whether they use AIM or not.

Growing popularity across Canada
- More and more CF teachers across Canada are using AIM. What do you think about this growing trend?
Appendix O
Ontario Ministry Representative Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Today, I would like to ask you a few questions about your perceptions related to aspects of the AIM method for teaching CF, and its implementation in your school. Please keep elementary-level students and teachers (Grades 4-6) in mind when answering the questions, as this particular context is most relevant to this study.

Background Information
- How long have you held this position with the Ontario Ministry of Education?
- Please describe your previous teaching experience (i.e. grade levels, subjects etc.)

Knowledge about AIM
- What do you know about AIM?
- Please describe how/when/where you first heard about AIM.
- Are you aware of any of the academic research that has been conducted on AIM?

Growing popularity across Canada
- More and more CF teachers across Canada are using AIM. What do you think about this growing trend?

Utility
- Have you ever had a chance to observe elementary-level CF teachers using AIM? If yes, please describe your general impressions of what you saw.
- In your opinion, is AIM a useful method for teaching elementary-level CF? Why or why not?
- In your opinion, is AIM a useful method for teaching junior- and/or senior-level CF? Why or why not?

Instructional Materials
- What do you think about the AIM instructional materials (i.e. Histoires en Action kits)?

Implementation
- Has the implementation of AIM in CF classrooms across Ontario required any change or restructuring at the Ministry-level?
- In your opinion, what role does the government play in the implementation of AIM?
- To what extent does the government support or question the kind of change that AIM represents in the CF program in Ontario?
Appendix P
Non-AIM Teacher Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Today, I would like to ask you a few questions about your experiences as an elementary-level CF teacher, and your perceptions related to aspects of the AIM method for teaching CF. Please keep your elementary-level students (Grades 4-6) in mind when answering the questions, as your teaching experience in that context is most relevant to this study.

Background information
- How long have you been an elementary-level CF teacher?
- Do you have other French Second Language teaching experience (i.e. French Immersion)?
- Do you have other teaching experience (e.g. English homeroom)?
- How long have you been teaching elementary-level CF at this school?

Teaching context
- How do you feel about your school board’s policy related to teachers choosing an instructional method for CF (i.e. choice left up to teachers)?
- Why do you think this policy is in place?
- What instructional method do you use in your elementary-level CF class?
- Please explain why you are using this particular method.

Utility
- Please explain why you chose not to use AIM to teach elementary-level CF.

AIM-related background information
- Describe how you first found out about AIM.
- Are you aware of any of the academic research that has been conducted on AIM?

Growing popularity across Canada
- More and more CF teachers across Canada are using AIM. What do you think about this growing trend?
Appendix Q
Observation Scheme

OBSERVATION SCHEME
AIM Implementation

Date ..................  School .................................... Teacher ........................................... Observation # .................

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>ACTIVITIES &amp; EPISODES</th>
<th>PARTICIPANT ORGANIZATION</th>
<th>CONTENT CONTROL</th>
<th>STUDENT MODALITY</th>
<th>MATERIALS</th>
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<td>Group</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>T ↔ S/C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>ACTIVITIES &amp; EPISODES</td>
<td>AIM Procedures</td>
<td>CONTEXT</td>
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<td>36</td>
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Appendix R
Lyrics from AIM Raps Observed

Entry Rap

La classe commence et tout le monde est prêt,
On doit parler seulement en français.
Si quelqu’un parle en anglais,
Cette personne n’a pas de cartes, et ça c’est vrai.
Ça c’est dommage, mais on espère aussi
Que tout le monde essaie d’aider ses amis.
En français, on parle tellement bien,
Notre rap est terminé, c’est la fin.

Grammar Rap – Articles Partitifs

‘À’ plus ‘le’ c’est “au”,
‘De’ plus ‘le’ c’est “du” c’est vrai.
‘À’ plus ‘les’ c’est “aux” avec ‘x’,
Et ‘de’ plus ‘les’ c’est “des”.

Exit Rap

La classe de français est maintenant terminée,
Et c’est dommage, mais on doit s’en aller.
On revient encore une fois, est ça c’est bon,
Mais il faut partir, alors on dit à bientôt.
Bien sûr c’est en français qu’on a parlé aujourd’hui,
Si quelqu’un avait besoin de moi, je l’ai aidé, oui!
On s’est amusé et on a beaucoup appris,
On avait voulu danser, chanter ou écrire.
On a travaillé fort, mais toujours en français,
Parce qu’apprendre un autre langue est fantastique, c’est vrai.