NOS HISTOIRES:
A REFLECTION IN DEMOCRATIC DISCOURSE IN A FRENCH PRIMARY CLASSROOM
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ABSTRACT

This study used an interpretive model of classroom action research and focused on the planning, implementing, and reflection related to a sharing routine called *Nos histoires* in a Grade 1 French Immersion classroom. The sharing of personal narratives provided opportunities for students to be motivated to practice language because the topics were of personal interest to them; for students to extend conversations and create social interaction through the set-aside time for dialogue; and finally, for students to work together, construct knowledge collaboratively and acknowledge living together in the same space, thus living a good life.

Reflections confirmed student discourse could be useful in a second language setting. The sharing time experienced by the children became a practical routine for fostering the theoretical ideals implicit in Vygotsky's social learning theory and in the theory of democracy. The practices of dialogue and caring expanded into other routines throughout the school day, and connections were made between socioculturalism and democracy, and democracy and action research.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“Kids learn in communion.” (Noddings, 1992, p. 36)

Open the classroom door of a Kindergarten or Grade 1 classroom and you may see twenty young children sitting on a carpet in a semi circle. You follow their gaze to the front and notice a young student standing and holding something in her hand. Beside her sits the teacher in a small chair. You return to look at all the children sitting with crossed legs and hands in their laps. Then you start to hear the little girl’s presentation. The young girl is speaking about the object in her hand: a doll. She describes three things about the treasured item. Her name is Cindy. Her aunt gave it to her for her birthday. She keeps the doll on her bed. Then she asks the group in front of her if there are any questions. Several hands go up. The student proceeds to ask three of her classmates for their questions. One of the students responds with the statement, “I like her dress.”; and does not ask a question. Another student asks where she got the doll; a question that was previously answered within the student’s presentation. The third student asks a question, “What do you like most about your doll?” After the presenter answers the questions, she passes the doll around so each child can see it. Afterwards you see the girl return Cindy to her backpack. Show’n’tell has finished for the day.

Establishing Research Purpose

Show’n’tell is a common practice in primary classrooms. In my experience as a Kindergarten and Grade 1 teacher, and from talking with other teachers who teach the same grade, the scenario just described is a typical example of how show’n’tell is
conducted in classrooms. Why do Kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers include show’n’tell in the planning of classroom routines? Is the preceding example of show’n’tell an effective routine, or can a more meaningful way be found to engage students in a sharing process? How can a new routine be implemented and why is it important to try? If a new routine for show’n’tell is established and encourages new patterns of discourse, how will other subjects and class interactions be influenced? These are questions I investigate in this study.

These questions are important because as an educator I want to use educational practices that will ensure my students are prepared for entering the world that will be their future. I propose that show’n’tell can be more than a rote exercise performed in a formulaic fashion. In this study, I have planned, implemented, and reflected on a sharing routine that engages students in the type of dialogue that I believe is necessary to prepare them as educated citizens in our world. This study begins by discussing why teachers should spend instructional time on show’n’tell, and why improving classroom discourse is important. In this chapter, I present my research questions, discuss the theoretical underpinnings behind the design of a new show’n’tell routine, show significance of the study, share a description of myself as a teacher and researcher, and explain the parameters of the study. This study was conducted in a French Immersion setting and as such French vocabulary was used. English translations, however, are provided in square brackets following any French text.

Why Spend Time on Show’n’tell?

In my classroom show’n’tell has been a daily routine. Time in the classroom is always precious. Therefore, when planning my timetable for the school year, I thought
seriously about what the purposes were for show’n’tell in order to validate the amount of
time spent on one routine. What were the lessons being taught? As a teacher, I felt a
good lesson had to be justified by the provincial learning outcomes. The learning
outcomes used by teachers in British Columbia are presented as Integrated Resource
Packages, or IRPs. If I look only at the English Language Arts IRP (British Columbia
Ministry of Education, 1996); I find at least 18 of the 44 learning outcomes apply to
show’n’tell (see Table 1, and for corresponding learning outcomes from the French IRP
see Appendix A). Therefore, 41 percent of the language arts learning outcomes could be
addressed by the daily routine of show’n’tell and justifies taking the time to have
show’n’tell on a daily basis. Yet, I do not want to be an educator who simply justifies
his or her lessons on the quantity of learning outcomes taught. I want to be an educator
who helps prepare students to become the best individuals they can be; prepared to
participate in society as adults.

Why Improve Classroom Discourse?

Several studies (Hughes & Cousins, 1988; Michaels & Cazden, 1988; Wells, 1986)
have reported that teachers and schools are not providing environments to encourage or
enhance the richness and diversity of student dialogue. In some instances, teachers
interrupted their students, cutting them off and effectively closing dialogue completely
(Michaels & Cazden, 1988). In other instances, schools were not favorable in accepting
home dialects and students were denied the opportunity of a realistic assessment of their
language skills (Gilmore, 1986; Hughes & Cousins, 1988). Each of these authors
concluded that including more time in the classroom for student talk would improve
learning situations for those students who would benefit the most by achieving improved
Table 1
Prescribed Learning Outcomes from the English Language Arts IRP Associated with the Show’n’tell Routine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comprehend and Respond</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is expected that students will:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• ask questions as an aid to understanding when listening</td>
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<tr>
<td>• demonstrate abilities to follow simple oral instructions</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Communicate Ideas and Information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is expected that students will:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• demonstrate a willingness to present relevant ideas in discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• identify connections between ideas and information and their own experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• revise oral communications to clarify their ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• demonstrate pride and satisfaction in using language to express their thoughts, ideas, and feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• demonstrate a willingness to experiment with oral forms of communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• demonstrate a willingness to participate in a variety of sharing activities that include the use storytelling</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<th>Self and Society</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is expected that students will:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• demonstrate an awareness of themselves as communicators - users of language and various media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• demonstrate a willingness to respond to questions about their own communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• demonstrate their understanding of the different purposes and uses of language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• interact with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• speak in turn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• listen actively, providing verbal and non-verbal responses appropriate to their stages of development and to their cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• agree and disagree appropriately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• demonstrate a willingness to participate actively in oral activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• demonstrate an awareness of differences in the ways in which people use language in various contexts, including home, the playground, and the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• acknowledge special events and honour individual and group accomplishments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Adapted from the *English Language Arts K to 7 IRP*, British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1996.
literacy skills. The French Immersion IRP supported this argument and listed several learning outcomes involving students being able to share information about familiar topics such as family. The French IRP promoted language learning that is authentic, collaborative, and interactive (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1997). In other words, by improving discourse practices students’ achievements of prescribed learning outcomes may increase. Therefore, I felt it was important to find ways for students to immerse themselves in dialogue.

My previous experiences with storytelling led me to the conclusion that having students share personal narratives may be one way of initiating classroom discourse. My coursework this past year has added personal meaning to the importance of sharing experiences with one another as a learning tool. Several of my graduate classes modeled discourse methods. Through the sharing of personal anecdotes I was able to learn from my colleagues as well as from my professors. Thus, this study has evolved from personal inquiry and professional inquiry, to the connections made between my educational coursework and my teaching experiences.

Research Question

The purpose of this study was to find ways to include storytelling in regular classroom routines to promote an environment conducive to increasing French language use by students, collaborative learning, and the practices of democratic dialogue. As such, I incorporated storytelling among students as a way to strengthen my current method of show’n’tell. I called this new routine Nos histoires [Our Stories]. In this study I investigated the following three questions:

1. Can I establish a classroom routine that is based on democratic and
sociocultural theory and (a) increases proficiency in the French language, (b) enhances student interactions for the purpose of scaffolding knowledge among peers, and (c) provides space for practicing democratic principles of dialogue?

2. What evidence can be collected to demonstrate that the new classroom routine was successfully established?

3. What new meaning will I construct and what commitments to action will I make after having participated in the creation of new educational practice through classroom action research?

Classroom action research is the method by which I investigated these questions. I collected data in the classroom for three months. I used a video camera on several occasions to tape sessions and I kept a journal for field notes. I analyzed the data using qualitative techniques such as coding, conversing reflectively with colleagues, and journaling.

This inquiry was important because both the academic literature and my professional experiences suggested that when students share their stories and are given the opportunity to respond, they can be expected to connect their own personal meaning to the stories of others. I visualized this connection as an upside down pyramid; where the connection between participants creates building blocks of learning as the world view of each student expands with the shared contributions of others' experiences (see Figure 1). Moreover, I expected that the motivation to share personal anecdotes would also create meaningful contexts for students to practice literacy skills. By the end of the study, Nos histoires became a way for me, as an educator, to provide a space for children to learn about participating in the miniature society that was our classroom. Within Nos histoires, the students learned to converse with one another. As they practiced the skill
of oral communication they were beginning the process of creating the *good life* for themselves.

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<tr>
<td>7. Kelly explains that jelly fish live in the ocean.</td>
<td>8. Suzy realizes she swam in a lake, not an ocean.</td>
<td>9. Daisy wants to know if Suzy saw any neat animals that live in lakes.</td>
<td>10. Bobby wants to know if jelly fish can live in lakes also.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Dan asks what a jelly fish is.</td>
<td>5. Daisy describes the jelly fish and draws a picture on the board for all the students to see.</td>
<td>6. Bobby asks about where Daisy went and where jelly fish live.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Suzy shares a story about swimming but not liking it because of all the weeds</td>
<td>3. Daisy responds that there weren't really any weeds, but there were cool animals like jelly fish in the water.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Daisy shares a story about going to the beach and swimming in the water.</td>
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<td></td>
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*Figure 1*. The building blocks of learning: a hypothetical example illustrating how students sharing stories can be an interactive process to help students expand their horizons of knowledge.
Theoretical Framework

Arendt (1968) stated:

[Education] is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world. (p. 196)

I see Arendt's words as a challenge to all educators. One way to prepare our students for the global world in which they will live as adults is to invite them to share their personal stories. Nos histoires was designed with two major theoretical underpinnings in mind: sociocultural theory and democratic theory. In this section, I summarize how Vygotskian perspectives of human development and fundamental characteristics of democracy, explained by Fenstermacher (1994, 1997) and Arendt (1968), influence educational practices. I explain why personal social development, beyond learning outcomes, is important to education, and I provide a brief summary of sociocultural theory and democratic theory as it relates to Nos histoires.

Educational Reform for the Good Life

Wells (1986, 2000) and Fenstermacher (1994) have both written critically about educational reform. Educational reform, they argued, should not be focused on achievements and creating better learners because according to 'demographic, economic, and social data . . . the very same people who always [do] better are going to continue to get better, while those who have not been the traditional beneficiaries of schooling are going to fare the same or worse than before' (Fenstermacher, 2000, p. 9). In other words, the authors proposed that when teachers or other educators focus on learning outcomes
for the basis of improving education, those students whom they were trying to improve did not benefit. “Learning is not an end in itself, but an integral aspect of participating in a community’s activities and mastering tools, knowledge, and practices that enable one to do so effectively” (Wells, 2000, p. 62). Therefore, education includes preparing our children for the future; in particular, to be participants in the world in which they will live as adults, and to be able to live in diverse and changing societies with one another. That is the good life.

According to Dyson (2000), the good life is the “envisioning [of] possible lives” (p. 127). The good life provides for “equal freedom to develop an ethical self-understanding, so as to realize a personal conception of the ‘good life’ according to one’s own abilities and choices” (Habermas, 2003, p. 2). The good life is defining ourselves by creating our personalities (Moll, 2000), or as Habermas (2003) suggested, “successfully being oneself” (p. 15). There are few opportunities in life that allow individuals to become the best that they can be: school needs to be one of those places (Schutz, 1999). Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory helped put into perspective the ways in which practicing the good life is influenced by our social and cultural activities.

**Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory**

According to Vygotsky, we, as human beings, are inseparable from our social and cultural worlds (Moll, 2000). His theory of human development extends beyond the understanding of what it is to be human to include how to improve the human situation (Wells, 2000). All activity, whether social, economic, or productive, create our experiences which in turn ‘funds [our] knowledge’ and this results in the makeup of our culture (Moll, 2000, p. 258). In other words, our culture is not a static entity, but a
dynamic process comprised of our experiences at home, at school, and in the community. This dynamic process shapes who we are and allows us to become what Moll (2000) defined as the most important artifact: our personalities.

Since social and cultural activities involve all aspects of human life, the good life then, cannot be only about successfully being me, for we are social beings interconnected by our activities. Therefore living the good life entails incorporating an us perspective. As such, building a community within the classroom is important to learning. If human beings cannot separate themselves from the social existence that is our world, neither can we construct meaning for ourselves without thinking about how our lives will coexist with those of others (Habermas, 2003). This means that even though human beings are individuals, they exist in a social world where each of their life choices affects the people around them.

Nos histoires was designed to be an activity that would facilitate the sharing of children’s socialization from home to school. Within that process of sharing, the students interacted as social beings, sharing personal perspectives, listening to other points of view, and realizing a common world bigger than themselves. As a result, they were able to expand their own boundaries of knowledge.

Background knowledge that is brought forth during the sharing of personal narratives represents each child’s own social world and can be expected to influence the social world of his or her peers. For example, if Sara tells the story of a trip to the ocean and Emma has never been there, Emma’s thoughts become influenced by Sara’s words. Emma’s background knowledge becomes extended as she internalizes the story of Sara and begins to contemplate the concept of a beach. Emma has the opportunity to ask questions to clarify her thoughts and interpretations about Sara’s experience. Ryan,
another student in the class may have a different story about going to the ocean since he has been on a ship. His narrative now expands the thinking of Sara's experiences and so forth. In this way, the children in the class are constantly referring back to the social world that is familiar to them and assimilating new information in the new social situation that is Nos histoires. This interactive exchange is how I envisioned Nos histoires. By promoting this joint learning activity, I believed students would not only be encouraged to expand their background knowledge; I believed students would increase proficiency in the French language.

The social use of language promotes language practice and thus increases linguistic skills. When Nunan (1991) summarized the term, "comprehensible output hypothesis," he stated that "output, particularly when it occurs in conversations where the learner is having to negotiate meaning, provides learner’s [sic] with the opportunity to push to the limit their emerging competence" (p. 50). In a similar summary, Johnson (1995) noted that language production must occur within the context of social interaction, since this, unlike language production in isolation (for example, repetition of language patterns in a language lab), gives learners opportunities to try out their knowledge of the language" (p. 84). In other words, teachers of second language learners need to provide opportunities to take part in face-to-face communication with one another. Thus, Nos histoires was designed to promote the use of language in two ways: for improved linguistic competence and to encourage collaboration as students make personal meanings from the shared stories of peers. In this way, Nos histoires became a practical application of Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory.
Democracy and Education

In redesigning the show’n’tell routine to promote sharing and responding, I attempted to create a public space for the students in my class. The notion of public space plays an important fundamental role in democratic theory (Fenstermacher, 1997; Habermas, 1996; Arendt, 1968). There are two types of spaces: public and private. On the one hand, private space is our life at home and with family, a space where one is familiar and “bound by blood, love, [and] long periods of shared experiences” (Fenstermacher, 1997, p. 55). On the other hand, public space is “experienced beyond the home” . . . [and] consist[s] of many different kinds of persons seeking some sort of cooperative existence” (p. 55).

In Schütz’s (1999) work, Creating Local “Public Spaces” in Schools: Insights from Hannah Arendt and Maxine Greene, the author interpreted two visions of public spaces in education. According to Schütz, Arendt and Green shared the assumption that “each individual human being is absolutely unique” (Schütz, 1999, p. 79). Similar to Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, Arendt and Green believed that what happens in one’s life is that one’s experiences “constitute one’s unique and developing ‘story’” (p. 80). Nos histoires was designed to provide the necessary space to allow students to share their unique biographies in the expectation that when children are able to contribute their uniqueness to the common group, a public space will be created (Schutz, 1999).

I believe Nos histoires was an effective and meaningful routine in the classroom and an improvement of the usual method of show’n’tell, because it was built on the integration of Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory and democratic theory. The sharing of personal narratives allowed students to hear stories and learn from the experiences of others. As the sharing took place, students used language in authentic ways, interacted in
Significance of the Study

This study is focused on integrating the theories of socioculturalism (Moll, 2000; Wells, 2000; Wertsch, 2000) and democracy (Fenstermacher, 1997; Habermas, 1996; Schutz, 1999) with the classroom practice of learning language (Krashen, 1982; Nunan, 1991). The outcomes of this study contributed to student growth, to my own development as a teacher, and to the field of education.

Student Growth

I see the classroom as a mini model of the larger society. It is here that students can come together to learn how to be participants and contributors to the common world in which they will belong as adults. The Ministry of Education in British Columbia provides justification for this perspective: “[we are] “committed to providing a high quality education for Kindergarten to Grade 12 children so they can develop their individual potential and acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes to contribute to society” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2001, p. 1). I believe this study presents evidence that Nos histoires was a vehicle that helped the students begin the path to a high quality education. Nos histoires provided a space that encouraged the development of skills in literacy and oral communication. Moreover, these skills were practiced in a community-like setting where students were seen as individuals contributing to the conversations of their peers and to the society as they knew it.

Nos histoires addressed the learning of the whole student. Students were expected to increase their knowledge and to develop character. Growth in knowledge was achieved
as students improved their use of French within their stories. Yet, it was not only the
growth in knowledge that was important. At the heart of Nos histoires we found a
community, a group of students who had to learn how to care for one another in order to
acknowledge the stories they were hearing. This was a group of children who in the
telling of their stories developed relationships with one another so significant the origins
of these relationships exist exclusively to people “acting and speaking directly to one
another” (Arendt, 1958, p. 183). Within this relationship we discovered a community of
active citizens who care for one another.

Nos histoires was a unique study in that it was implemented in a French
Immersion classroom. As a new French Immersion teacher, I found my previous methods
of teaching, for example, using storytelling, were often challenged by other teachers
because of the special circumstances in a French Immersion setting; in particular, that of
the students not having sufficient vocabulary in the target language to be able to
contribute to the discourse process effectively. I had found in the past with Mes histoires
[My Story], that students could achieve the expectations set before them. Within Nos
histoires, students were expected to share their narratives using as much French as
possible and throughout the year the amount of French used did increase. Nos histoires
provided students with the opportunity to practice French in an authentic situation.
They were motivated to speak to one another because the content of conversations was
student led.

I have learned many things about my students that have allowed me to be a better
teacher. I have learned about their interests, fears, strengths, and weaknesses through the
stories they have shared. Their own worlds have expanded as they have heard stories
similar to their own experiences and learned new ideas from stories unfamiliar to them.
before. This was Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory at work as they began to make meaning not only out of their own experiences, but out of the experiences of their peers.

**Personal Growth**

In my own professional growth as a teacher through the course of this study, I have realized the importance of studying educational theory. To my surprise I enjoyed reading philosophical writings pronouncing the benefits of talk, arguing the necessity of care, and promoting the importance of freedom. I have been challenged by these concepts to incorporate their ideals into my everyday life. I have applied the concepts of discourse and community to my own relationships with my family, with my peer groups, with my students, with my friends and acquaintances, and with strangers. I found I am becoming what I wanted my students to learn. I am now a better teacher because I believe the students will learn more from who I am than from what I teach.

**Growth in the Field of Education**

I believe this study contributes to the field of curriculum and instruction in education by providing an example of a learning situation that could be initiated at any grade level and in either a student’s first or second language. I believe this study provides a look into the possibilities in one classroom and thus may encourage other teachers to see the potential of collaborative learning as a teaching strategy in their own classes. Furthermore, the study shows that the integration of social learning goals such as active listening, public speaking, and acting in caring ways toward one another can influence a teacher’s practice without diminishing the importance of delivering the more content-based aspects of the prescribed school curriculum, such as literacy and numeracy.
In analyzing the discourse of the students, I envisioned a model representing an upside down pyramid (see Figure 1, p. 7). This upside down pyramid is illustrated using blocks. These blocks build upon one another just as the conversations of students build upon one another. The conversation begins when one person, the first block of the pyramid, initiates a topic. Then as other students add their input the conversation and the information shared grows, just as the pyramid widens. Students use each other’s input to build upon and add more input, collaborating with one another as the pyramid grows higher. I felt the diagram of the building blocks was a visual description of the scaffolding process and helped to document the interactive discourse that I expected would take place during Nos histoires.

I have used the Learning Circle (Brown, 2004) model as the methodological framework to organize this study. The Learning Circle was designed to be used as a model for action research in group settings. In this study the Learning Circle was adapted and used for the first time in the setting of a single teacher researcher. This study provides a successful example of action research and how it can empower classroom teachers to become participants in democratic dialogue. In support of the literature, I have provided an example of a teacher who involved herself in creating a vision for her classroom, took action to implement the vision, reflected on the progress of that action, and implemented changes for improvement. This teacher became an agent of change that influenced educational practice (Wells, 2000; Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005).

Nos histoires

The objectives of Nos histoires included creating a social atmosphere to encourage the development of an educated person. I define an educated person as one who is a
citizen, has a sense of responsibility, and has the ability to reflect. A citizen is someone who actively participates in his or her community (Barber, 1984; Pitkin & Shumer, 1982). A sense of responsibility refers to the idea that we are all living together in one world with one another (Arendt, 1968; Habermas, 2003), and as such we are responsible for living a good life. This can mean loving one another and being happy we are together, living on earth at the same time (J. Wiens, personal communication, July 8, 2004). We are responsible for our behaviour as it affects others around us all the time. Finally, I believe that educated people are constantly reflecting on their own attitudes and behaviours. This reflection may cause changes in opinions and beliefs and leads to responsible action. Someone who reflects is learning about the past and applying that knowledge toward the future.

Nos histoires was designed as a means to help students begin to achieve the characteristics of an educated person. The sharing time encouraged students to participate by speaking, to demonstrate responsibility by listening, and to reflect by responding. The following is an example of how I envisioned Nos histoires:

Imagine a Kindergarten and Grade 1 classroom. The students of the class sit in a circle facing one another. You have to take a second look around to find the teacher, whom you find is sitting on the floor among her students. You listen carefully and see that a boy is holding a rock in his hand. He is talking and while he talks, he caresses the rock, revealing its importance in his life. He tells of an adventure with his dad. The boy and his father went hiking on the weekend. They came to a lake and his dad taught him to skip rocks over the water. The boy soon discovered that not all rocks were good for skipping. His dad showed him that the rocks had to be flat, just like the one in his hand. He wanted to keep this rock to remind him of his dad and their hike. The students all
want to see the rock and start to sit up on their knees and stretch their necks out to get a closer look. The student volunteers to pass the rock around so everyone can see.

As the rock moves around the circle, the student asks if anyone else wants to share. A student raises her hand and begins telling a story of when her dad took her to Barkerville and they collected a piece of gold. At the end of the story one of the students turns to the teacher and asks if that is true. Could the child have collected real gold? The teacher directs the question back to the storyteller. The storyteller is not sure, but she believes it is real gold. Another student puts up his hand and suggests that it could be real gold because Barkerville is a gold mining town and many people found gold there. More hands go up and another story is shared.

In this example of a sharing routine the students are engaged in a self-chosen topic. Interest is evident as students share similar stories with one another and ask questions to build meaning. Information is shared among the students and the children are encouraged to speak directly to one another. I wanted Nos histoires to create an atmosphere that encouraged children to talk to one another about what they felt were important topics. I wanted the focus to be on the sharing of each other’s stories and not on the presentation of an object.

Description of Context for Nos histoires

Nos histoires was implemented in a Grade 1 French Immersion classroom. The class was held in a dual track, English and French, elementary school with grades Kindergarten to Grade 5. The school was located in a medium sized industrial town, with a population of approximately 80,000 people, in British Columbia. The school had a population of about 320 students and was located in an area of town that included
families from a range of incomes.

The student population came from middle-class families. Most of the students were neighbourhood children, with only one or two coming from far away. Several of the mothers were available to volunteer in the classroom on a regular basis. None of the students spoke French regularly in the home. Six of the students were attending learning assistance for help with reading. There were no students with significant disabilities.

Description of the Researcher

This was my second year teaching Grade 1 in French. Previously, I taught English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Second Dialect (ESD) to students in grades Kindergarten to Grade 7 at an inner-city school where the majority of students came from homes with low incomes. Over half of these students were First Nations. It was during these years as a language teacher that I became interested in storytelling as a learning tool for reading and writing.

In my last two years teaching ESL/D, I spent considerable time with students transcribing their dictated stories. The students used these stories to practice reading, learn grammar skills, and build confidence in themselves as children capable of sharing what was important to them.

At the same time I became involved in the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program. This program teaches parents how to have fun with their infants using rhymes and storytelling. I was interested in this program because I felt the inclusion of rhymes and songs provided a way to introduce literacy into the home at a very early age. During my time as a co-leader of this program, I not only taught songs, I also told parents stories that they could share with their children. An important goal that the program continues to
communicate is that parents have within themselves everything required to take care of
their baby. The personal stories told by parents, for example, how their baby was
named, are vital stories to share with their children. Everyone is a storyteller and inside
of us we all have stories to tell.

Having had two positive experiences with storytelling, I attempted to include
ways for students to tell stories in my first year as a French Immersion teacher. The
students were given a notebook called Mes histoires and they spent 20-30 minutes at a
time drawing and writing their stories without worrying about spelling and other grammar.
These stories were shared with the class after every session. Over time, I began to see the
students include aspects of the curriculum in their stories. The sharing of school topics
also occurred in the dictated stories told by the ESL/D students. For example, if planets
were being studied in science class, a student may tell a story about a planet he or she
visited. Less proficient students in the French classroom would begin their stories by
copying something in the class, a poem, for example. After a few weeks, he or she would
be able to create a few sentences independently. Sometimes students would voluntarily
write about what we had done earlier that day in school, for example, report on the food
we were giving our compost worms.

These three experiences, story dictation, the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program,
and Mes histoires, inspired me to look closely at the significance of storytelling in the
classroom. I wanted to look at my current teaching routine and find an area in which I
could incorporate storytelling as a method to strengthen the discourse practice in my
classroom. I chose to begin with show’n’tell time. I have never felt excited about
conducting show’n’tell in the class, although I know there are several good reasons to do
so. I wanted to imagine and create a routine that I could be passionate about, that would
help the students share a bit about who they were, and at the same time create an atmosphere conducive to acquiring the necessary literacy skills and motivation that are so important at the primary level. I believed Nos histoires could be a way to achieve this.

Parameters of the Study

The parameters of this study are acknowledged and defined in the following sections: delimitations, limitations, and definition of terms.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this research included:

1. The study was delimited to one classroom.

2. The students were in Grade 1. The class was learning French as their second language in an Immersion setting.

3. Although I, the researcher, had been a teacher for eight years, I had one year of prior experience teaching Grade 1 French Immersion.

4. Extensive onsite data collection occurred for three months.

5. I was the researcher and the classroom teacher.

6. Data collection focused on my own observations and evaluations of the students' progress and participation as recorded in descriptive field notes and interpretive journal entries.

7. The intent of this study was to improve learning conditions for current students. Changes in the process were expected and such alterations occurred during data collection. Analysis was ongoing.

8. I was in the classroom as a part-time teacher; therefore, I could not be fully aware
of the interactions of my teaching partner with the students during the time frame that the study took place.

**Limitations**

The limitations of this research included:

1. The data were affected by the degree of participation, the understanding, and the level of language of the students.
2. The data were limited to the perspective of a single interpreter. As the researcher, the data analysis was influenced by my own unique past experiences and sensitivities.
3. This study was limited due to time factors. As the classroom teacher, I had the responsibility to teach other areas of curriculum. As a part-time teacher, I was present in the classroom 64% of the time and taught each day only in the morning.
4. This study is concerned with one specific class and centered on my aspirations for creating educated persons. Generalization of the findings may be realized by other interested parties who see similarities in their own situations.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms are used throughout this paper. I explain below what these terms mean to me and how they are used in the paper. The terms are organized alphabetically.

- **Activity system** is “a social practice that includes the norms, values, division of labor, and goals of the community” (Gutiérrez & Stone, 2000, p. 151).

- **Circle time** refers to a classroom routine in which students meet at the carpet and sit in a
circle for a particular activity.

**Citizens** are people who participate actively in their community (Barber, 1984; Fenstermacher, 2000).

**Educated person** is defined as one who is a citizen, has a sense of responsibility, and has the ability to reflect.

**Good life** involves a sense of responsibility that we are all living together in one world with one another, and realizing that our behaviour affects others around us all the time (Arendt, 1968; Habermas, 2003). We are responsible for living a good life and it means loving one another and being happy we are together, living on earth at the same time (J. Wiens, personal communication, July 8, 2004).

**Ideals** are “orienting devices; they offer us a sense of direction and guide our journey to a destination” (Fenstermacher, 2000, p. 2). Ideals “are not the objective or the goal” (p. 2). Ideals are that to which we aspire. Goals are the smaller steps we take along the way.

**Immersion** refers to a style of language learning. In this study the students attended a French Immersion class. This means they participated in French throughout the school day, all the subjects were taught in French and the teacher, for the most part, spoke only French. It is common that students who are in French Immersion do not come from French speaking backgrounds, thus the students are immersed in a second language.

**Lead story** refers to the first story of a Nos histoires session. The lead story was shared by the student assigned to moderate Nos histoires for that day.

**Making meaning** refers to the construction of knowledge (Wells, 1986). Within every person there exists individual past experiences to influence the interpretation of
present and future experiences. As people learn about one another they add the learned experiences of others to their own lives, expanding their knowledge as they construct new meanings from what others have shared with them.

*Mes histoires* refers to a specific student notebook. In the notebook, students had the freedom to write or draw about anything they wished. The stories could continue on at each session or students could write several stories in one session. The stories were not marked for grammatical correctness. The message of the story was considered most important. Students had the opportunity to read their *Mes histoires* stories during reading conferences with the teacher and to others in the class during circle time.

*Nos histoires* is the name of the share time session designed to replace the usual show’n’tell routine.

*Public space* is space that is experienced outside one’s family and home (Fenstermacher, 1997). It is a space where individuals come together to share themselves with the goal of forming a cooperative group (Fenstermacher, 1997; Schutz, 1999).

*Show’n’tell* refers to a common morning routine in the primary classroom where children bring an object from home to share with their classmates.

*Signs* “refer to categories of objects rather than to single items” (Wertsch, 2000, p. 21). Signs are what help us develop concepts.

*Zone of proximal development* is a Vygotskian term defining the area between a child’s independent learning accomplishments and a child’s potential learning accomplishments when in joint activity with an adult or more capable peer (Vygotsky, 1978).
Summary

As I explored ways to implement the theories of social learning and democracy in my class, I established new teaching practices to enhance student learning. I hoped to inspire student learning that extended beyond learning outcomes toward the development of educated persons. I believed I could provide such an environment if I focussed on the areas of language development, social interaction, and dialogue. Nos Histoires satisfied my goals as the sharing of personal narratives provided opportunities for students to be motivated to practice language because the topics were of personal interest to them; for students to extend conversations and create social interaction through the set-aside time for dialogue; and finally, for students to work together, construct knowledge collaboratively and acknowledge living together in the same space, thus living a good life. My success with Nos histoires was measured in my own reflections on its development and implementation, as is the tradition of classroom action research. The following four chapters are a record of that process. In Chapter II, I present academic literature supporting the use of sociocultural and democratic theory as necessary to the learning environment. Chapter III describes and justifies the method of action research as it was used in this study. Chapter IV focusses on the results of the data collected in relation to the research questions. Finally, in Chapter V, I discuss the implications and potential areas for future research that have evolved from the study.
CHAPTER TWO

RELATED LITERATURE

We are the meaning makers - every one of us: children, parents, and teachers. To try and make sense, to construct stories, and to share them with others in speech and in writing is an essential part of being human. For those of us who are more knowledgeable and more mature - parents and teachers - the responsibility is clear: to interact with those in our care in such a way as to foster and enrich their meaning making. (Wells, 1986, p. 222)

The desire to improve show’n’tell time led to my interest in developing a new routine for sharing. I wanted to develop a routine that would not only provide opportunities for language practice, but also create a community space where children could practice their citizenship skills. The path of this inquiry began with envisioning what an ideal show’n’tell time would look like. Fenstermacher (2000) recommended that our notions about how we educate our students should be divided into ideals and goals. Our ideals are what we would want for our students as a whole. Ideals are the "stars" that we want them to reach (Fenstermacher, 2000, p. 2). Our goals then, are the small, measurable, steps we take as the path to reach those stars. My own stars for my class include developing a learning environment in which children feel safe to practice language and initiate talk, where all children have equal opportunity to listen to the words of their peers and meditate on their opinions before continuing further dialogue, and where children take the opportunity to ask questions for further learning. These skills are important and contribute to the lifetime ideal of living a good life. The purpose of this study was to find if Nos histoires was a routine which could address the practice towards such ideals. In this chapter, I will discuss the relationship between talk and knowledge as
Talk and Knowledge

Why is talk by the students so important in the classroom? Talk is how we make meaning and how we construct knowledge. Bruner (1966, 1979), Dewey (1938), and Wells (1986) proposed that children need experiences to construct knowledge. All three authors agreed that knowledge worth knowing is that which is of interest to the child. Nos histoires provided students the time and space to share their experiences with each other. It was a time for students to bring up topics of their own choosing and interest. Furthermore, Nos histoires was designed to provide opportunities for students to broaden their own experiences by hearing about the experiences of their peers.

Bruner (1979) encouraged child-centered learning and argued that educators should promote "cultural ways of [the students'] social world" (p. 116) and that "education must, then not only be a process that transmits culture but also one that provides alternative views of the world and strengthens the will to explore them" (p. 117). This means that the personalization of knowledge (Dewey, 1938) needs to go beyond the current experiences of a child. We, as the teachers, need to expand local and social experiences into the larger global community (Bruner, 1966) to prepare them for the world in which they will live as adults.

Parallel to this line of thought, Michaels and Cazden (1986) and Wells (1986) acknowledged the role of the teacher as one who is in partnership with the students. Vygotsky (1978) also conceptualized the act of teaching as a collaborating activity. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development refers to the process of learning where children are capable of reaching a level of understanding independently, but still have the capacity
to learn more. The teacher, adult or another more-capable peer interacts with the student, who, with help learns to his or her potential. Talking with one another is how this learning takes place. It is a process of collaboration between a learner and another more-capable learner. It was expected that the storytelling in Nos histoires would be talk that allowed for the teacher and the students to collaborate, make meaning, and construct knowledge in social contexts. As I planned the study, I felt it was important to explore further the role of language, its use at school and at home, and what implications exist for second language learners.

The Role of Language

Human beings share their experiences, and thus themselves, with one another through language. The purpose of language is to convey meaning and according to Vygotsky, making meaning is a result of the developing relationship between signs and objects (Wertsch, 2000). For example, a child learning the word for dog may associate all four-legged animals as dog based on his or her limited exposure to other animal words. An adult, however, would recognize a more limited meaning of the word dog to include four legged animals that bark. Meaning takes on another form for adults who know the words collie, terrier, and greyhound.

Vygotsky separated language into word and thought (Wertsch, 2000). Words have individual meanings. They are “explicit, expanded, systemic, and decontextualized” (p. 23). Thoughts, however, are “contextualized and [have] personal meaning” (p. 23). Thus the words we use are loaded with meanings consistent with our personal experiences. One word may convey different messages to different people depending on which thoughts are brought to mind. Since one’s experiences define how and what one
communicates, identities are formed in the participation of activities (Wells, 2000).

School Talk and Home Talk

The students in my class were learning a second language. Therefore, the purpose of talk, for us, was not just for the collaborative construction of knowledge, but to involve the practice of the language itself. I believe this would also be true in a monolingual classroom as well, for there is a difference between the language we use in school and the language we use at home. Clay (1991), Corson (1988), and Michaels and Cazden (1986) have suggested that a child's oral discourse at home differs from the literacy-based discourse used at school. School language is centered around the language of books; therefore, children must learn and be aware of book language to become successful students. Clay (1991), Hughes and Cousins (1988), and Michaels and Cazden (1988) provided examples of cases where children's spoken dialect at home differs from the formal language of education. This dialect is not substandard English, rather it is simply the oral discourse used and accepted by their parents and community.

Clay (1991), Corson (1988), and Michaels and Cazden (1988) suggested that students could improve their oral language by practicing talk with an adult who is modeling standard speech patterns. Clay (1991), Corson (1988), and Wells (1986) recommended that teachers provide as smooth a transition as possible between the child's two worlds of home and school. An encouraging and positive transition will build self-confidence within the learner. I believed Nos histoires could be the routine that provided such a transition because it allowed students to lead the talk. As well, the teacher and other students were included; therefore, other speech patterns were modeled. Since the objective of Nos histoires was to share stories of oneself and not to be graded on
grammatical correctness, I expected Nos histoires to become a safe space for practicing
the new "school" language.

Second Language Talk

According to Krashen (1982), "language acquisition occurs when language is used
for what it was designed for, communication" (p. 1). He believed second language
acquisition is affected by one’s "affective filter" (p. 30). The affective filter is
manipulated by motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. For instance, if a learner is very
nervous and unsure of his or her ability the affective filter would be high and learning
performance would be low. In contrast, a learner who is highly motivated and self-
confident would perform very well. Students need to have optimal conditions for learning
to occur (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). When our affect is touched, for example, being
anxious about performing in front of peers, we prevent learning input from entering our
brain. In my own experiences as a second language learner, I have come across situations
in which I did not want to speak in case I made errors. At other times, I made errors
because I was nervous in a particular situation.

Krashen and Terrell (1983) stated that "the value of all classroom activities is
measured by the degree to which the affective filter is lowered" (p. 58). Our goal as
teachers then is to make the learning conditions most effective by lowering anxiety levels.
I attempted to provide such a condition in Nos histoires. This is why the sharing aspect
of the routine needed to play a more important role than the grammatical correctness of
the students’ speech. It was important for the students to get to know one another, feel
part of the group, and experience a sense of class community so that each student had a
low affective filter. In this way, I hoped, the students would be part of building a learning
environment that would become conducive to practicing a second language. The fact that students would be trying to communicate something of interest to them, their own stories, would provide them with the motivation to practice the language.

*Good language learners.* Nunan (1991) summarized characteristics of ‘good’ language learners. These characteristics include finding strategies for practicing the language inside and outside the classroom, experimenting with language and making errors work, and using knowledge of their first language to learn the second language. These guidelines would influence how the students and I participated in Nos histoires. By allowing students to move past their errors and use English as a stepping stone to continue on in French when they were at a loss for a word, I hoped to build their confidence as they tried to be understood in their second language.

*The use of correction.* I believe that the telling of personal narratives provides an authentic way to practice French. By allowing students to share experiences that are familiar and of self-interest; students will be motivated to talk. However, the process must provide a space where students feel safe and supported to take risks. Delpit (1990) reported findings that when students have been overcorrected their learning is inhibited. Cazden (1988) reported that when teachers correct errors students become dependent on instruction. Both of these outcomes are detrimental to the process of learning language.

I am not advocating that explicit language instruction should be eliminated from the classroom. I am suggesting that students should have some correction-free time to experiment with the language they are learning. There is a time and place for both types of language practices. Goodman (1991) and Gilmore (1986) encouraged teachers to observe language use in a variety of contexts. Watching how children attempt to communicate their stories in a space where they are uninterrupted by corrections and
where some English is acceptable will allow the teacher to view the child in new contexts outside traditional language teaching routines such as, “repeat after me.” Goodman (1991) suggested this kind of observation can expand a teacher’s opportunities to enrich the curriculum and thus provide a more interesting and motivating space for student learning.

Listening and Teaching

The goal for the students is that they will use the stories they hear and tell as tools to grow as learners by making personal connections and thus meaning. Teachers are responsible for helping children make that connection to learning (Wells, 1986). Stories in the classroom can only be as beneficial as the teacher allows them to be. Sometimes teachers fail, unknowingly, at the important task of guiding their students into greater learning (Wells, 1986). It is important for us, as teachers, to reflect on our teaching practices and learn from what others have done before us.

In a study conducted by Wells (1986), the author followed several children from the age of 15 months until the age of ten. He found that "compared with homes, schools are not providing an environment that fosters language development. For no child was the language experience richer than that of the home - not even for those believed to be ‘linguistically deprived’" (p. 87). Another study conducted by Hughes and Cousins (1988) reached a similar conclusion. Both authors suggested that the school experience did not provide enough opportunities for children to talk. More specifically, Wells (1986) explained that teachers initiated the discussions and chose the topic. They directed the conversation and referred twice as many times to their own meanings rather than trying to extend the developing ideas of the children. Hughes and Cousins (1988) found that students who were labeled inarticulate at school could participate in rich and
diverse conversations at home.

Teachers should remember that children are active learners who should not be reduced to the passive role of responder as is often the case when the common Initiate-Respond-Evaluate (IRE) routine of teaching (Pappas, Kiefer, & Levstik, 1995; Wells, 1986) is used in class. Noddings (1992) defined dialogue as “open-ended; that is, in a genuine dialogue, neither party knows at the outset what the outcome or decision will be. As . . teachers we cannot enter into dialogue with children when we know that our decision is already made” (p. 22). Children eventually lose confidence in trying to collaborate with the teacher to make meaning if they are not given the opportunity to share their own interpretations. Children respond with a narrower range of meaning than what would normally be displayed at home because they no longer believe their message is important to others (Wells, 1986).

Whitmore (1997) explored the relationship between the content and structure of classroom discourse. She argued for classroom structure where the power is shared with the children. This means moving away from teacher-centered routines to routines where the teacher is the mediator and the students control the topic of talk. There is a reason behind every child’s story. The point needs to be made that by listening to the child’s story, by listening to what the student has to say, the teacher will know where to begin and extend knowledge (Clay, 1991; Wells, 1986). The teacher’s job is to find out what is so interesting for that child that he or she would like to share it. These conditions foster a classroom that is safe for risk taking in the search for meaning. When other people are interested, a child will continue to share. This promotes more opportunities for talking and enhancing the oral discourse in the classroom, allowing for further collaboration and meaning exploration.
As a teacher trying to create meaningful dialogue, I considered Wells' (1986) suggestions for fostering an enriched environment to promote language development. First, one must “treat what the child has to say as worthy of careful attention... [and] do one’s best to understand what he or she means” (p. 218). When a teacher replies to a student’s thought, “take the child’s meaning as the basis of what [to] say next - confirming the intention and extending the topic or inviting the child to do so him- or herself” (p. 50). Finally, one should “select and phrase [one’s] contributions so that they are at or just beyond the child’s ability to comprehend” (p. 50). Only when we take the time to interact in this thoughtful manner can we engage in collaborative construction of knowledge. In effect we are scaffolding the child’s language experiences for the purpose of communicating that constructed knowledge.

Hughes and Cousins (1988), Michaels and Cazden (1986) and Wells (1986) all presented evidence that school instruction does not necessarily improve oral language skills or overall learning. However, their studies revealed cases of poor instruction and a lack of constructive collaborative strategies. If we learn from their findings and take heed of their suggestions, teachers can become more successful at the scaffolding process of helping children become meaning makers. Hughes and Cousins (1988) concluded that storytelling is not about entertaining the class but a method in which children can bring parts of themselves into the school experience to create more coherent meaning for the group. Whitmore (1997) stated that “talking is the most important thing you can do in [the] classroom. You learn best when you talk while you work” (p. 124). Nos histoires was an attempt to improve opportunities for classroom dialogue. I expected to improve dialogue by taking care to use words and actions to promote more student talk.
Student as Listener and Learner

When listening to stories, children's imaginations are engaged (Egan, 1986; Wells, 1986). Wells also suggested that children who listen to stories regularly are able to comprehend the teacher's use of language with greater ease. This increased comprehension is due to the child having discovered the symbolic relationship between words and experiences through listening to stories. Teachers often talk about topics for which there is no physical evidence, for example, oceans, firemen, or space. Stories begin the process of discovering these worlds through words.

The new worlds that children access through stories extend beyond their classroom, beyond the school, and beyond their communities. Booth and Barton (2000) wrote that when students "hear the story we read or tell, they listen to the heartbeats of those beside them. . . . They are the storyteller, the story, and the listener, all in one" (p. 33-34). This reveals the significance of stories and how stories can effect the classroom culture. I hoped to find that the powerful effect of narrative would help children create meaning in the development of literacy skills, and affect their personal relationships in the class and beyond.

The stories others give us may be true or untrue, it is the message that is most important (Senehi, 2004). Students need to listen to the story that the storyteller has chosen to share. Senehi (2004) used the metaphor of a story as a gift for the audience. This imagery inspires children to listen to one another’s message by receiving the gift of their classmates' stories. These are conditions for the class that encourage the sharing of themselves and provide the motivation to listen to one another. Their stories help the class to understand what it means to be human.
Talking, Listening, and Democracy

The culmination of dialogue: talking and listening, takes place within a democratic context. Nos histoires was built upon the ideal of democratic understanding. If the definition of democratic is that everyone has equal opportunity to participate in the occurring dialogue (Arendt, 1968; Pitkin & Shumer, 1982; Habermas, 1996); then I wanted the classroom discourse to involve all students sharing their personal experiences. I expected that the children would be reminded of their own stories to share, to ask questions to help clarify meaning, or to expand another person's story. Senehi (2000) explained that “the ability to tell and understand stories and narrative is probably an innate human capacity... Storytelling is not restrictive by economic class [therefore]... storytelling is a process that is profoundly inclusive” (p. 102-103). The notion that everyone can participate in the sharing of stories allows storytelling to be an excellent process for practicing democratic dialogue.

Barber (1984) defined a strong democracy as one of civic participation. He continued by saying that “participation is a way of defining the self, just as citizenship is a way of living” (p. 449). Fenstermacher (2000) maintained that the cultivation of citizenship is an ideal. Citizenship is “effective participation in public space” (p. 2). By participating in the sharing, the students are defining themselves; while at the same time they are acting as citizens responsible for making future participation in society possible. In such a democracy, the citizens understand their interconnectedness, that participation and thus citizenship cannot exist apart from the community. These are the ideals, or stars, that I want my students to pursue.

The challenge in designing Nos histoires, was to create a routine that was not promoted as one particular person's day to share because then the ideology of equality
would be undermined since the sharer would have more opportunity to speak than anyone else. Yet, someone had to begin the sharing time and someone needed to moderate the discussions. My presence in the room could upset the balance as well, since, as the adult and classroom teacher, I would not be seen as an equal participant. I felt, however, that I could reduce my presence by sitting on the floor along with the children and participating with them. For example, I would raise my hand as they did if I wanted to ask a question. None the less, Gutmann (1996) argued that a nonideal democracy is still better than the nonideal alternative. She notes “an appreciation of basic freedoms and their centrality to human dignity, self-respect, and well-being often makes nonideal democracy both apparently and really better than its alternatives” (p. 343). This observation gave me the courage to continue with the designing of Nos histoires despite knowing imperfections of democratic practice would exist in the classroom setting because of my responsibility as the adult and teacher. Therefore, I agreed with Gutmann (1996) that an imperfect democratic practice is still better than any known alternative towards ensuring the children's preparation for the good life.

Summary

In this chapter I have presented a survey of literature to support the use of storytelling as a teaching strategy within Nos histoires. Our stories begin within our minds. They are the unconscious acts in our minds that try and make sense of our world. As we begin the process of putting our stories into words, the narration of our experiences becomes a conscious act (Wells, 1986). In this way the discourse of storytelling allows students to construct meaning through sharing and collaborative conversations among peers and with their teachers. This collaboration takes place within
the democratic understanding of equality and participation. Students are practicing the important skills of listening to one another as a way to live and learn from one another.

Storytelling is an oral act in a social setting. The rationale for using storytelling routines in the classroom lies in building interest in learning, confidence in the learners, and motivation to expand the children’s prior knowledge. Having taken the time to listen to the stories of the students, the teacher can build on what the students already know, thus extending the students’ existing competencies. In this way, improvement in language could become a positive byproduct of the original intent to include storytelling in the classroom.

Stories make meaning for us. They provide the background knowledge we need to construct sense out of the current experiences in our lives. As we assimilate the new knowledge we are changed and, therefore, so does our story. Each new experience extends our base of knowledge a bit further and we become active meaning makers.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

"Of all classroom resources, our own behaviour as teachers is the most precious." (Cazden, 1988, p. 97)

Traditionally, scholarship has consisted of researchers who have been specialists at universities or research organizations (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005). These researchers prided themselves on being isolated from the 'real world' and believed their removal from the daily systems of the people they studied resulted in objectivity. Holly, Arhar, & Kasten (2005) have noted recent changes to this view of scholarship. More and more researchers are conducting studies closer to their subjects of inquiries and embracing subjectivity as they believe obtaining objectivity is a myth. It is now more acceptable for the teacher to be the researcher. In this chapter, I begin with the justification for the use of action research, then follow by discussing the details pertaining to the planning, implementation, and analysis of Nos histoires.

Teacher as Listener and Learner

Teaching is a profession. Professional practice implies scholarly pursuit: on the job action guided by research, evidence, and sound theory; and a commitment to learning (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005). Professional "learning involves critically reflective practice in which we question our assumptions and personal experiences, and we inquire into the perspectives of students, colleagues, the social context, and the literature" (p. 11). When teachers are listening and observing, they are acknowledging the practices that are successful and unsuccessful in their classrooms. Reflective analysis and modifications of
these practices, also known as classroom action research, justify the teacher as researcher.

Action Research for Educational Change

Classroom action research is a method worth considering in a study concerned with improving classroom practice because change, or educational reform, should start within the activity system, in other words in the classrooms, schools, or school districts (Wells, 2000). It is "important to encourage the participants in these local communities to become agents of change by trying to improve the activity systems in which their development takes place" (p. 60). Teacher researchers reflect on their practice, systematically make changes (Wells, 2000) and as a result are continually in the process of improving their behaviour, which according to Cazden (1988), is the most precious classroom resource.

Action research involves theoretical analysis and the use of concrete strategies and techniques (Glanz, 2003). It involves integrating educational theory into practice, which results in sustained observation, disciplined inquiry, critical reflection, and "a personal attempt at understanding while engaged in a process of improvement and reform" (Hopkins, p. 42). In this study, I have attempted to improve discourse practices in my classroom using an alternate version of show 'n' tell: Nos histoires. I wanted Nos histoires to be a bridge between the theories of socioculturalism and democracy. Action research allowed me to analyze my efforts to support the practices of discourse that I felt would best reach the ideals I had set for my class: to pursue the good life. In my own observations, inquiry, and reflection, which occurred throughout my involvement as researcher, I became personally involved in the change happening in my classroom and as a result was able to make reform more complete because change was not isolated to the
time spent in Nos histoires, but was integrated into my very being as a teacher through changed beliefs and commitments. In this way, I became as transformed as my students as I began internalizing the good life as an ideal for myself.

**Ideals**

Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2005) stated that:

Action research in the context of teaching is a form of inquiry designed to improve our teaching by using professional (informed) eyes to observe our own practice. We collaborate with others to enhance the power of our learning and we face the challenges we meet with action and analysis, sharing results with others for critique. (p. ix)

Fenstermacher (2000) wrote about the importance of setting ideals for ourselves and our students. Ideals are not what we can do, rather ideals are “what we ought to hope for” (p. 1). Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2005) defined aspirations as educational promises and behind those promises are one’s beliefs and values. I saw ideals, as used by Fenstermacher (2000), and aspirations, as used by Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2005), as the same. My aspirations as a teacher were to create a space where students were increasing their proficiency in French, learning collaboratively with peers, and engaging in democratic dialogue. These were high expectations and as ideals they guided the learning journey for me and my students. “Action research is a process and structure for realizing educational aspirations” (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005, p. x). Thus, I chose action research as my research method as a way to follow through on the examination of my ideals and to develop an instructional process that coincides with my values and beliefs, the result of which was Nos histoires.
Unlike other forms of research that follow the linear path of plan, collect, analyze, and report; action research is cyclical in nature (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005). In the Learning Circle model of action research, Brown (2004) interpreted this cyclical journey as stages called Wholeness, Awareness, Meaning, and Commitment. The Wholeness stage involves more than planning (W. Brown, personal communication, August 21, 2004). It is a vision that encompasses one’s ideals, the aspirations that are leading the inquiry. Awareness involves the collecting of data, and includes constant reflection on whether classroom practice corresponds with the original vision. Meaning is made during analysis when the data are interpreted and their significance is assessed by making connections to one’s personal experiences. Commitment involves sharing one’s learning and continuing the inquiry by designing the next step in the vision. It is at this point in the circle where the reflections become revisions and as alterations are made the researcher returns to the wholeness stage and the opportunity for another cycle of reflections begins. “Overall, the cycle integrates the objective knowledge provided by the research literature and data analysis with the teacher’s subjective knowledge, gained through experience and meaning making” (W. Brown, personal communication, February 28, 2005).

It is with the Learning Circle (Brown, 2004) in mind that I designed, implemented, and observed Nos histoires in my classroom. I attempted to put into place the ideas presented by Wells (1986, 2000), Fenstermacher (1994, 1997), Cazden (1988), Clay (1991), Senehi (2000, 2004), and others. I imagined how these ideals would look in a redesigned version of show’n’tell and I collected and analyzed the data related to implementation, incorporated changes into the classroom, and reflected on how the class responded. Within this process I took action and became a reflective teacher conducting
disciplined inquiry for the purpose of improving student learning.

Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2005) have drawn on the writings of Hannah Arendt (1958) to define action. Action is people engaged with others to effect change. Action can change the human situation by initiating something new. The purpose of action, then, is not to produce generalized findings, as is the intent in experimental research, but to "understand, articulate, and alter practice and our relationships with students and others" (p. 219). That is what is important to the educational process.

Action research in the classroom represents a form of naturalistic inquiry (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005). Naturalistic inquiry occurs in the natural setting with little interruption to the normal routine. Its purpose is to "seek meaning to enhance human interactions in complex social settings" (p. 36). Naturalistic inquiry examines the context of the situation, how it is socially influenced, dynamic, and interactive with many variables. Observations occur between the researcher and the researched.

Following the Learning Circle model (Brown, 2004), I engaged in action and in the process of educational change by promoting new opportunities for student discourse in the classroom. Moreover, in order for action to take place as research I had to make my efforts public (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005). As such I committed to sharing my findings in both peer-reviewed and informal publications and professional presentations.

Connecting Action Research to Learning and Democracy

I believe that action research is the most suitable method for this study because as I strove to see democratic principles practiced among my students, I saw a connection to how my own learning could exist in a similar democratic framework. Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2005) noted that:
Action research is a process of democratizing research and educational practice. It is a democratic orientation to professional practice, a way of learning and improving oneself and one’s practice. It is a process that employs systematic and sustained inquiry, and it is made public. It is a self-directed journey, guided by a commitment to building a democratic learning community. (p. 45)

Through action, I expected to help, in my own way, improve the human situation.

Through research, I attempted to encourage public discourse. Thus, in choosing action research as a method of inquiry, I believed I would not only be helping to prepare my students for a good life, but also I would be improving my own preparation for the good life.

Description of the Participants

The participants in this study consisted of the 22 students in my Grade 1 French Immersion class. These students ranged in age from 5 years old to 7 years old. There were eight boys and 14 girls in the class. The majority of students were Caucasian. Almost all of the students came from a two-parent home with a middle class income. Out of the 22 students, 19 spoke English at home and were learning French as a second language. One student spoke Spanish as his first language and was learning English and French at school. Two of the students spoke both English and Punjabi at home.

Consent and Ethical Considerations

Consent was requested and granted from the Research Ethics Board of the University of Northern British Columbia, School District No. 57, the school principal, and from the parents of each child (see Appendix B). A copy of the thesis proposal was given to the Ethics Board. A brief summary of the proposal was given to the School
District and the school principal. Each parent was given a letter summarizing the intent and method of the project.

"Where human participants are used in the course of research . . . the rights of the participants are [to be] respected and protected and . . . procedures followed in such activities [must be] ethically, medically and legally acceptable" (University of Northern British Columbia, 2003, p. 30). To honour these requirements, this research was conducted with respect for the participants, including informed consent, confidentiality, and honesty. Ethics approval was sought from the University of Northern British Columbia, the local school district, the school principal, the parents of the students, and the students themselves. Confidentiality was preserved through the use of pseudonyms for the students.

All data collected were stored in a secure place away from the school grounds. It was kept until the end of the school year in which the study was conducted. At that time the videotapes were erased.

It was planned that children who did not have consent to participate in the study would still take part in the classroom activity because it was part of the class curriculum. The video camera would have been positioned so that students without consent were not being filmed. This, however, was not a problem because all of the consent forms were returned.

There was no known risk to the students' education by participating in Nos histoires. As a reflective practitioner, I would not have continued with a routine that impeded the children’s learning. Evaluation of the practices in the classroom were ongoing. At times the routine was modified to best fit the learning needs of the participating class.
Procedure

In this section I begin with the Wholeness stage of the Learning Circle (Brown, 2004), then follow with the Awareness stage. In Wholeness I envisioned how I wanted Nos histoires to contribute to my practice as an educator and I considered both ideals and goals in my planning. For Awareness I divided the stage into two parts: (a) implementation of the new action, and (b) adaptation as a result of observed student response. It is in this section that I describe the implementation of Nos histoires, and identify the criteria for analysis. Chapter IV will address the changes in the practical design of Nos histoires that occurred throughout the study.

Wholeness

I wanted to design a routine that would integrate the theories of socioculturalism and democracy into the classroom practices of learning language. Nos histoires was implemented as an effort to accomplish this task. Drawing upon the literature in Chapter II, and following the Wholeness stage of the Learning Circle (Brown, 2004), I devised a list (see Table 2) of ideals that would help to define my vision of a routine that encompassed practices pursuing the good life.

I then devised another list (see Table 3) that recorded the responsibilities of both the teacher and the student. The reason for this was to help visualize what a successful session of Nos histoires would look like by breaking down the theories represented in the ideals into behaviour that could be observed.
I want Nos histoires to:

- provide an environment that enhances the richness and diversity of student dialogue
- motivate students to practice language because the topics will be of personal interest to them
- promote language use
- increase students' linguistic competence
- encourage collaboration to make personal meaning for the broadening of background knowledge
- promote the collaborative construction of knowledge as students learn to live together in the same space
- help students in the socialization process as they move from home to school
- encourage the sharing of personal narratives
- encourage students to listen to others' points of view
- allow students to envision a greater common world
- provide alternate views of the world
- develop individual identities
- allow students to share their unique biographies
- create public space within the classroom
- encourage growth both in knowledge and character
- extend student conversations
- create social interaction through the set-aside time for dialogue
- create a social atmosphere to encourage the development of an educated person who participates by speaking, demonstrates responsibility by listening, and reflects by responding.
Table 3
The Responsibilities of the Teacher and the Students Engaging in Democratic Dialogue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibilities of the Teacher</th>
<th>Responsibilities of the Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• sits at the same level as the rest of the students</td>
<td>• moderator comes prepared with one experience to share as a beginning to Nos histoires time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• directs conversations back to the students</td>
<td>• sits as part of the circle, eyes are on speaker, and adheres to the expectation that one person speaks at a time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• provides sufficient time for students to respond to each other’s experiences</td>
<td>• asks questions, makes comments, or shares own story to other students directly (not through the teacher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• allows for true inquiry to take place and thus the opportunity for students to sometimes lead the topic of learning (including trips to the library for further information, or the bringing in of other resources) even when unplanned</td>
<td>• respects the time limit of Nos histoires and understands further contributions can be recorded in Mes histoires and shared at a later session</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the beginning of the school year, I presented my proposal to my thesis committee for approval and then applied for ethics approval from the university and school board. Shortly thereafter, letters were sent home to the parents explaining the Nos histoires routine and asking for consent for their children to participate in the project. The principal of the school and my teaching partner were also informed of the project and invited to share any ideas or feedback to allow the project to take place as smoothly as possible within the shared classroom and the school. There were few obstacles to implementing Nos histoires, and it seemed everyone concerned was supportive of this inquiry.

Initially I had planned to establish the show’n’tell routine I had encouraged in previous years. For the first month, I anticipated that students would bring in an item and tell three things about the item using frame sentences provided by me and practiced at home by the student ahead of time. I had thought this would help the students in the beginning to grasp some of the necessary language and to give me some time to get to know the students and the dynamics of the class. I also wanted to speak with the parents at the September parent/teacher interviews about the intent of Nos Histoires. I wanted to share with parents, for example, how they could help their children choose topics and items to share and how having their children share with one another would help the class practice citizenship and literacy skills.

Upon beginning the school year, however, it became clear to me quite quickly, that this initial plan would need to change. The students in this particular class were having a very difficult time adjusting to the daily routine. I felt teaching them the conventional show’n’tell routine knowing we would not be participating in it for very long would be a
waste of time. I decided to begin with Nos histoires right away.

Originally, I thought my contract at the school would be two or three full days every week. After two weeks of school, my contract changed and I began teaching each day until lunch time. This schedule change was favorable, as it allowed me to conduct Nos histoires on a daily basis. My teaching partner did not participate in Nos histoires.

I did not set up the videocamera in the classroom until consent was completed by the parents. Once the videocamera was set up, it remained in the room for the remainder of the study, which helped the children become accustomed to its presence. The students were all made aware of my work at the university and they knew that I was videotaping our times together as a way to learn how to make Nos histoires even better. At one point during the term, the children and I watched one of the sessions together and discussed appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. As well, we identified the good efforts of students who told their stories in French.

Implementation. The routine of Nos histoires began in the third week of school. The students and I sat in a circle on the carpet. We discussed their ideas of what show’n’tell was and I introduced the new expectations surrounding Nos histoires (see Table 4). The students were expected to share a story about something important to them. They were allowed to bring an object to show if they wished, but the object was not necessary. A parent letter went home that day similarly explaining the concept of Nos histoires and the expectation that at home students would think ahead of time about the story they wished to share at school. A schedule of which students would lead Nos histoires accompanied the parent note. The letter informed parents that each day one student would be designated to share a story with the class. This student would begin Nos histoires by sharing his or her story and then moderate by choosing subsequent
speakers throughout the period of Nos histoires. The rest of the class could contribute voluntarily to the session on any day.

Table 4
A List of Expectations for Nos histoires

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Expectations</th>
<th>English Translation:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Une personne raconte une histoire.</td>
<td>1. One person tells a story at a time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. La classe écoute bien.</td>
<td>2. Listen well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Levez-vous la main.</td>
<td>3. Raise your hand.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we established Nos histoires in our class, the children were taught how to listen and present. Instructions included: make eye contact; keep hands and feet to yourselves; imagine pictures of what the presenter is saying; say comments that are kind; think of questions that will gather more information; and speak with a loud and clear voice. The presenter practiced leading the discussion and questioning after his or her story by nominating who could speak next. There were no limitations on what type of story was shared. Students could retell favorite folk tales, describe what they did after school yesterday, explain why their favorite doll was named Sabrina, or share about the time they moved to a new house. I found that most stories revolved around a student’s family life. They would share stories about visits to the pool with dad, family vacations, or after school activities. Usually, the stories would be shared in themes, as one student’s
story reminded another student of a familiar situation.

Nos histoires took place each morning. The time allotted spanned approximately 10-20 minutes. This was equivalent to the time I would have spent on the conventional show’n’tell routine. Once I felt the session should come to an end, because we had already been sharing for a long time, I felt the class was getting restless, or we needed to move on to the next task of the day, I simply called out, “Deux minutes de plus” [Two minutes left] and the students understood that one more person could share and then our time would be over for the day.

At times, some students would still want to share and tell more stories. Therefore, approximately twice a week, the students would end Nos histoires and return to their desks for Mes histoires. Mes histoires was their notebook for writing, and it was here that students could write freely (sounding out words the best they could, phonetically) and draw a picture. When a student felt he or she did not have an opportunity to share, I would reply, “Tu peux écrire ton histoire dans Mes histoires” [You can write your story in your notebook]. Students seemed satisfied with this answer and always moved enthusiastically to their desk to begin Mes histoires.

Data collection. The data were collected using videotape and journaling. The videotapes were transcribed. According to Miles and Huberman (1994) the amount of raw data collected can become overwhelming. As such, videotapes were transcribed on a regular basis and reflective comments were noted simultaneously in square brackets. Journaling was done at lunch on the same day so as to have a reliable memory of the event. Initially, I planned to complete an observation checklist (see Appendix C) following the transcription. However, I did not find the preplanned checklist coincided with the information I was gathering from the sessions. For example, instead of wanting
to know the number of questions students were asking, I found I was more interested in
whether the students were participating in English or French. Some of the best
conversations did not take place because of new questions being asked, rather they
evolved from a student sharing a similar story. I did not always videotape myself, thus
completing the teacher observation checklist was not possible. I decided the
transcriptions were sufficient in themselves for analysis of data and found it more useful
to record summarizing comments on the transcription itself (again, in square brackets)
regarding behaviour rather than keeping a separate sheet for data.

I had also planned to complete a contact summary sheet (see Appendix D) after
each session. The contact summary sheet required that I summarize the main themes in
the session, answer whether previous target questions had been addressed, report any
new salient information, and decide on new or remaining target questions for the next
contact. Instead I found that my journal met this requirement in an informal way so that I
would have been duplicating the same information by keeping both a journal and contact
sheets. I preferred recording in my journal because the space was less constricting. I was
able to make my notes of the session as long or as short as needed and I was not bound
by an itemized list of inquiry topics as was the case if I had used the contact sheet.

Journal entries were the basis of my interpretation of the data for the first part of
Nos histoires. I recorded detailed descriptive and some interpretive information in a
journal for each of the first seven days Nos histoires took place. Afterwards, I kept a
journal once a week until videotaping began in November. Once I began videotaping the
sessions, the journal entries reflected more of the personal growth that resulted from my
effort to encourage democratic practices in my classroom, and descriptive and interpretive
information were included instead with the transcription sheets as additional notes.
These later journal entries recorded reflections and questions about professional literature, conversations with colleagues, as well as some descriptive and interpretive summaries of particular Nos histoires sessions.

Analysis

Cazden (1988) described share time as Teacher-Student-Teacher dialogue. The teacher initiates the sequence of sharing by calling on a student to share, the nominated student responds by telling a narrative, and the teacher comments on the narrative before nominating the next child. I was trying to move away from this type of teacher-centered scenario. I wanted to see the children interacting with one another. I decided to look at the videotape and transcripts without a preplanned code, such as identifying the number and type of teacher interruptions. Rather I looked at the videotape and transcripts several times looking for categories and patterns to emerge.

Coding. I did multiple passes of the transcript because, as I was interpreting one topic, new ideas associated with an existing topic emerged and I wanted to determine the categories. While reading the transcripts I made comments throughout and interpretive thoughts were placed in square brackets. I concluded that I wanted to identify how many stories were told in French versus English, and tally the number of stories in which children interacted with one another. On the right hand side of the transcripts descriptive coding was used and the identification of French was initialed FR, the identification of English was initialed ENG, and the number of conversations in either language was written and circled next to the corresponding language. Interactions between students were initialed INT. At the end of each transcript I made a simple chart identifying the number of French stories, English stories, and interactions.
Selective coding was chosen, as I chose only to focus on areas of the transcript that were pertinent. This means that I did not analyze, for example, a chunk of transcript in which the class was interrupted to weigh in coins for a UNICEF fundraiser. I chose to code whether the stories were in English or in French and whether other students interacted in dialogue because of a story. The stories were exclusively coded as either English or French. Although the interactions occurred at the same moment as the English or French story, I did not specify whether the interaction itself was English or French.

Sources of data collection were coded. Abbreviations of these codes are listed in Table 5. During transcription, in order to protect the identity of the students involved, I did not use any names. Students were identified as ST#1, ST#2, and so on depending on when they appeared in the dialogue. Each new dialogue began with the same coding even though different students participated. Any quotes of my participation are coded as T.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Data</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher’s Journal Entry</td>
<td>JE</td>
<td>JE, Oct. 27, 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Transcript</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT, Nov. 02, 2004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Criteria. A French story at this level was defined as a story beginning with a French phrase, for example, “Un jour, Maman et Papa et moi, nous sommes allés...” [Once, my mom, dad, and I went...] and using common French words within the story, for example, “mon chat” [my cat]. If the student did not use common French words, the story was classified as English (see Table 6).

Student-initiated conversations, as defined by Whitmore (1997), include interactions where a student begins a new topic, a topic is developed into extended conversation, and the conversation draws in other students. Thus, an interaction was identified if a student asked a question regarding the story, a student made a comment that showed meaning making, and or new knowledge was being shared. Interactions occurred when students extended the conversation with one another. In the example of an interaction in Table 6, students were learning personal information about one another and at the same time created meaning for themselves as one student appreciated that people eat spaghetti differently than she does, one student tries to convince another that stinky cheese is really good despite the name, and another student tries to inform the group of the real term for ‘stinky cheese’.
Table 6
Examples Showing Criteria for an English Story, a French Story, and an Interaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Language Story</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St: &quot;Aujourd'hui, after school...&quot; (VT, Oct. 27, 2004, p. 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This student’s story was classified English because although the student began the story in French the rest of the story was spoken in English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French Language Story</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St: “Un jour, maman et grand-papa et grand-maman, nous sommes allés à la &gt; bridge”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: “le pont”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St: “et maman a trouvé les pierres.” (VT, Oct. 27, 2004, p. 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This story was classified as French since the student began the story in French and continued to use common phrases in French throughout the story</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St#:1: “Aujourd'hui, I mean tomorrow I'm going over to *”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[two students are involved in a side conversation at the same time, making it difficult to hear]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St#1: [looks at St#2]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St#2: “I don't like stinky cheese.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St#1: &quot;But it's for your spaghetti.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St#3: “It's really good.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St#4, 5, and 6: “Yeah”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St#5: “It's parmesan cheese.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St#1: “Yeah, it's just called 'stinky cheese'.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St#2: “We only just put butter on.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St#6: “I never tried that, I should try that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St#2: “...on spaghetti so it can make it slippery.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Students giggling] (VT, Dec. 07, 2004, p. 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This story was classified as interactive because the original story developed into extended conversation and drew in the participation of other students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: St = student  T = teacher  > = pause  * = indiscernible
Classroom action research was my choice of method. I videotaped the Nos histoires sessions and examined the stories students told for English or French language use and for interaction among students about the stories they told. I also maintained a journal regularly. Within the process of planning, implementing, reflecting, and revising, I noted the problems that arose, recorded the changes I made, and evaluated the solutions. I wanted to see how students progressed with using French in the oral Nos histoires. In my journal entries, I focused my awareness on how the class activities were reflecting my ideals of improved use of the French language, joint construction of knowledge, and democratic principles of dialogue. On the evenings of the days I videotaped, I watched the video, transcribed the tape, and added interpretive notes simultaneously.

Summary

In this chapter I have presented arguments supporting my decision to use classroom action research as my method. I believe an educated person is one who can reflect on his or her own attitudes and behavior and allow such reflection to influence opinions and beliefs. In my view, an educated person accepts the responsibility to integrate the learning from past experiences and applies that knowledge toward improving the future. These same behaviors are evident when teachers participate in the cycle of classroom action research. As a person who believes in the importance of reflection as a quality of an educated person, I believe I have continued with my own personal and professional growth by reflecting on how the ideals of learning and democracy can exist successfully in my primary classroom.

By using action research, a process that encompasses patterns of "Wholeness, Awareness, Meaning, and Commitment" (Brown, 2004), I feel I have done my best to
improve my classroom and that I have created a better learning environment for my students. I have explained the Wholeness stage in this chapter and introduced the Awareness stage. I will now, in the next chapter, detail the events of Nos histoires through the continuation of the Awareness stage. Then, in the Meaning stage, I will present my findings.
CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

"Every child knew that his or her voice was valued and important; inviting all children to have a turn demonstrated our faith in their ability to make a contribution to our community . . ." (Donoahue, 2001, p. 29)

The purpose of this study was to see if the implementation of Nos histoires would increase proficiency in the French language, enhance student interactions for the purpose of scaffolding knowledge among peers, and provide a space for practicing democratic principles of dialogue. A reading of the literature suggested the act of storytelling is a powerful learning tool, in which students take part in the collaborative process of sharing to construct meaning and to make connections between their own stories and those of their peers (Booth & Barton, 2000; Donoahue, 2001; Michaels & Cazden, 1986; Senehi, 2004; Wells, 1986). It was my hope that in structuring a classroom routine whereby students had the opportunity to share their personal narratives on a daily basis, students would not only use more French in the classroom, but also they would increase their awareness of how to participate in a community by listening and responding to information provided by their peers. As the study progressed, I became more sensitive to the importance of creating a classroom community based on democratic principles. It became more and more critical to me that each student be made to feel important and confident enough to use his or her voice to express an idea, a question, a story, a problem, or a response.

In Chapter III, I described the first two stages of the Learning Circle (Brown, 2004) in regard to the implementation of Nos histoires. The first stage, Wholeness,
represented my ideals of wanting students to interact with one another as human beings, using their voice to share and learn from one another, while at the same time practice the French language. Then, in the second stage, Awareness, I described the implementation of Nos histoires and explained how the data were collected through journal entries and videotaping. In this chapter, I continue the Awareness stage and explain in detail the growth of Nos histoires in our class throughout the three months of data collection. It is also in this chapter that I discuss the third stage of the Learning Circle. In the Meaning stage I analyze the data and reflect upon the success of Nos histoires in providing a routine that fulfills the requirements of the research questions.

Awareness

The Learning Circle (Brown, 2004) is a description of how one can organize and conduct the process of classroom action research. For the purposes of this study I have used the four stages, Wholeness, Awareness, Meaning, and Commitment, as a way to communicate the path I took in planning and conducting this study. Yet, classroom action research entails more than one pathway of learning. It is a more complex system as researchers reflect on the process as it occurs, revise plans, and implement reformed ideas while still focusing on the final outcome. Therefore, one may see that the Learning Circle actually contains smaller learning circles within itself. These smaller circles of Wholeness, Awareness, Meaning, and Commitment occurred during the Awareness stage of the original pathway. Figure 2 illustrates how I see these smaller learning circles in context of the whole study. In each of the smaller circles I have labeled examples of some of the issues that arose from the reflection that took place during action.
Figure 2: Illustration of the Learning Circle and how in this study smaller versions of the learning circle took place during the Awareness stage.
The following section is an account of what happened during the implementation of Nos histoires in my classroom over the three months, and includes examples (as listed in Figure 2, p. 62) of the smaller learning circles I followed as I made decisions that altered the initial plan of the routine.

Setting up the Activity

Nos histoires began in our classroom the third week of September (JE, Sept. 20, 2004). For approximately eleven weeks, I made a conscious effort to focus my attention on the dynamics and outcomes of Nos histoires in the classroom. I examined our sharing times by videotaping the sessions and by recording details and thoughts in a journal. I videotaped nine sessions between October 27 and December 7 and I wrote 16 journal entries that date from September 20 to December 5.

Throughout these eleven weeks, Nos histoires was a regular, dynamic routine in our class. It was constantly evolving as I cycled through the four steps of the Learning Circle: Wholeness, Awareness, Meaning, and Commitment (Brown, 2004). My journal played an important role in the reflection process. It was here that I combined my planning with my long term goals for the class by asking myself questions about what I was doing as a teacher and how the children were responding in the class. I developed a keener sense of awareness for the behaviour and development of the students by watching the videotapes of the sessions. I continued to read professional articles, spoke with colleagues and at times let the students lead me in order to further investigate the idea of community and democracy in the classroom. I went back to the class and altered the routines slightly each time to create a sharing time coherent with my goal of creating a public space safe for sharing.
At the start, Nos histoires began with all of us sitting in circle on the floor. I thought it was important that everyone be seen on the same level; therefore, while in other classroom routines the special helper of the day sat in a special chair, and I usually sat in my own chair, for Nos histoires everyone, including me, sat on the floor. I made up a schedule where one student was named the leader of Nos histoires for each school day. This schedule was sent home once a month so students had notice when it would be their turn to lead. The leader was expected to come prepared to share a story and to moderate the rest of the sharing time by choosing who would get to speak next. The role and expectations of the leader were one of the few things that did not change during the eleven weeks.

We experimented with having Nos histoires at different times during the day. By the 3rd week it became routine to begin the day with Nos histoires.

*Today was a good day. I liked starting with Nos histoires. It seemed to set the tone for the rest of the day. It was nice to be able to start the day informally, to chat with one another before getting busy to work. The students seemed to like it, too. This morning they had a wonderful conversation with one another about fishing and camping (JE, Oct. 1, 2004, p. 1).*

*Today I forgot to do Nos histoires. I had a strange feeling all morning, but couldn’t pinpoint the problem. I felt disjointed and I think the kids were somewhat too, as if we were going through the motions but something was missing. Nos histoires has become such an essential part of our routine, I feel out of place without it (JE, Jan. 26, 2004, p.1).*

The students arrived in the classroom, put on their indoor shoes, came to the carpet, we said good morning to one another, sang O Canada, discovered who the special helper of the day was, and repeated the day’s date. Then I would ask, “Qui va faire Nos histoires, aujourd’hui?” [Who’s turn is it to lead Nos histoires today?] The class moved to create a circle, the leader would put up his or her hand, and then we would start.
The leader would share his or her story and then ask, "Qui veut parler?" [Who would like to speak now?] Several hands would rise and the leader would then nominate the next speaker. Usually the new speaker would proceed and share a similar type story. Sometimes the nominated speaker asked a question or made a comment referring to the leader's story. At other times the speaker would recount a tale unrelated to the lead story. After the nominated speaker was done, the leader would repeat "Qui veut parler?" and again nominate someone to share. This back and forth exchange continued for about ten to fifteen minutes and then I would give the children a warning to let them know only a few minutes were left. After the few minutes passed we would move on to the next activity for the day.

Showing Objects

From their Kindergarten experience, the students were used to the traditional show'n'tell routine of bringing an object to school. I did not want to deny anyone the opportunity to show something if he or she wished. However, I did emphasize that the object was not as important in Nos histoires as was the telling of the story. If they wished to bring an object they could, but then they had to tell a story about the object. At first, most of the students were uninterested in bringing objects and just told their prepared stories. However, by about the 5th week, I noticed more students were bringing items to show and sometimes problems arose in presenting the object so that everyone had the same opportunity to view the item. For the most part, the item was displayed in the center of the circle. We tried passing the objects around, but I found this was too distracting and other stories were either not shared or not listened to carefully because the focus of attention remained on the object. In adjusting the routine regarding the showing
Nos histoires

of objects, I was engaging in a smaller cycle of the Learning Circle (Brown, 2004). The presenting of objects was interfering with my vision of a sharing routine where students were participating and responding respectfully to one another. The decision to no longer allow the passing of objects around the class was new action, or Commitment, designed to refocus the routine to its original ideals.

The Split

It was also about this time that I was questioning the effectiveness of having all the students sitting together in one large circle. I found, for the most part, that the students listened well to each other, though occasionally there were side conversations. Students seemed to want to tell similar stories at the same time (JE, Oct. 20, 2004), and I returned to the Wholeness stage to ask myself more frequently, "What is Nos histoires for?" (JE, Oct. 27, 2004). Awareness grew as I decided that if my purpose was to build a growing sense of community in the classroom by engaging students in dialogue then dividing the class into smaller groups would allow for more informal questioning by other students, and more sharers could have an opportunity to share (Cazden, 1994). Yet, I struggled with the idea that for me the whole class was the community. By splitting the class, I felt I would be splitting our community. The students would no longer be participants in the same experience. I struggled with the notion that not all students would hear the same stories. Therefore, we continued as one group. I continued to emphasize orating skills such as speaking with a loud voice, and eye contact with the whole class (not only to the teacher).

Greater Awareness developed from Whitmore's (1997) words. She wrote, "[We] left the students to continue discussions without me . . . . This demonstrated our trust in
students to teach one another, an essential part of community” (p. 116). I felt to truly see if the students could initiate their own voices with one another, I would have to remove myself from Nos histoires. I also continued to think of Cazden’s (1994) arguments that smaller groups gave students more opportunity to participate. I had already experimented somewhat with leaving the students on their own by allowing students to begin Nos histoires while I spoke with a parent. I also knew that once when I had missed school, the students did an adequate job explaining to the substitute teacher how to participate in Nos histoires and they did so when I wasn’t there. I was confident they could work in a small group independent of the teacher.

In the ninth week, I decided to alter our set up somewhat and we began Nos histoires with two groups (JE, Nov. 16, 2004). The class was informally divided with one student leader for each group. The groups conducted Nos histoires for approximately ten minutes and then I would say “échange” [switch] and the two leaders would stand up and switch circles while the rest of the students remained sitting. I sat with students in one group and remained in that group, leaving the other group to be on their own for the entire session. By allowing the lead students to switch places, I was attempting to avoid the creation of a disjointed community by having students not hear the same stories. Although the following stories would not be the same, students did hear the same lead story and as a bonus, the lead students were able to tell their stories twice, allowing for more practice.

Once we began having Nos histoires with two groups, new expectations were established. For the most part students chose with whom they were going to sit. Students who had difficulty choosing were quickly told where to sit, and I sometimes moved students before we got started to eliminate situations such as having all the boys in
one group. After the students chose their groupings, I would join and participate in one of the groupings and the other group was videotaped. At times I did have to go to the other group to quiet them, to refocus them on the task, or to remind them to speak French. For the most part, I was able to stay as a full participant in the one group.

New Awareness emerged as I found that because the groups were smaller, students had more opportunities to talk. It became evident, from viewing the videotape, that my presence (not my words or interruptions) did change the dynamics of the group and as a result affected the student dialogue. The session I viewed on the videotape of the other group often appeared to be more dynamic. For example, in one instance a student brought a book to share. In my group he proceeded to read the book to the students. I was trying not to interrupt or force the direction of the discussion. However, I did end up stopping the student as a way to provide time for other students to speak. The student, however, continued to dominate the circle with information about his book. On the videotape, the student (St#1) presented his book to the second group and allowed the students in the group to speak first:

St#2: "What is it?"
St#3: "Bear, big, blue house book."
St#1: "Yes, but that's not how its called. Do you want to know how its calls? The name of the book is ..."
St#4: "I think I may have gave that book to St#1."
St#4: "Did I St#1?"
St#1: "What?"
St#4: "Did I give that book to you?"
St#1: "I don't quite remember St#4?"
St#4: "I think I did."
St#1: "I'll read one page and then I'll make the questions. Okay?"
Students: "Okay"
In this example, the student did not dominate the circle at all. He was quite content to let others have turns speaking. A possible reason for changed group dynamics was that the leader had already had one turn sharing in the first group and did not want to share as much the second time around. Although I did not compare the number of interactions between the group with the teacher and the group without the teacher (having only videotaped the group without the teacher) it seemed to me that the children interacted more when the teacher was not present, whether the person leading was sharing for the first time or second time.

In another example, a student could not think of what to say. Another student offered her an idea about sharing something that happened to her when she lived in Australia. The leader proceeded to tell a story about her participation in a Christmas concert at her school in Australia. The conversation was extended as the children began discussing the seasons and how it is hot in Australia at Christmas and in the summer it is cold. If I had been present, probably, I would have been the one to encourage the student’s story and I wouldn’t have thought to mention something about the child’s previous school since I usually prompt with saying “Qu’est-ce qui s’est passé hier?” [What happened yesterday?] Hence, my absence from the group provided an opportunity for the students to collaborate on their own. Their interaction of shared thoughts led the direction of the conversation.

As a result of my reflection in the Meaning stage, I came to believe that splitting the class into two groups was a good idea and helped to further achieve the objectives of Nos histoires. In reviewing the transcripts, I was surprised to hear the group without the
Nos histoires

teacher speak any French at all, but many of the stories did occur in French. In a transcript from the tenth week, seven out of ten stories were in French (VT, Nov 24, 2004). Since students were initiating the use of French language and continuing conversations without the aid of an adult, I found that allowing students the benefit of conducting Nos histoires without a teacher present helped to increase proficiency in the French language and enhanced their interactions with one another. This allowed for new knowledge to be shared with peers. This trust in one another is evidence of the community building that took place in our classroom.

It is important to note, however, that I am not arguing the teacher is unimportant in the process of Nos histoires. By the time I observed the students’ ability to interact with one another the routine was well established and the children were familiar with it. In the first two months, while we stayed as a whole class group, interactions still took place and I was present. I invested time in providing French vocabulary, modeling responses to students’ stories, and discussing behavioural expectations. I do not believe the children would have been as successful in an independent small group without the direct teaching and practice which took place at the beginning when Nos histoires was conducted as one group. As well, I have noticed that as Nos histoires continues as a routine in our classroom, at times the students need to be brought together as a whole and reminded of the purposes and expectations of Nos histoires. Thus, the teacher is an essential facilitator for Nos histoires. In the next section I will explain further the impact of the teacher’s presence during Nos histoires.

A Look at Teacher Behaviour

One of my objectives in observing the progress of Nos histoires was to assess my
own developing ability to help the students become better participants in the practice of peer dialogue. I asked myself how I could empower the students to engage in classroom discourse. Whitmore (1997) wrote that for teachers to empower their students, they must expect a high level of intellectual engagement from them and organize their classrooms to share power with the students. I believe that encouraging the practice of Nos histoires with the purpose of expecting Grade 1 students to interact with one another is a high expectation. Nos histoires was organized to facilitate the sharing of power because the student storyteller, rather than the teacher, leads the session with a story and chooses who may tell the next story.

Whitmore (1997) continued by supporting the use of teacher interruptions. Interruptions are helpful if they: offer clarification, ask the student to provide additional background information, or if comments contribute to extend meaning (Whitmore, 1997). In one transcript (Nov. 2, 2004), I specifically identified my interruptions and observed how they affected the students’ conversations. The students responded indifferently to my interruptions. They continued their stories regardless of teacher input (VT, Nov. 2, 2004). They would listen to my input, repeat a word or phrase in French if necessary, but the interruption did not stop the flow or direction of the stories told by the students.

I found that I made four types of interruptions. I would (a) repeat a phrase in French; (b) provide a word for the student in French; (c) remind the student, with a hand gesture or verbal expression, to look at the class while speaking; and (d) provide clarification on a topic. On this particular day I did not provide any further information to extend the meaning of a topic. As I made meaning for myself regarding teacher interruptions, I became committed in future sessions to continue with “helpful” interruptions having concluded that these “teachable moments” could be beneficial rather
than detrimental, to students’ meaning making.

In each of the smaller learning circles I was able to make the Commitment of new action as I developed understanding, and thus Meaning, between the current reality and my ideals. These adaptations occurred frequently in the Awareness stage as I constantly compared the current action and student response with my goals and ideals presented in the Wholeness stage.

Links to Home and School

By week seven, I began to make more realizations about our progress (JE, Nov. 04, 2004). I was surprised at how well I was getting to know the students. From their stories I was able to see a personal side of students that increased my awareness of who they were as individual learners, and my empathy for their situations at home:

One of the students spoke lovingly about his father. His stories revealed that his father was away often on work trips and that he missed him terribly. He spoke about his father in awe, yet it was apparent they rarely spent time together. As the school year progressed, this same boy had difficulty learning to read. He did not have the simple pre-literacy skills such as understanding that words are read from left to right. At the parent teacher interview I was able to encourage the father to model reading at home, knowing his son would want to imitate the father he so admired (JE, Nov. 04, 2004, p. 1).

The stories shared by students contributed to my awareness of their needs. I was able to choose read aloud stories and themes of learning that were of direct interest to the students:

One student’s collection of rocks which [sic] she collected from several bridges across Canada led to lessons on classification and sorting. Children began to collect rocks and brought them to share. We started a nature discovery table and continued to investigate similarities and differences in our finds. These teachable moments were in line with the Grade 1 Science prescribed learning outcomes [see Table 7], (JE, Oct. 28,
Table 7
Prescribed Learning Outcomes from the Science IRP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Science (Properties of Objects)</th>
<th>Earth and Space Science (Earth's Surface)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>It is expected that students will:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• describe the properties of a variety of common objects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• describe the characteristics of rocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• classify rocks according to their physical characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• describe the effects of water and wind on rocks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Adapted from the *Science K to 7 IRP*, British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1995.

Moreover, I learned that many of the children had parents with occupations in forestry. Most stories centered on camping trips and hiking. I was able to get a guest speaker to come in and teach a unit on forestry. The children enjoyed the unit and were able to extend their personal stories to new factual information regarding topics such as “Who works in the forest?”, “Who lives in the forest?”, and “How do we take care of our forests?” I became better equipped to connect student experiences and interests with the
I noticed that students were increasing the variety of story beginnings. Although, ‘un jour’ [once] was still the most common introduction, some students began to experiment with more specific terms by using ‘hier’ [yesterday] or ‘aujourd’hui’ [today] (JE, Oct. 27, 2004). Thus in the first two months of Nos histoires, I saw students increase their use of the French language, students interacting with one another independent of an adult, and students using that interaction as a learning tool.

Meaning

Making meaning, according to the Learning Circle (Brown, 2004), is the interpreting and reflecting stage in action research. It was with this in mind that I began to analyze all of the data in relation to the research questions for which I began the study. Did I establish a classroom routine based on democratic and sociocultural theory that (a) increased proficiency in the French language, (b) enhanced student interactions for the purpose of scaffolding knowledge among peers, and (c) provided space for practicing democratic principles of dialogue? By interpreting the significance of the experiences in our classroom during Nos histoires, I have determined that we did establish an effective routine through which I attempted to address the ideals I listed in my vision during the Wholeness stage (see Table 2, p. 47). In this section, I present the data as evidence of my meaning making as it relates to French language use, scaffolding knowledge, and democratic dialogue.
To determine if students increased their proficiency in the French language, I observed the extent to which students were using any French in their stories, whether they were helping other students use more French in their stories, and what words and phrases were becoming an automatic part of the students' second language. In the tradition of an exploratory case study, my intention was not to prove the generalizable effectiveness of Nos histoires for language acquisition, but to learn to use Nos histoires to facilitate language growth for students in this particular classroom. This section explains my observations of how students were using French in Nos histoires.

Students were encouraged to use as much French as they could within their dialogue. When I heard a word or phrase repeated by the students, I would stop the class and provide the French translation. From there the students were expected thereafter to repeat that particular word or phrase in French. If a student was not using as much French as I thought he or she was capable of using I would stop the story and say “Recommence en français” [Start again in French]. In most instances the stories consisted of more English words than French words, which is to be expected in a French Immersion Grade 1 class in the beginning months of the school year.

By the 5th week, I noticed the children were using French phrases in their stories on a regular basis (JE, Oct. 20, 2004). Students began their stories with “Un jour” [Once], added familiar family names such as “Maman” [Mom], “Papa” [Dad], “ma soeur” [my sister], or “mon frère” [my brother], and also used “nous sommes allés . . .” [we went . . . ]. Often common French words that were spoken in English were corrected by classmates. For example, if a student said, “My cat . . . “ another student would call out, “chat” (JE, Sept. 24, 2004, p. 1). Two of the students told stories completely in French
The students in this class began with very little French knowledge. They had had one year of French language training in Kindergarten. Two of the students were beginning school in French for the very first time and so had no extensive prior exposure to the language. Due to maturation, the students could increase their proficiency in French simply by attending the class. As no pretests or control groups were included in this study, it was difficult to attribute growth in the area of French proficiency to Nos histoires. However, I was content to see children using French without my prompting. As a teacher of students studying a second language, I am always trying to find ways to activate participation in the new language. Nos histoires provided that.

As well, if I compared the conversations we had this year in Nos histoires with the speech that took place with my previous Grade 1 French Immersion class, I would note that the students this year had more opportunity to repeat phrases during Nos histoires. Since many of the stories were related, the same terms were repeated again and again. It allowed for certain phrases to become automatic, for example, “Un jour, nous sommes allés...” [One day we went...].

In the first few weeks of Nos histoires many of the stories centered around seeing wildlife. For example, one student said, “Papa drove from Quesnel and saw deux bébés ours dans la forêt [Dad drove from Quesnel and saw two baby bears in the forest].” (JE, Sept. 20, 2004. p. 1). For many days, the students shared stories similar to this and as a result found their own time to practice using animal vocabulary. This evidence supported the assertion that language production that occurs in the context of social interaction allows students to “try out their knowledge of the language” (Johnson, 1995, p. 84) and...
thus “push to the limit their emerging competence” (Nunan, 1991, p. 50).

The data show that more of the students’ stories were told in French (62%) than in English (38%). Table 8 shows the number of English stories and the number of French stories recorded on videotape. It is important to note these tables are representational of the nine transcripts completed, and not of the total number of stories told over the three months of studying Nos histoires. I was surprised at how often the children did use French in their stories, considering that I was not present in most of the transcribed sessions and the students were speaking among themselves. This was a wonderful discovery and I believe one reason the students did speak French was because they were telling stories with familiar topics and themes, for example, stories about their families or going swimming. Students were motivated to speak French because the vocabulary they were using was familiar and natural to use. Although, I cannot confirm that Nos histoires increased the students proficiency in the French language, I do believe that Nos histoires was a routine that successfully provided the necessary social interaction to create positive learning conditions in a French Immersion classroom.

Table 8
Number of Stories told in English and French

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of stories transcribed</th>
<th>61</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of stories in English</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of stories in French</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Scaffolding Knowledge

As students shared their stories, they provided information to one another. In this example the students were sharing all kinds of factual information with one another, from “fish need water to live” to “fish can bite”:

One little girl told a story about family camp. She was in the lake and the fish were tickling her toes. Many kids got involved in the conversation. Two of the boys and the little girl ended up continuing the dialogue even further. They were not putting up their hands to speak but were turn taking in a respectful manner. Boy#1 thought the girl should have caught the fish.

The girl responded, “But I didn’t have a net.”

The talk continued and moved onto the topic of fish needing to be in water or they would die.

Boy#2 observed, “But if they are near the shore they’d flop back in the water.”

Another little girl contributed to the conversation by adding her own story of when her mom was sitting on a log and a fish bit her toes (JE, Oct. 1, 2004, p. 1).

Learning from their personal experiences, whether it be camping or watching a television program, the students were able to teach their peers about topics significant to them:

One student shared information from a TV program he had watched. The program was about bike safety and the student proceeded to model how to fall off a bike safely. Before I knew it, all the kids were practicing the roll used to fall off the bike safely (JE, Oct. 20, 2004, p. 1).

At times students became very involved in sharing information with one another, and often a story started by one child led to a conversation involving several students. In the following example one of the students was sharing a story about him and his brother playing in the pool. Their brotherly play became aggressive and they began pushing each other under the water. Some of the students thought it was funny that the younger brother pushed the older brother under the water. Other children became quite concerned
at the action and shared their opinions to the class:

\[ \text{St} \#1: \text{"I pushed him underwater."} \]
\[ \text{[Students laughing, cheering]} \]
\[ \text{St} \#2: \text{"That's not funny."} \]
\[ \text{St} \#3: \text{"You could die."} \]
\[ \text{St} \#1: \text{"No."} \]
\[ \text{St} \#4: \text{"Yeah."} \]
\[ \text{St} \#2: \text{"That's a rule."} \]
\[ \text{St} \#1: \text{"I can see underwater. We kept pushing each other underwater.} \]
\[ \text{St} \#2: \text{"That's dangerous."} \]
\[ \text{St} \#3: \text{"You could get enough water in your mouth, you could die."} \]
\[ \text{St} \#1: \text{"No"} \]
\[ \text{St} \#2: \text{"Yeah."} \]
\[ \text{St} \#1: \text{"It was only one second."} \]
\[ \text{St} \#2: \text{"It's okay if you go underwater."} \] (VT, Nov. 04, 2004, p. 1)

In another example, one can see how much fun the students had listening to their classmates:

\[ \text{One student was very good at getting the students to pay attention to his stories. He had very good eye contact with the whole class and spoke excitedly about his topic. One story was about monster trucks. The students were enthusiastic and wanted more details. They spoke directly to the student, ignoring my presence. They would repeat, "Tell us more, tell us more about...". The students were really enjoying themselves, laughing, and interacting with one another. They became their own group, participating without adult intervention (JE, Oct. 20, 2004, p.1).} \]

These examples show that the students were listening to one another, enjoying one another's stories, caring about one another enough to respond to each other, and participating in the sharing process together. As I was watching these interactions take place, I wanted to see if the interactions of the students progressed similarly to the illustration of the building blocks outlined in Figure 1 (p. 8), which I believed occurred on several occasions, as shown by the previous four examples. In Figure 3, I have redrawn the building blocks to represent the dialogue from the first example regarding the fish.
1. Girl #1 begins story about family camp and swimming in the lake.

2. Boy #1 wants to know why she didn’t catch the fish.

3. Girl #1 explains she didn’t have a net.

4. Boy #2 explains fish need water.

5. Boy #1 agrees that fish need water or they will die.

6. Boy #2 mentions that if a fish is out of the water but near the shore they could flop back in the water and still live.

7. Girl #2 tells a story of when a fish bit her mom’s toes.

8. Girl #1 emphasizes the fish just tickled her toes, and did not bite her.

9. Boy #1 wonders what lake each girl was at.

10. Girl #1 shares the name of her lake, but Girl #2 doesn’t know the name of the lake in her story.

Figure 3. Building blocks example from Nos histoires.
I believe that this representation revealed the interest students took in one another as they spoke directly in response to each other without input or direction from the teacher. It also shows that the students were able to discuss ideas outside the story, such as the need for a net to catch fish, fish need water to live, and fish can bite. The conversation started with one person but grew to involve four different speakers.

I believe that the foundation of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is the idea that our learning occurs in the midst of others. The success of Nos histoires in providing scaffolding may be attributed to the fact that at the center of Nos histoires was the focus to enhance student interactions. The students would not have continued dialogue and continued learning from one another without first achieving an interest in one another. It is here that the democracy and sociocultural theory become entwined. In my wanting to provide a space for practicing democratic principles for dialogue, I had to include in my vision (see Table 1, p. 47) ideals such as encouraging students to speak, listen, and respond to each other as well as share unique biographies and alternative views of the world. The ideals I thought would guide me in my search towards democratic dialogue, also helped me to create an atmosphere conducive to the scaffolding of knowledge among peer groups. Thus within the action of students learning from one another they were also participating in democratic dialogue.

*Democratic Dialogue*

To determine whether democratic dialogue was taking place in the Grade 1 classroom, I decided to look at the number of interactions children had while sharing. Table 9 shows the number of interactions recorded on videotape. Interactions were identified when students extended one person's sharing of a story into a conversation. It
ss important to note again that these tables are representational of the nine transcripts completed, not of the total number of stories told over the three months of studying Nos histoires.

Table 9
Number of Interactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of stories transcribed</th>
<th>61</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of interactions between students</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students initiated extended conversations with one another almost one third of the time. Although, this may not seem like a lot, considering the age group and novelty of the routine, I believe students were successful in interacting with one another. Table 10 displays the breakdown of interactions by students in the weeks between October 27 and December 07, 2004. The table shows a gradual increase in the number of interactions between students. In the first few weeks, the students did not engage in any extended talk. Towards the end of the study, there were at least one or more interactions between the students. On December 07, 2004 there were eight interactions. I believe this is evidence to show the students were becoming active participants and creating classroom dialogue.
### Table 10

Number of Interactions Videotaped each Week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Transcription</th>
<th>Number of Stories</th>
<th>Number of Interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 27, 2004</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2, 2004</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 3, 2004</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 4, 2004</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 10, 2004</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 18, 2004</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 22, 2004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 24, 2004</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 07, 2004</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One particular interaction stood out for me:

St#1: “Aujourd’hui, I mean tomorrow I’m going over to *”
[two students are involved in a side conversation at the same time, making it
difficult to hear]
St#1: [looks at St#2]
St#2: “I don’t like stinky cheese.”
St#1: “But it’s for your spaghetti.”
St#3: “It’s really good.”
St#4, 5, and 6: “Yeah”
St#5: “It’s parmesan cheese.”
St#1: “Yeah, it’s just called ‘stinky cheese’.”
St#2: “We only just put butter on.”
St#6: “I never tried that, I should try that.”
St#2: “...on spaghetti so it can make it slippery.”
[Students giggling] (VT, Dec. 07, 2004, p. 1)

In this example the interactive dialogue taking place was a conversation that occurred
without the presence of an adult. There was no one to enforce turn taking. The students
were able to choose what they wanted to talk about, compete with one another for
attention, take their turn to speak, and freely interrupt one another. This according to
Whitmore (1997) is an example of a trustful relationship. I propose that this trusting
relationship showed evidence that we had created a community where students felt safe
enough with one another to share their differences and similarities. I believe we created a
space where democratic dialogue could be practiced. Students used their voice and were
heard by their peers.

Unexpected Insights

As the year progressed, I learned more about my students as a whole. I observed
that some of the students who didn’t participate in other activities during class did put up
their hand to tell a story at Nos histoires. In conversations with my teaching partner, I
realized how unique Nos histoires was as a learning experience for the children. The
evaluations of some students by my teaching partner did not agree with my own
evaluation of the children’s progress. I began to witness first hand two learning theories
in practice.

First, my observations confirmed Gilmore’s (1986) argument about the
importance of assessing students in a variety of instructional circumstances, including
being able to demonstrate literacy skills in peer contexts; and second how moving away
from the traditional IRE method, where teachers initiate the talk and then evaluate the
student response, allowed some students to show more of what they were learning. The
nature of Nos histoires was peer dialogue. This observation allowed me to see the
students in action from a different perspective. I was not the leader, I did not ask the
questions, and I did not expect any answers. The repetition of familiar French phrases by
peers was imitated by all the students. The phrases learned were phrases chosen by the
students themselves because they were the most common phrases used in their own
stories. There was meaning and purpose behind learning the phrases because Nos
histoires was the opportunity for students to share an important message with their
friends.

It was this awareness that also led me to understand why the vocabulary students
were using regularly in Nos histoires was not transferring to other curriculum areas.
Although students would often bring in terms from other subjects into their stories, for
example, during the Thanksgiving theme, the children used specific vocabulary such as ‘le
dindon’ [turkey] when sharing a Thanksgiving story in Nos histoires; and ‘hier’
[yesterday] is a term from calendar time, many phrases remained unique to our time in
Nos histoires, for example, ‘nous sommes allés’ [we went], or ‘à la piscine’ [to the pool].
I saw that Nos histoires provided students with a time and place to practice learned
vocabulary because of its unrestricted instructional content. At other times in class, the teaching time was too restrictive and students were unable to use the new language emerging through Nos histoires.

Students described by my teaching partner as uninvolved, off topic, and weak were seen by me as students who participated frequently and tried to speak French when possible. I began to realize that we were evaluating the students in different learning contexts and as a result seeing the same students display different skills. I felt more confident when speaking with parents about their child’s progress in the French program. My anecdotal descriptions of how students’ were doing were made more complete by including observations from Nos histoires with observations in other subject areas. Now, more than ever, I appreciate the value of having some part of the school day reserved for an open time of learning, a time where students can share their knowledge without the restriction of having a “right” answer. I will continue to be more aware of the necessity to broaden my approach to evaluation, including consideration of when and where it should take place.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided a detailed account of the inner workings of Nos histoires. As I worked through the Awareness stage of the Learning Circle (Brown, 2004), I realized many smaller learning circles were taking place within the overall process. I wondered about issues, such as showing objects, splitting up the class into smaller groups, and whether or not to interrupt students. I returned to my ideals as the guidepost for my problem solving, which emphasized the importance of beginning a cycle of inquiry with Wholeness. In the Meaning stage I found evidence to support the idea
that sharing in a storytelling format could be used as a productive instructional tool for increasing French language use, building concepts through peer learning, and creating space to practice democratic dialogue. I found Nos histoires to be a valuable and successful teaching strategy in all three of these areas. I also discovered that by taking the time to have storytelling each morning, I learned more about the children themselves, their home life, their hobbies and interests, as well as more about their abilities and skills as learners. This enabled me to scaffold their learning more powerfully.
"Democracy is forever incomplete; it is founded in possibility. Even in the small, the local spaces in which teaching is done, educators may begin creating the kinds of situations where, at the very least, students will begin telling the stories of what they are seeking, what they know and might not know, [and] exchanging stories with others grounded in other landscapes, at once bringing something into being. . . . It is at moments like these that persons begin to recognize each other and, in the experience of recognition, feel the need to take responsibility for one another. This means responding to one another as a sister or a brother being in the process of choosing, of becoming what that person (in the midst of others) is not yet." (Greene, 1993, p. 5)

In this chapter I complete my learning circle by addressing the fourth stage, Commitment. I begin by presenting an overview of the study and then discuss successes and failures, contributions, and future commitments. Finally, I address my own discoveries and learning, as a result of reflection on my personal and professional growth throughout this study.

Overview

Essentially Nos histoires was a classroom routine that involved students sharing personal stories with one another. The routine was designed with the intention of promoting student talk for the purposes of increasing French proficiency, encouraging student scaffolding of knowledge between peers, and engaging students in democratic discourse. This study reported on the implementation, changes, and student responses to Nos histoires in one Grade 1 French Immersion classroom. This section provides an overview of the technical aspects of the study and the implications of issues regarding
changes in subject participation, my own participation in the classroom, changes during the active phase of the study, learning in a second language, and the impact in other areas of teaching.

In September, the class consisted of 23 Grade 1 French Immersion students. The students in the class remained consistent throughout the study with one exception. One student, male, left the French program in November. Since I looked at the class as a whole, and did not single out any one student's improvement or development, I decided to retain information pertaining to this one particular student. It should be noted however, that the class size did decrease by one in the month of November.

I was in the classroom on a part-time basis. Therefore, I was not able to link what we were learning about democratic principles into many other areas in school. However, having a partner in the classroom enabled me to note differences in how we were evaluating the students. It became evident that Nos histoires provided me with the opportunity to assess students in an alternative setting. The open-endedness of Nos histoires allowed me to see strengths in students I may have missed in a more restricting or teacher-centered routine.

As this was the first time I had implemented Nos histoires in any classroom, the students and I learned together. Thus, throughout the study we did not begin at the same time everyday, nor did we even keep the same format from beginning to end. Nos histoires started as a whole class lesson and by the end we were conducting sessions in two groups. I do believe that starting as a whole group was beneficial and I intend to repeat the same process next year with a new class. It was important for us, as a class, to learn the process and routine of Nos histoires as one whole group. It was important for our sense of community to learn how to listen in a group setting, how to speak in front of
to continue our learning about one another and to have more opportunities within the group for talk. Thus, once we all understood the expectations of participation, it made sense to move into smaller groups.

The most difficulty in the implementation of Nos histoires occurred when students brought objects to show. Towards the end of the eleven weeks, we seemed to have reverted somewhat to the conventional mode of show’n’tell. Students were no longer sharing stories about themselves but rather simply presenting factual information about an object. I found myself becoming unenergized and disinterested in the sharing. The students also seemed to be less engaged as they no longer shared more stories, but asked similar questions about the same information that was just presented. It was in this reflection that I realized how important the storytelling aspect of Nos histoires was. I felt the students responded differently to something that was shared versus something presented. I needed to find a solution to this problem and shift the focus of showing an item to sharing a story. My solution for next year will be to inform parents and students that we will have a few thematic weeks throughout the year. For example one week in November could be talent week and students could come prepared to share a particular talent with the class. I feel this may help to maintain the storytelling of Nos histoires, while still providing students with the opportunity to share an important part of themselves to the class.

Analysis of the data showed that the students’ ability to interact with one another gradually increased over time. It would be interesting to continue monitoring the students periodically over the year to see if they carry on with improving their ability to converse with each other. I did not look into whether the number of interactions related to whether
English or French was being spoken since very few stories were told exclusively in French. However, that could be an area for further investigation. More data could be collected regarding the French language learned by the students during Nos histoires. Do classrooms that use Nos histoires have students who speak more French? Is the level of French more complex in Nos histoires classrooms than in non-Nos histoires classrooms?

It would also be important to conduct further study on whether the students’ ability to interact in Nos histoires transferred to other subject areas. For example, do the students respond to a comment about a science topic in the same way they respond to a story? Are they able to listen to one another’s ideas, extend the conversation, and add new information when speaking about Math?

In my experience with this class, I have noted my own change in behaviour when it comes to encouraging student interaction and participation. For example, I allowed several students to answer the same question, even if they all gave the same answer, so that more than one student’s opinion was heard. I asked students to justify their answers to show them that how they think is as important as what they think. Finally, I tried to redirect a question or comment that was addressed to me back to the student who had initiated the idea. These are all behaviours that I am much more conscious of as a teacher and I try to exhibit these behaviours in all the subjects I am teaching. In summary, increased awareness and meaning making through reflection has led to action and commitments to improved teaching practice.

Reaching the Stars

Fenstermacher (2000) referred to one’s ideals as:

“. . . stars. They are orienting devices; they offer us a sense of direction. They guide our journey to a destination. But
they are not the destination; they are not the objective or the goal.” (p. 2)

He then noted that the goal is “the place we are trying to reach” (p. 2). In the Wholeness stage of this study I listed the ideals (see Table 2, p. 47) I had for Nos histoires. These were the concepts I hoped for, an impossible ideal. In Table 3 (p. 48), I listed goals that were in the realm of possibility for a Grade 1 French Immersion class. Nos histoires was my attempt to create a routine that would bring the children in my class closer to the ideal of living a good life.

The Ideals

In the awareness stage, I had to make some decisions about the Nos histoires routine. I made changes such as splitting the group into two smaller groups. As illustrated in Figure 2 (p. 62), these issues created smaller cycles of the Learning Circle (Brown, 2004) and as I struggled with the impact my decisions would have on the routine of Nos histoires, I had to keep in focus the ideals, or “stars” I was wanting to reach. The ideals providing light to Nos histoires were listed as my vision of this study in the Wholeness stage. In looking over the list in Table 2 (p. 47), I found that I was able to keep the development of Nos histoires in line with my vision of a routine that would address concepts such as linguistic competence, collaboration, and public spaces. These concepts encompass large and abstract ideas that many adults may have difficulty reaching themselves, and yet this study showed how these ideals could shine at a Grade 1 level. The children may not have become fluent speakers in French, but they did speak French in their stories, even when an adult was not present. The students did not acquire knowledge of world changing significance, but they did discuss ideas about bike safety, wildlife, monster trucks, water safety, and other topics important to six and seven year
old children. The students did not engage in political debate but they did learn that listening involves looking at the speaker, that conversations require taking turns, and that each one of them has a story to tell. Nos histoires was a routine in a Grade 1 class that allowed the teacher to engage her students constructively to practice the greater ideal of living the good life. Fenstermacher (2000) noted that “the child will grow to an adult without the teacher. But with worthy teachers constructively engaged with their students, more children will become fine adults than would occur otherwise” (p. 5). My attempt to engage the students constructively in Nos histoires, led to a list of responsibilities for both the teacher and the students to fulfill. These responsibilities became the observable goals for a successful Nos histoires.

The Goals

Table 11 and Table 12 review the goals that were presented in Table 3 (p. 48), and assess the extent to which these goals were achieved. All of the students’ goals were met. Under the teacher responsibilities, I felt the first two responsibilities were fully met, but that the third and fourth responsibility were only partially met.

The third responsibility of the teacher was to allow enough time for the students to respond to one another. I realized after watching one of the videos (VT, Nov. 24, 2004) that the group I was not participating in was being cut off because I did not know when a natural break was occurring in the session to initiate the exchange. I tried to remedy this by paying closer attention to their group, even though I was not in it, before calling for the switch of leaders. It became difficult to balance showing my full attention to the speaker in my group while trying to listen in on the other group. The students did not complain about the abrupt switches, and I did not complain if a student took a bit
longer to switch because a story was being finished.

Table 11
Responsibilities Achieved by the Teacher during Nos histoires

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibilities of the Teacher</th>
<th>Behaviour I Observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ sits at the same level as the rest of the students</td>
<td>I sat on the floor in the circle with the students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ directs conversations back to the students</td>
<td>When students looked at me, I would gesture to the previous student who spoke. I also frequently reminded students to look at the whole class while telling their story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ provides sufficient time for students to respond to each other’s experiences</td>
<td>This was inconsistent. At one point I realized students were not always able to finish sharing a story because I had already suggested the lead students change groups, yet other times we had ample time for students to respond to both their oral stories and their written work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ allows for true inquiry to take place and thus the opportunity for students to sometimes lead the topic of learning (including trips to the library for further information, or the bringing in of other resources) even when unplanned</td>
<td>The conversations were student led and several times I allowed the conversations to be continued in other areas throughout the day, for example, displaying a rock collection, and inviting a guest speaker to come and teach a unit on forestry. There were some limitations, however, in allowing spontaneous learning of a topic, because of the complexity of teaching in another language, not having available resources in French at a moment’s notice, the number of students in the class, and my being present only part of the school day.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 12
Responsibilities Achieved by the Students during Nos histoires

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibilities of the Student</th>
<th>Behaviour I Observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☑ moderator comes prepared with one experience to share as a beginning to Nos histoires time</td>
<td>Very few students were unprepared to begin Nos histoires. Those that said they didn't have a story still had to think of something to share on the spot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ sits as part of the circle, eyes are on speaker, and adheres to the expectation that one person speaks at a time</td>
<td>The children did remain in the circle configuration and kept their eyes on the speaker, although they did need frequent reminders. The conversations were always civil as the students were responsible with taking turns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ asks questions, makes comments, or shares own story to other students directly (not through the teacher)</td>
<td>By the end of the three months, the students were able to conduct a session of Nos histoires without a teacher present. They asked each other questions or made comments relating to the lead story. More often than not, the students would tell stories similar to that of the lead story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ respects the time limit of Nos histoires and understands further contributions can be recorded in Mes histoires and shared at a later session</td>
<td>Students seemed to enjoy Mes histoires, because they usually cheered or moved energetically to their desks whenever I said it was time to write their stories.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The fourth responsibility of the teacher was to facilitate student-led inquiry. I believe I was able to address this goal within the limitations explained in Table 11 (p. 94). And yet, I also believe more connections could have been made. With the experience gained in this study, I hope that next year I will be able to integrate more spontaneous inquiry into our day. In a second language class, such integration will require a melding of structural teaching strategies, such as presenting key vocabulary, while at the same time encouraging the exploration of the children’s interests. If the themes of interest in this year’s class, including camping, family, wildlife, swimming, rocks, fishing, and after school activities, are typical of Grade 1 stories; I can be more prepared with materials in anticipation of these topics.

Contributions

Throughout the process of this study, I felt I was able to contribute in many ways to both the theoretical and practical fields of education. Nos histoires provided a practical link to the theories of socioculturalism (Moll, 2000; Wells, 2000; Wertsch, 2000) and democracy (Fenstermacher, 1997; Habermas, 1996; Schutz, 1999) by emphasizing the idea of community in the classroom. Both theories acknowledge that all human beings are individuals living together in the same world and that how we choose to live affects those around us (Moll, 2000; Schutz, 1999). I think that this documentation of the development of Nos histoires provides an opportunity for other teachers who are excited about this broader view of education. Teachers who want to teach the whole child, and prepare each child for his or her future participation in the world, can use the example of Nos histoires to investigate the process of sharing personal narratives as a method to address philosophical concepts involved in social education, such as caring and
The method of classroom action research provided a practical link to democratic theory (Wells, 2000; Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005). As a classroom teacher I was able to practice a routine in my classroom that incorporated the practice of dialogue into a second language classroom. This was important because I found other experienced French Immersion teachers did not feel that dialogue could work well as a learning tool in a second language. The challenge to incorporate a routine with dialogue and analyze its progress allowed me to be an active agent for educational change. In sharing my progress with my colleagues I have found my voice and will continue to dialogue about educational issues with my peers.

In conducting this research, I developed a model to illustrate the building and expanding of knowledge that can be shared between students as they share their stories. The diagram of the building blocks was a useful tool to analyze the dialogue occurring in the classroom. I also created a visualization of the small learning circles that occurred during the process of action research. The Learning Circle by Brown (2004) was a helpful framework for the organization of the study. The Wholeness stage complemented Fenstermacher's (1997) notion of ideals. The emphasis on reflection and revision supported my own vision of the educated person and, as such, following the circle encouraged me to follow my own path to becoming an educated person.

Future Commitment

In conducting this research I have become more interested in the concept of classroom communities. I believe that it is important for students to become aware of the society that is their classroom and to practice social skills that will help them to become
active citizens in their society as adults. The circle of inquiry for Nos histoires was the beginning of such a process in our class. We began with learning how to share our stories with one another. For me, as a teacher, this process blossomed into learning how to listen to students’ stories in other parts of the day, especially during conflicts between students. I learned how to stop and listen to each side of the story and cautioned myself to interrupt only for clarification or to gather further information. Usually students could work it out for themselves once they heard the other person’s point of view. I even had some students begin to initiate their own problem solving by asking to leave the room so they could talk and work out a plan to get along.

As I continued to read research and dialogue with peers, I initiated other complementary routines in the class. For example, I involved the children in a morning greeting whereby each student said hello to someone and thus each student received a welcoming greeting before beginning the school day. This morning routine allowed for the practical teachings of what to say when you have forgotten someone’s name, or when someone enters a room. We also conducted one class meeting in the fall. The morning greeting and class meeting are two other areas that could be investigated further, along with the implementation of Nos histoires. These three topics appear to have the potential to promote the importance of each student as an individual who has worthwhile words to say.

Another area of focus may be to look more at the use of Nos histoires for assessment. Using open-ended dialogue truly showed me another side to my students. I was able to get to know my students in a different way this year and Nos histoires did not seem to inhibit the weaker students nor did it seem to bore the stronger ones. Each student was able to come to the circle at his or her skill level and participate fully.
Both my enthusiasm for the routine of Nos histoires and my desire to continue to find other modes of integrating democratic principles into my classroom to complement Nos histoires point toward collaboration with my own peers. This year in my school, I have consciously made the effort to discuss ideas about sharing with my colleagues. Other teachers have shared their successes regarding useful resources and we have engaged in dialogue regarding the problems and rewards of encouraging social curriculum in our classrooms. In sharing my study with others, I hope to open the door to more formal and informal ways of participating in dialogic collaboration. I believe this is the way I can fulfill my part in being an active, educated, citizen in our society.

Revisiting the Learning Circle for Myself

Coulter (2002) wrote, "... how teachers teach becomes what they teach" (p. 191). I believe his words to be true and have noticed the difference in my own teaching behaviour as I have internalized the democratic principles of caring and living the good life in my own life. As my teaching becomes more caring, so do the attitudes of the students I am teaching. I have witnessed changes in the attitudes of the students in my class. They want to hear each other's stories and they want to make sure everyone is included in hearing the stories they have to tell.

In conducting this study I followed the tenets of the Learning Circle (Brown, 2004). Encompassing the Wholeness vision of planning, I feel I did not just plan a new routine for show’n’tell, but I determined to include the vision of community and democracy in my classroom while finding opportunities for children to practice their French language. Nos Histoires was just the beginning of my planning. I became enthralled with the theoretical explanations of authors such as Arendt (1958, 1968),
Nos histoires 100


I realized how important it was to read the theories that support practice because the theories are the ideals. As educators, we need ideals to guide our practice.

In the Awareness stage of the Learning Circle (Brown, 2004), I remained in a constant state of reflection, determining whether or not I was being true to my ideals. As such, I found that my own instructional techniques began to change during other parts of the school day. I suddenly began to see opportunities in morning exercises, calendar time, and in math and language arts lessons that allowed me to maintain my ideals for each child to have a voice in the classroom. I remained consistent, even with the parents, by altering my parent-teacher interview style to provide more time for parents to speak to me about their children. Parents shared what they believed to be the strengths of their children and the areas in which they wished to see improvement. As a result, they told me a story about their child from the parental point of view versus the child’s point of view.

Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory emphasized the important role our surroundings have in impacting who we become (Moll, 2000). Earlier, I presented the argument that living the good life involves thinking about our lives in relationship to those around us. Throughout the process of implementing Nos Histoires, I came to value and understand more fully the importance of others as one strives to make the good life a possibility. I have concluded that the good life cannot come to be without caring for others (Noddings, 1992). Coulter (2002) wrote:

Parents who want their children to grow up to be caring adults, for example, need to treat their children consistently with that aim: children do not learn to care for others by being bullied themselves. Similarly, how teachers teach becomes what they teach.” (p. 191)
Nos histoires became an educational practice for me that expanded into not something to teach but a way of teaching. It was a time to practice how to talk to one another and a time to practice how to listen to one another. As we developed these skills we learned how to care for one another.

In making meaning for myself regarding the significance of Nos histoires, which was the third stage in the Learning Circle, I was thrilled and surprised at the amount of French I was witnessing on the videotape. I was impressed to see connections I was making about assessments. As well, I observed that students had some difficulty setting aside their previously learned show’n’tell routine as they often returned to the familiar question and answer pattern of their Kindergarten year when an object was brought to share. I was satisfied to realize, however, there was an improvement in student conversation when students moved away from the conventional show’n’tell routine to the storytelling routine of Nos histoires. Yet, what was most important about Nos histoires were the relationships created in the class. The students and I shared our own unique personalities and acted in relationship to others. Thus, we began the process of engaging in a democratic process through dialogue.

The fourth stage of the Learning Circle (Brown, 2004) is Commitment. In conducting this study, I have become more self-aware as a person and a teacher. This has led to revised action. In fulfilling the Commitment aspect of this study, I have made concerted efforts to discuss curriculum issues with staff this year. The conversations are not specifically centered around Nos histoires. They are conversations, though, about ideals and visions. As we talk about new curriculum coming into the school, we discuss how that curriculum will benefit our students beyond the learning outcomes. In our discussions, I am able to weigh what I have learned from the literature, what I have
learned from my colleagues, and what I have learned from the students to make meaning as an educator in order to find what works best in my classroom. I find the conversations I am drawn to the most are about curriculum which integrates the school subjects, for example reading and writing, with social instruction designed to create a classroom atmosphere conducive to community practice. I will continue to engage myself in such dialogue and add the input of my own experiences to the learning process of me and my colleagues. In this way, I too became an involved citizen in the community of education as I practiced sharing my own stories with my peers.
REFERENCES


Table A1
Prescribed Learning Outcomes from the French Second Language IRP Associated with the Show’n’tell Routine

Langue et communication

$L\text{’}élève pourra$:
- partager ses idées, informations, expériences personnelles et émotions en s’appuyant sur des éléments visuels et gestuels tout en utilisant sa langue maternelle à l’occasion
- interagir avec l’enseignant et avec ses pairs dans des situations orales provoquées ou spontanées en produisant des phrases simples
- parler de lui-même, de sa famille et de ses amis en utilisant un vocabulaire de base

Langue et communication

$L\text{’}élève pourra$:
- poser des questions pour satisfaire son besoin d’information
- créer des phrases simples et souvent compréhensibles

Langue et culture

$L\text{’}élève pourra$:
- parler des coutumes et des routines de sa famille
- reconnaître des événements spéciaux et honorer les réalisations des individus et des groupes
- manifester sa fierté de comprendre le français

Langue et développement de soi dans la société

$L\text{’}élève pourra$:
- prendre des risques en parlant français
- se montrer disposé à participer aux activités langagières
- reconnaître et exprimer ses préférences
- proposer des solutions aux problèmes quotidiens de la classe

Note. Adapted from the Français Langue Seconde - Immersion de la Maternelle à la 7e année: Ensemble de ressources intégrées, British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1997.
INFORMATION SHEET

1. Researcher’s name  Andrea Davy
2. Address  c/o Willow Brown, UNBC
   3333 University Way, Prince George, BC V2N 4Z9
3. Phone #  250-960-6262
4. E-mail  adavy@sd57.bc.ca
5. Supervisor’s name  Willow Brown
6. Program  MEd in Curriculum and Instruction
7. Title of Project  *Nos Histoires: A Reflection in Democratic Discourse in a French Primary Classroom*
8. Type of Project  Thesis

a. *Purpose of Research*

   To find ways of improving student learning by promoting classroom discourse.

b. *How were respondents chosen?*

   Participants will be students in my class.

c. *What will respondents be asked to do?*

   Students will be asked to share personal narratives.

d. *Who will have access to respondent’s responses?*

   Researcher and readers of the project.

e. *Participation is voluntary?*

   Yes
f. Potential benefits

Increased proficiency in the French language, enhanced student interactions, and increased time in class practicing democratic principles of dialogue.

g. Potential risks

None

h. How will anonymity and confidentiality be addressed?

Participants will be given code names.

i. How will information be stored?

The data will be collected and stored in a secure place with the researcher, off of school grounds. Data will be stored until the end of the school year upon which it will be destroyed in the university shredder.

j. Name and phone number of person to contact in case questions arise?

Andrea Davy [Researcher and Classroom Teacher] 960-6262

k. How can one get a copy of the results?

Through Andrea Davy and the UNBC library. Also, a copy of the thesis will be offered to the school district and a brief summary of the study will be made available to parents upon request.

l. Complaints or concerns about the project should be directed to the Vice President of Research at UNBC, 960-5820.
Re: UNBC MEd Thesis Study Proposal

**Purpose**

Storying is the process in which children are given the opportunity to share their own personal experiences in the classroom as a means of constructing meaning from the curriculum. In most instances storying is a cooperative, group, and oral activity. I believe that storying can be a successful teaching strategy in a French Immersion setting because students will be given the opportunity to practice language that is of importance to them personally - their own life stories. As students participate by sharing their personal narratives they become connected with others in the class. In this study, I would like to explore the ways that storying may provide a learning environment in which children feel safe to practice language and initiate talk, where all children have equal opportunity to listen to the words of their peers and meditate on their opinions before continuing further dialogue, and where children take the opportunity to ask questions for further learning.

The study will be called, *Nos Histoires: A Reflection on Classroom Discourse in a French Primary Class*, and will be conducted using classroom action research.
Method

I am a primary teacher at an elementary school. The classroom will be my research site as I initiate storying activities as part of my teaching practice. The students in my Grade One class will be the subjects in this study. Permission will be granted from the UNBC Ethics Board, the local school district, the school principal (see attached consent form), the parents of the students in my class (see attached letter and consent form), and the students themselves. I will use a video camera occasionally to tape particular lessons for reflection on the students’ progress and to analyze my own contribution to the storying process. I will also collect work samples from participating students. I plan to collect data from September 2004 until January 2005. The data will be stored in a secure place off of school grounds until the end of the school year, June 30, 2005 at which time the videotapes, audiotapes, and student samples will be shredded.

Classroom action research acknowledges the teacher as researcher. Teachers reflect on their own teaching practices by videotaping lessons and talking collaborative with colleagues as a way to improve teaching strategies and thereby enhance student learning. This type of action research revolves around teachers implementing research-based practices and analyzing their classroom experiences according to current educational theory. Most of my own teacher as researcher methods will be modeled on work done by Gordon Wells from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) and J. Glanz’s book *Action Research: An Educational Leader’s Guide to School Improvement*. I will also be following the Learning Circle guide developed by Willow Brown, Assistant Professor of Education at UNBC. The Learning Circle presents four steps for implementing and adapting new learning ideas in an educational environment through an interpretive and sense-making approach of wholeness, awareness, meaning, and
commitment.

My plan for introducing storying into the classroom is to begin by re-creating a show'n'tell routine, called *Nos Histoires*, that provides the opportunity for students to practice the democratic practices of citizenship and dialogue. This new show'n'tell routine will consist of students sharing personal narratives and responding to the personal narratives of peers. This time of sharing will include oral stories as well as a reflective journal writing time at the end of each session. Inquiry will be encouraged and supported.

Throughout the study, I intend to reflect on how successful storying is at promoting both an educational and democratic community in the classroom. I hope to see children actively participating by sharing knowledge from their personal experiences and listening to the information their peers share with them. Storying is a joint activity where students are exchanging information back and forth with one another and with each exchange they are expanding their knowledge base by constructing new understandings from the experiences of their peers. I hope to see that everyone has an equal opportunity to share, students are respecting one another's ideas, making answers to real questions, extending their previous knowledge, and practicing how to live with one another in a caring way. Achievement of these goals will be assessed through specific observations guided by theoretical strategies for encouraging discourse. Observations of the class and of me will take place. I will also collect students' work.

*Implications*

I believe this study would benefit our school district. As educators we are responsible for preparing our students for the world in which they will live as adults. Such a world is diverse and ever changing. Students need to know how to express themselves while living within a global society. The classroom is a mini-model of our
society. Our construction of knowledge is built on experiences. Students who talk and listen, and thus engage in dialogue, are extending their understanding, creating new questions for learning, and becoming active participants as they learn how to become citizens.

The principal of the elementary school in which I work has already approached me regarding sharing the results of my study with the school staff. I look forward to other opportunities where I can share my research and encourage collaborative talk among my colleagues through presentations and publication. I am also committed to share reflections of the study with parents and make a copy of the thesis available to the district.
Dear Parents,

As many of you know, I am currently working on my Masters of Education at UNBC. I am conducting classroom research on “Storying”. Storying is a process in which children are given the opportunity to share their own personal experiences in the classroom as a means of constructing meaning from the curriculum. In most instances storying is a cooperative, group, and oral activity. I believe that storying can be successful in a French Immersion setting because students will be given the opportunity to practice language that is of importance to them personally - stories from their life. As students participate by sharing their personal narratives they become connected with others in the class. In this study, I would like to explore the way that storying can provide a learning environment in which children feel safe to practice language and initiate talk, where all children have equal opportunity to listen to the words of their peers and meditate on their opinions before continuing further dialogue, and where children take the opportunity to ask questions for further learning.

I would like to ask your permission to collect data pertaining to your child’s progress for this study. Children who do not participate in the study will still take part in storying activities, such as the show’n’tell routine of Nos Histoires, as part of the class curriculum. However, their participation will not be reported as part of the research. All of the activities we will be doing will be part of the class curriculum. I would like to be able to videotape and audiotape some of the lessons. I would also like to collect student writing samples to include in the study. The videotapes and audiotapes will be seen by me, my research committee, and the children in our class. The collection of information will begin this September and continue on until January of 2005. The data will be kept
until the end of the school year and stored in a secure place off of school grounds. The videotapes, audiotapes, and student samples will then be shredded. Strict confidentiality will be maintained in the handling of data and reporting of results to ensure all participants' anonymity. Code names will be used in all transcripts, reports, and student samples.

If consent for your child's participation is granted, you are free to withdraw consent at any time. If you do withdraw, videotaped and other data will be destroyed and not reported in the study. This study will be conducted with the school district's approval and according to UNBC's guidelines for ethical conduct of research. A copy of the signed consent form is available upon request. The results of the study will be available in the thesis. The thesis will be given to the university and the school district. I will also have a brief summary of the completed study available to parents or staff members upon request. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me or the principal at the school, 962-9661. Complaints about the project should be directed to the Vice President of Research at UNBC, 960-5820.

Sincerely,
UNBC MEd Thesis Study Parent Consent Form for
Nos Histoires: A Reflection on Classroom Discourse in a French Primary Class

Please return this portion of the letter to the school by ______________________.

I, ____________________, do give my permission for my child, ____________________.
    parent's name          child's name

to participate in the MEd study called Nos Histoires as described in the attached letter by
Andrea Davy.

My signature below indicates my permission that these data may be used for a Master’s
research study as described in the letter.

signature: ________________________ date: ________________________
UNBC MEd Thesis Study School Principal Consent Form for
Nos Histoires: A Reflection on Classroom Discourse in a French Primary Class

I, ______________________, do agree to allow Andrea Davy to conduct research in her classroom for her Nos Histoires MEd thesis as described in the attached proposal by Andrea Davy.

My signature below indicates my permission that these data may be used for a Master’s research study as described in the letter.

signature:___________________________ date:___________________________
Observation Checklist - Teacher Behaviour

date: __________________
duration of session: ____mins

_____# of teacher talk

_____# responses (clarifications)

_____# initiations

_____# evaluative remarks

_____# interruptions

Did you:
(strategies adapted from Wells, 1986 and Whitmore, 1997)

☐ intentionally remain quiet to allow students the opportunity to initiate topics

☐ treat what the child had to say as worthy of careful attention

☐ do your best to understand what he or she meant

☐ take the child’s meaning as the basis of what to say next - confirming or extending the topic

☐ select and phrase your contributions so that they were at or just beyond the child’s ability to comprehend

☐ ask real questions (for clarification)
Appendix C - 120

Identify any useful words/phrases that encouraged further student dialogue:

__________________________________________________________________________

Identify any words/phrases that were harmful and disengaged student dialogue:

__________________________________________________________________________

Additional comments and observations:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
Observation Checklist - Student Behaviour

date: ______________________
duration of session: _____ mins

_______ # questions asked by students

_______ # of students participating in conversation

Examples of students:
(stategies adapted from Wells, 1986 and Whitmore, 1997)

☐ looking at one another while talking

☐ turn taking flows naturally and overlaps like normal conversation

☐ asking questions of one another

☐ treating what a peer had to say as worthy of careful attention

☐ taking a peer’s meaning as the basis of what to say next - confirming or extending the topic
Appendix C - 122

Identify any useful words/phrases that encouraged further student dialogue:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Identify any words/phrases that were harmful and disengaged student dialogue:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Identify topics of discussion (curriculum based, interest based, other):

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

Additional comments and observations:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Contact Summary Sheet

Contact Date: _______________  Today’s Date: _______________

1. What were the main issues or themes that struck you in this contact?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

2. Summarize the information you got (or failed to get) on each of the target questions you had for this contact?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Information</th>
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3. Anything else that struck you as salient, interesting, illuminating in this contact?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

4. What new (or remaining) target questions do you have for the next contact?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________
Examples Showing Increased French Use by Students in Nos histoires

Example 1
St: “Moi, maman et papa, nous sommes allés > faire du camping avec mon ami Colin > et um we saw fireworks.” (VT, Nov. 04, 2004, p. 2)

Example 2
St: “Un jour moi et mon ami mon frère were jumping on . . .”
Other Students: “sauter”
St: . . . “on the trampoline and my brother, he was pretending to be a robot and my tooth was loose * that he was chopping at my mouth and he karate chopped my tooth right out and then me, moi, mon ami et mon frère, we went nuts running around the backyard into the house and then and then finally when we stopped we had to have supper. Then my mon ami • • and then I got three dollars for it.” (VT, Nov. 04, 2004, p. 2-3)

Example 3
St: “Un jour maman et papa et mon grand frère et mon petit frère nous sommes allés à la piscine. Moi et maman, we went to the”
T: “Nous sommes allées à la . . .”
St: “Nous sommes allées à la diving board * sauter off of the little one.” (VT, Nov. 10, 2004, p. 1)
Example 4

St#1: "Un jour moi et maman et papa et mon soeur et mon autre soeur nous sommes allés un un hay no no . . ."

St#2: "hay ride?"

St#1: . . . "un sleigh ride"

St#3: [speaking to St”2] "not a hay ride."

St#2: "In the summer it is."

St#3: "Yeah, I know I 've been on one."

St#2: "Me too."

St#1: [begins story again] "Un jour moi et maman et papa et mon soeur et mon autre soeur nous sommes allés à un sleigh ride et we saw lots of animals there."

St#3,4: "animaux"

St#1: "animaux, et je vois un grand cochon et je vois un buffaloo."

St#4: "Oh I saw those there"

St#2: "Did you feed the ducks?"

St#1: "Yeah"

St#2: "So did I"

St#1: "et I got une uh . . ."

St#2: "Did you feed the horses?"

St#1: "* et we saw um un > What else did we see?"

St#5: "Santa?"

St#1: "les chevals"

St#2: "Did you see Père Noël?"

St#1: "No" (VT, Dec. 07, 2004, p. 3-4)

Key:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>St</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>&gt;= pause</th>
<th>. . . = interruption</th>
<th>*= undiscernible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>student</td>
<td>teacher</td>
<td></td>
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