Teachers' Perspectives on Plurilingualism in the French Immersion Program

By

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Abstract
As linguistic and cultural diversity in the Greater Toronto Area continues to grow, French Immersion (FI) student populations are reflecting this change with over 50% of students from homes where neither English nor French is the native language spoken. The purpose of this qualitative research study is to explore and unpack the current French Immersion teaching experience from interviews with three FI teachers. The narratives were analyzed through the lens of plurilingualism to get a sense of how teachers can and do address the speakers of Non-Official Minority Languages (NOML) pedagogically in their classrooms. While the findings do show some evidence of plurilingual strategies and perspectives, the traditional binary understanding of establishing a French only environment in an anglo-dominant society seems to be the common understanding. An analysis of the history of French as a Second Language programs in Ontario in contrast with current research into plurilingual pedagogy indicates a gap between ideal practice and classroom reality and a well-established policy and linguistic power dynamic that excludes NOMLs from consideration in the classroom.

Key Words: French Immersion, Non-Official Minority Languages, inclusion, second language education, plurilingualism, multilingualism, multiliteracies
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Introduction

How Does Accessibility to French as a Second Language Programs in Canada Impact the Diversity of the Student Population in FSL Programs?

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Introduction to the Research Study

Imagine you are a student sitting at your desk in your classroom at public school at the end of the morning. You end up in a minute of daydreaming and your eyes scan your surroundings. There are posters, anchor charts, diagrams, the date and weather written on the chalkboard, many books on the shelves, reminders of the days’ schedule on the white board, and student art projects about themselves on the bulletin board. Everything is in French because this is a French immersion classroom. Your desk neighbour passes you a note; it is written in English because that is the common social language. When the bell rings, you head to the cafeteria with your lunch-bag; when you open it, there is a note from your mom reminding you to bring the empty containers home. The note is written in neither English nor French: it is written in the language your family speaks at home. As a Non-Official Minority Language (NOML) speaker, you represent over 50% of the students’ enrolled in the Toronto District School Board’s French immersion programs. French teachers teach you French; English teachers teacher you English; your home language, though you are not the only speaker of that language at your school, rarely gets acknowledged by any of your language teachers.

Teachers in the French immersion program have a hefty job on their hands: to produce French-speaking Canadians. In the last year, the Ontario Ministry of Education released a new French Language Program curriculum for Kindergarten to Grade 8 (2013). This document has a substantively different focus than previous curriculum policy documents with a focus on oral communication and task-related skills rather than
specific grammar points. This shift outlines a move towards more authentic communication activities as highlighted in the Common European Framework for languages (CERF), greater focus on metacognitive strategies, and takes into account principles of language acquisition with the sequential introduction of listening, speaking, reading, then writing. The focal change has caused many teachers to question how one goes about teaching the language without overtly focusing on the grammar and other mechanical aspects.

I see this shift as an opportunity to take an avenue for language teaching that touches upon identity, inclusivity, and diverse learning styles and backgrounds – and to recognize students’ ample linguistic baggage. Considering Canada’s linguistic diversity and growing immigrant population, French is often not a second language but a third or fourth language for students in FI. Canada can be seen as a plurilingual environment: one where Canadian citizens often concurrently use more than one or two languages in their daily home and professional lives (Statistics Canada, 2013). Especially in Canada, French has a place within our plurilingual world. Within the framework of the new Ontario FSL Curriculum policy, teachers can be to engaging all students in their French immersion classes. Even though it has been thought that a proper French immersion student must be a Canadian-born Anglophone (Cummins, 2006; Hayday, 2001), it is no longer the case. Teachers are faced with a diverse student population; how can we make sure to offer the most appropriate support possible in our French immersion programs?
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this exploratory study is to unpack the classroom practices and beliefs of French Immersion teachers that pertain to the French language learning process and students’ multilingual and multicultural backgrounds through the lens of plurilingualism. To catch a glimpse of today’s French immersion classroom will provide important information from which we all may learn and grow. Understanding the techniques successful teachers use to teach the French language to the current linguistically and culturally diverse student populations is key to inform my own future teaching. Being a teacher who is able to identify and implement practices that can access students’ rich cultural and linguistic backgrounds could impact my teaching on a profound level. Validating the diverse linguistic backgrounds of the students could have a positive effect on attitudes toward learning and using French and NOML for my students.

Research Questions

The principal question that will be addressed in my research is: how do teachers address the multilingual backgrounds of their students in French language programs? The following questions will support the principal research question:

1. How does accessibility to French as a Second Language programs in Canada impact the diversity of the student population in FSL programs?
2. What are teachers' perceptions on the linguistic identity development of students in their classrooms?
3. What kinds of strategies and teacher attitudes support and acknowledge students with diverse linguistic backgrounds?

4. How do teachers see the growing population of speakers of non-official minority languages affecting their classrooms? What does it mean for the future of French education?

This study will look at teacher perspectives on teaching in the immersion programs in Toronto, Canada.

**Background of the Researcher**

This topic has interested me ever since I came back to Canada in 2013 after about 5 years abroad and 7 more years before that living in a French speaking part of Canada. At that time, I realized just how multicultural and multilingual Canadians are. My travels and international ESL teaching experience taught me how diverse and intricate our linguistic identities are. I see that students in Canadian classrooms are coming to school with very interesting and rich linguistic baggage which could serve as a great resource in the French language classrooms.

My own linguistic journey of learning French as a second language, Korean as a third, and now working on Spanish, has made me very familiar with being a language student. In each learning experience, I search for similarities to the previous languages learned, creating a complex system of being an English/ French/ Korean/ Spanish speaker. It is likely that my future students also come to class with intricate webs of words, notions, and cultures. I endeavour to learn how to support them fully.
Overview

In chapter one, we are introduced to the current reality of the multicultural population in Toronto schools which inspired this study and the primary research questions surrounding teachers’ perceptions of teaching this growing population. Chapter two presents relevant literature on the history of FSL programs in Ontario, language acquisition theories, and issues pertaining to plurilingualism and multiculturalism in schools. Chapter three provides the methodology and procedures including information about the three teacher participants and the interview process used as a data collection instrument. In chapter four, I present findings that stood out from the interviews, participants’ perspectives on and strategies for teaching students with diverse linguistic backgrounds and I tie those findings into the existing literature from chapter two. Chapter five concludes the paper by commenting on the implications of acknowledging students’ linguistic backgrounds in the French immersion program and providing recommendations for further study.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I will present an overview of themes that are woven into the research question at hand: how do and can teachers support the development of students’ plurilingual repertoires? It is pertinent to look at the history of the French as a Second Language (FSL) programs in Ontario and the policies and commentaries that have affected its present incarnation. Considering the increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse population in the Greater Toronto Area, the literature review will pay special attention to research that addresses teachers’ perspectives on language acquisition, the connections between learners other languages, their cultural identities, and a target language.

French as a Second Language Programs in Canada: For whom? Historic Context of FSL in Ontario and Language Policies that Affect FSL Programs

With the Canadian Official Languages Act of 1969, Canada validated French and English as official languages in Canada. To support this, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (RCBB) was created (Haque, 2012) and from their recommendations to the provinces, the first FSL programs were created in Ontario in the 1960s and 70s (Hayday, 2001). Through, in part, federal monies intended to aid in transitions and development of programs, Ontario started to promote and teach French to the majority Anglophone population (Hayday, 2001, p. 51). Programs and policies have continually been made with largely only the Anglophone population in mind except when the Franco-Ontarian population has made concerted effort to have their language needs
supported (Caron-Réaume, 2010; Hayday, 2001). The Canadian Official Languages Act aims to ensure respect for English and French and to ensure equality of status and equal rights and privileges as to their use in federal institutions and yet how each province approaches French language education and accessibility differs greatly; the provisions of this law do not cover FSL programs, there is no Canada-wide standard for this (Mady & Black, 2012).

Ontario’s current multicultural and plurilingual population do not yet factor positively in the province’s vision of FSL programming; Cummins (2014) points out that “some provinces (e.g., Ontario) have articulated restrictive policies in relation to multilingualism by prohibiting use of languages other than English and French as mediums of instruction except on a short-term transitional basis” (p. 1). This is interesting because Statistics Canada’s 2011 survey of Toronto’s population’s linguistic profiles shows 2,314,530 people as speakers of a NOML while the Anglophone population represents only 2,980,215 people. According to a 2010 report by the Toronto District School Board, over 50% of the French immersion student population’s primary home language is not English (p. 16). This indicates a lack in policy and consideration for a large number of NOML, bilingual, and plurilingual students in Toronto schools.

Ontario’s history of FSL programs and lack of support for NOMLs resembles a hegemonic point of view:

the perception of language as rigid, normative, and appropriate to given spaces, has been the linchpin of status quo arguments against linguistic integration in schools for years. The continued reliance on, and promotion of, majority/standard languages in mainstream schools, has served to establish a benchmark for success,
privilege, access, and normalcy in both education and society (Dei, James, James-Wilson, Karumanchery, & Zine, 2003, p. 99).

It serves the dominant culture to maintain this dynamic which makes it seem difficult to change or challenge but not impossible or unreasonable.

### Current Research on Students Who are Speakers of Non-Official Minority Languages (NOML) in FSL Programs: Accessibility

Some research focuses on the issue of minority populations in Canada and speakers of NOMLs, persons whose first language is neither of the official Canadian languages. With some qualitative and quantitative studies, the research highlights experiences of those who have been excluded from FSL programs or neglected on the grounds of program preparedness and suitability to participate (Mady, 2013; Mady & Arnett, 2009; Mady & Turnbull, 2010). Focusing on the applicability of FSL programs for minority populations in public school bilingual or English settings is a growing theme in Canadian research and has been an issue since bilingual programs started. This is not a new issue:

Saif and Sheldon (1969) quoted the opinion of the French Department of the Toronto Board of Education that "students who are learning French as a third language perform better than children who are learning French as a second language. Somehow the learning of a third language is facilitated by the learning of a second" (1969, p. 7). Support for this opinion comes from several studies conducted within the context of core or extended FSL programs where children from minority language backgrounds have performed better in French than

Regardless of findings so long ago, this issue persists and has been heightened as speakers of NOMLs constitute a growing portion of Canada’s population. Due to unfounded concerns that they may be dealing with learning English in English-dominant Canada, they have often been excluded from French programs (Arnett, 2008). Mady (2013) points out:

In the context of IMMs [Immigrants who are learning English] and FSOL in Canada, … when considering equality of access, one must consider not only potential directions given as in [being exempt from FSL programs regardless of success in FSL] but also the power relations operating upon registration to school in general and to FSOL programs in particular and the withholding of information as factors influencing IMMs’ opportunities (p. 49).

In that same study, which included a questionnaire completed by 69 elementary school teachers and a follow-up interview for 20 of that group on teacher perspectives of IMMs in FSL programs particularly the French Immersion program, she concludes that:

the result of this exploration suggests that educational stakeholders continue to practice segregation and benevolence when faced with questions of access to FSOL education for IMMs. The investigation shows that transitioning from segregation and benevolence to inclusion requires transformation of exclusionary practices in access and in pedagogy. In order for FSOL education to become more inclusive of IMMs, educators must become more open to receiving such learners and serving their needs (Mady, 2013, p. 55).
Of particular importance, the teacher perspectives on IMMs suitability for either the core or immersion program:

The respondents judged core FSOL to be a more viable option for IMMs than immersion. Of similar but more general note, they also expressed less agreement that all students should be included in immersion as opposed to core French (Mady, 2013, p. 51).

This last note adds to the history of exclusion of the French Immersion program that is reflected in the exclusion of children struggling with first language acquisition from second language education programs as well (Mady & Arnett, 2009). Contrary to the exclusionary tendencies from the immersion program, a 2012 study by Mady on core French teachers’ perspectives on having English Language Learners in the core French class, in the greater Toronto area, she found that:

teachers most strongly agreed that ELLs should be included in core FSOL classes, that the strategies needed to effectively support ELLs’ needs are consistent with the strategies they use to teach FSOL (Mady, 2013, p. 51).

While most of the research focuses on the physical exclusion of NOML students from FSL, there is little work that has examined the experience of NOML student in the FI context beyond this. Even less attention has been given to recognizing the effect of their first languages in relation to the acquisition and learning of French.

FSL strategies have been seen to effectively scaffold for a variety of learners (Arnett, 2010). In light of these contrasting teacher perspectives, I wonder why French Immersion teachers don’t feel that their pedagogy supports ELLs language learning processes. What is so different between the pedagogies of the core and immersion
programs? It is especially troublesome as, “there is no evidence that immersion programs are unsuitable for any identifiable category of students” (Cummins, 1983, p. 117), yet:

a policy vacuum exists with respect to the pedagogical implications of linguistic diversity. Home languages other than English or French are viewed as largely irrelevant to children's schooling. At best, they are treated with benign neglect and ignored; at worst, educators consider them an obstacle to the acquisition of English or French and discourage their use in school and at home (Cummins, 2006, p. 5).

The prevailing idea that French immersion is for Anglophones leaves little room for inclusion of speakers of non-official languages in policy and programming (Cummins, 2006) and begs for consideration of how they figure into the Canadian linguistic tapestry and education systems (Haque, 2012; Mady & Turnbull, 2012). It is particularly troubling when we recall that over 50% of the FI student population in the TDSB are from NOML homes.

**Linguistic Interdependence: NOMLs’ viability for inclusion**

“The languages of socially minoritized and marginalized groups deserve to be acknowledged, respected and validated in mainstream contexts” (Dei et al., 2003, p. 96). Including NOML students’ languages as reference points in the FI curriculum could have resounding effects as an example of equity in the classroom and counter-effort to the Anglophone hegemony (Dei et al., 2003). Their inclusion is also supported by the intersectionality of linguistic development in L1 and subsequent languages and critical
thinking, literacy, content knowledge (Cummins, 1979) whereby learners transfer skills between languages. The more languages are learned, the more resources the learner has to pull from when learning subsequent languages: learning of and in one language supports the learning of and in other languages. Cummins seminal 1979 work lays the foundation for including NOML students’ languages as reference points in the FI classroom.

**Motivations in French Immersion Programming**

In 1986, Jim Cummins puts the immersion program in context when illustrating the nil harmful point of home/school language switch:

research in Canada has documented the effectiveness of "French immersion programs" in which English background (majority language) students are instructed largely through French in the early grades as a means of developing fluent bilingualism (Cummins, 1986, p. 20).

The program was developed to provide Anglophone students with an opportunity to become bilingual (Swain & Lapkin, 1982) which would in turn provide the province with a bilingual workforce; creating much needed candidates for government jobs to implement the Official Languages Act. This bolsters bilingualism’s value through instrumental motivation and an increase in social capital (Dagenais, 2003; Dagenais & Jacquet, 2001): being hirable by the government (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991). This may be one reason for its success in teaching French – this kind of motivation applies to all learners, not just Anglophones and may account for FI’s popularity with new Canadians.

Mady (2010) on the topic of motivations for recent immigrant grade nine students in a
core French program shows that these students have a greater level of motivation to learn French as they see it as part of their growing Canadian identity and precisely a means of improving their job prospects later on in the Canadian context as encouraged by their parents. French Immersion programs have been seen as a viable way to increase one’s children’s social status and capital (Dagenais, 2003; Dagenais & Jacquet, 2001). This perspective is an example of additive bilingualism: parents valuing the existing home languages and the addition of new languages. Lambert (as cited in Wolfgang, 1975) asserts that when a person’s home language is valued less than the new language, it is an example of subtractive bilingualism.

As the Ontario French immersion experience is not about learning a dominant language, nor fitting into a specific target culture, Ushioda’s (2011) observations on integrative motivations for ESL learning in increasingly globalized societies are relevant. Ushioda thinks it, “may be better explained in terms of our desired self-representations as de facto members of these global communities, rather than in terms of identification with external reference groups” (Ushioda, 2011, p. 201).

**Plurilingualism**

Recent scholarship has begun to address the importance of plurilingualism to FSL. This term is related to, yet a shift away from multilingualism. It describes the complex relationship that exists between a first, second, third, and subsequent language for an individual in any given context, as opposed to presuming the mental or social segregation of those languages.

Plurilingualism allows for the interaction and mutual influence of [...] languages
in a more dynamic way [than multilingualism]” (Canagarajah & Liynage, 2012). Multilingualism keeps languages distinct both at the societal level and at the individual level. It also tends to stress the separate, advanced mastery of each language a person speaks. Plurilingualism, on the contrary, is focused on the fact that languages interrelate and interconnect particularly, but not exclusively, at the level of the individual. It stresses the dynamic process of language acquisition and use, in contrast with coexistence and balanced mastery of languages (Council of Europe, 2001, in Piccardo, 2013, p. 601).

The European Commission (2007) defines multilingualism as, “the ability of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage, on a regular basis, with more than one language in their day-to-day lives” (p. 6, in Cenoz, 2013, p. 5). In light of Canada’s Official Languages Act concerning English and French’s role in Canadian society and the speakers of NOMLs living in Canada, this distinction is particularly relevant. This shift indicates that there is:

- a focus on the individual as the locus and actor of contact has encouraged a shift of terminology from multilingualism (the study of societal contact) to plurilingualism (the study of individual’s repertoires and agency in several languages) […]. New discussions, anchored in a sociolinguistic approach to multi/plurilingualism and second and third language acquisition, called to pay more attention to the dynamics and symbolic values of language use in social interaction. (Moore & Gajo, 2009, p. 139)

Moore and Gajo specifically highlight and contrast research that has been published in French and English while working to reconcile the subtle differences in definitions from
either language. Perhaps this shift towards a plurilingual understanding in the research will counter the perceptions of Canada’s growing linguistically and culturally diverse population.

**Plurilingualism in the Classroom**

The current consensus, as per Jim Cummins (2014), is a lack in coherence with respect to policy and practice when it comes to empirical evidence of language acquisition and the benefits of speaking more than one language. Throughout Moore and Gajo’s article (2009), references are made to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR), which is making its way from Europe into Ontario classrooms (Piccardo, 2013). Moore and Gajo (2009) cite the CEFR as a tool for calibrating the development of students’ plurilingual repertoire. They assert that in Europe:

language learning … is regarded as much more than a careful assembly of words and grammar rules; the influence of one language on the appropriation of another is seen as a dynamic and multi-directional process, as an elemental and potentially positive aspect of learning that should not be inhibited, but encouraged under certain conditions that theoreticians, subsequently, need to define (p. 144).

Acknowledging the non-linear nature of language acquisition, Moore and Gajo (2009) highlight that “keen emphasis is given to the social, cultural and political dimensions of language appropriation, in situated contexts, to guide didactic principles for plurilingual education” (p. 144). Cummins, Giampapa, Cohen, Bismilla, and Leoni call upon multiliteracies, noting that “emerging literacies associated both with the new technologies
and with the multilingual composition of students in urban schools around the world”, to support their findings that when students’ L1 is viewed as a cognitive and academic resource in the classroom rather than the contrary, rich academic engagement is possible (The New London Group, 1996, in Cummins, Giampapa, Cohen, Bismilla, & Leoni, 2005, p. 23). Stille and Cummins, (2013) assert that:

instruction that affirms students’ identities exerts a significant impact both on their self-image and the quality of their language learning (Cummins, 2009; Norton & Toohey, 2011). Furthermore, the emergence of widespread access to digital media enables teachers and students to foster plurilingualism through multiple modes of representation that extend beyond the boundaries of linear one-dimensional print (p. 631-632).

Development in diverse and complex literacies adds to students’ identities; technology can help extend the reach of understanding and complexity beyond the teachers’ personal repertoire.

**Plurilingualic Strategies and Pedagogies**

In her 2013 article, Enrica Piccardo calls for a paradigm shift when it comes to curriculum and pedagogies, and defines several key principles. Firstly, the teaching and learning of any one language should be seen in conjunction with the overall objective of promoting plurilingualism and linguistic diversity. Secondly, the idea of a curriculum for each language taken in isolation should be replaced by consideration of the role of languages in a general language education, where knowledge, skills, and the ability to learn are transversal and transferable across languages. Synergies would be created
between languages with the purpose of reaching a common higher goal. Thirdly, the transfer of skills should play a pivotal role and be seen in a cost-efficiency perspective: not only would useless repetition be avoided, but also the greater awareness and self-esteem of learners would potentially optimize learning (pp. 603-604). Piccardo also highlights the benefits of a crosslinguistic perspective through metacognitive, metalinguistic strategies with the example of the European Language Portfolio, which has learners chronicle and evaluate their own language learning. In a previously mentioned article on multiliteracies, Cummins, Giampapa, Cohen, Bismilla, and Leoni (2005) makes use of bilingual texts as a strategy that aims to teach transfer across languages:

   teaching for transfer does not require that teachers speak the languages of their students. It does require, however, that teachers and administrators be willing to examine critically the implicit assumptions underlying curricula developed for the “generic student” and think imaginatively about how bilingual/ESL students can more rapidly gain access to the curriculum (p. 25).

There needs to be a sharing of responsibility between the authority and the students as to what knowledge each student is coming to class with and how the student may best access the curricular expectations.

   Teaching Diversity

   The current statistics regarding the FI population indicate teachers are teaching an ethnically and linguistically diverse group (Toronto District School Board, 2010, p.16). Nieto (2005) summarizes research on what makes a highly qualified teacher for students of diverse backgrounds with this comprehensive list:
place a high value on students’ identities (culture, race, language, gender, and experiences, among others).

• connect learning to students’ lives.

• have high expectations for all students, even for those others may have given up on.

• stay committed to students in spite of obstacles that get in the way.

• view parents and other community members as partners in education.

• create a safe haven for learning.

• dare to challenge the bureaucracy of the school and district.

• are resilient in the face of difficult situations.

• use active learning strategies.

• are willing and eager to experiment.

• view themselves as lifelong learners.

• care about, respect, and love their students (p. 35).

Stemming from the defining characteristics of how teachers should teach and looking at what teacher should teach, Leduc’s qualitative research study of 29 6th grade teachers’ Global Citizenship units, a curriculum topic, underscores the importance, not only of taking care of the world and increased sense of responsibility for environmental and human wellbeing, but also, “an awareness of the complexity of global issues and their inherent power struggles, or how some groups of people benefit at the expense of others” (2013, p. 399). These efforts and understandings should replace the traditional ideals of citizenship:
Assimilationist, liberal, and universal conceptions of citizenship require citizens to give up their first languages and cultures to become full participants in the civic community of the nation-state (Gordon, 1964; Young, 1989, 2000 as cited in Banks, 2008, p. 129).

From these sources, it seems as though teacher awareness of multilingualism and cultural diversity at the very lease play a significant role in teaching to diversity. Using that knowledge to form a critical perspective of what being a global citizen entails could also point to a more rounded concept of teaching to diversity.

**Summary**

In summary, it seems there is ample research to support the need and relevancy of a plurilingual pedagogy and curriculum in Ontario. Some resources and guiding principles are being developed to support this shift in understanding that will hopefully aid in addressing the disconnect researchers have found between teachers perceptions of language acquisition possibilities and the accurate capabilities of language learners in the Ontario French immersion program as it pertains to speakers of non-official minority languages. This study aims to serve as a means to gauge, on a small scale, whether teachers’ perceptions and pedagogies are reflective of a plurilingualistic or, the more traditional, multilingual perspective.
Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This qualitative research took the form of an exploratory study to allow flexibility throughout the process of delving into a new research topic; it is qualitative in nature to attempt to capture a rich, narrative sample of the participants’ experiences (Creswell, 2013). Following a comprehensive literature review on related topics, I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with a convenience sample of three knowledgeable French as a Second Language teachers who teach in the French Immersion program at the primary and intermediate levels in the Greater Toronto Area. Interviews, lasting between 40 minutes and one hour, were conducted face to face and over Skype and were audio recorded. Two interviews were held over Skype, those teachers at home and I also at home; the other, in person, after school in the participant’s classroom.

Instruments of Data Collection

The main instrument for data collection was a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix A). I asked French as a Second Language teachers for their personal histories of studying languages and teaching French as a Second/Additional Language, views of the new curriculum, some pertinent examples of their pedagogical strategies, such as curriculum and lesson ideas and activities, perceptions of student success related to teachers’ courses as well as anecdotal, anonymous descriptions of students’ levels and pre-existing learning or behavioural challenges. The questions were intended to illuminate the teachers knowledge and perceptions of students' plurilingualism as well as
activities and FSL strategies that acknowledge their students' plurilingual repertoires. The same questions were used in each interview.

To situate myself in this process, I’d like to unpack the question categories. The first two sections of questions stem from my own experiences learning languages and being immersed in cultures different from my own: I want to see if this kind of experience has any bearing on teachers’ ways of teaching FSL and perceptions of students’ identities as language learners. Questions in the third section aim to shine a light on the school culture and climate in order to see how the teacher talks about the diversity of the student population and resources that may be available to NOML speakers in that community. These questions are based on a desire to see language education practices and contexts that reflect diversity. In the final two sections of questions, I hope to uncover ways that teachers might use the new curriculum’s penchant for the communicative approach to language teaching and learning to address plurilingualism.

Participants

I interviewed three teachers who are passionate about inclusive and/or communicative teaching pedagogies and who teach students with various linguistic backgrounds. The participants teach at one of the public school boards in the Greater Toronto Area. The teachers are known by pseudonyms in this study to protect anonymity and confidentiality. Each teacher was interviewed once; Rose in October, 2014 (with follow up questions answered over email in December, 2014), Lily in October, 2014, and Iris in February, 2015.
Rose teaches grade 2 French immersion at the moment and has 7 years of teaching experience. She emigrated to Canada with her parents from a former French/British colony at the end of her high school years and speaks Creole, French, and English. Iris teaches a grade 4/5 split French immersion and this is her first year of teaching. She speaks English and French and understands some Tagalog as her mother is from the Philippines. Lily teaches grade 8 late French immersion and has been teaching for 13 year; she has taught various late French immersion grades and core French at the intermediate level. She speaks English and French.

**Ethical Review Procedures**

This study follows the ethical review procedures that are established by the Master of Teaching program and accepted by the ethical review board specific to the requirements of the Master of Teaching Research Project.

**Recruitment**

The recruitment of interview participants was conducted through a few different methods. Two teachers were approached separately via email to participate in the study: one was a former associate teacher of mine who was known by me to teach a culturally diverse student population in the intermediate years; the second teaches in the primary grades and was introduced to me by my supervisor because of the teacher’s experience and interest in the study’s topic. To round out the sample, I wanted to find a junior grades teacher; I looked to my former colleagues for interest. The third teacher was found by posting a message in a private online forum site that was created for teacher
candidates in the FSL teachable class from last year on a social networking. As many of my past colleagues have completed their initial teacher education program and found jobs, I was able to find someone who teaches French immersion in the junior grades and was willing to participate in the study.

**Informed Consent**

As per this, a consent form was presented to participants prior to interviews and signed by the participant; those participants whose interview happened over Skype were provided with an email consent form that they printed, signed, scanned, and sent back to me. It was made clear that data collected for this study would only be used for this study alone; their anonymity is ensured through the use of pseudonyms; also, the goals and scope of the study were explained in full prior to participation. Participants were also informed that should they no longer be able or willing to participate, they were free to cease involvement at any time.

**Data Storage**

The interviews, transcriptions, and any other data were stored on my own password-protected computer to which only I had access. The interview recordings were deleted upon submission of the research project. Finally, in addition to myself, my supervisor was also able to review the raw data. This is something of which every participant was made aware and to which they consented in signing the aforementioned letter of consent. Two recordings were transcribed by myself, one transcribed by a profession, and carefully reviewed by the participants.
Data Analysis

In my analysis, the objective was to identify themes regarding teacher perspectives informed in part by those found in the literature review (Chapter Two). The data was first organized and understood as responses to the supporting research questions and then those answers were grouped into more abstract headings and sub-headings so as to align the findings with the existing research. While writing up the findings, important themes emerged such as linguistic hegemony from the way the teachers talked about speaking English and French, and didn’t often talk about speaking non-official minority languages. With the study’s limited breadth and sample size, I did not find saturation in the data and can only begin to theorize on my data. Considering this, I hope to provide some insights into the experiences and perceptions of French immersion teachers in Toronto schools who show sensitivity to students’ linguistic diversity and also show evidence of inclusive and communicative practices.

Limitations

It should be noted that the breadth of this study could present some limitations to the depth of data to be collected. Also, due to this small sample size, the views and experiences cannot be said to represent those of teachers in a general or broad sense. Working within the limitations of the Masters of Teaching approved ethical review excludes the possibility to triangulate teachers’ claims with those of students.
Chapter 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, I will present the data obtained from the interviews with the three participants in this study and link it the literature reviewed in chapter two. The findings are organized into categories that emerged from careful analysis of the interview following open and axial coding processes: linguistic hegemony, instrumental motivation, language acquisition theories, program issues, purity, and complexity. Each category will be explored under appropriate sub-headings that reflect what was found in the data and interwoven with the existing body of research. The information provided by each of the participants illustrated an exemplary commitment to French language teaching and learning that is a snapshot of the present climate and an important contribution to the greater conversations on these topics.

4.1 Linguistic Hegemony

This theme deals with the power dynamics of Canada’s two official languages as well as the power of both those languages vs. Non-Official Minority Languages. English is the dominant language: the one common to students and teachers in English speaking Canada. French competes with English in the classroom and does not stand a chance outside of the classroom beyond future expectations of social capital. NOMLs do not figure strongly, especially compared to the assumption that English is the dominant linguistic background of all students. The reality of the students’ background is much more diverse than simply French vs. English.
4.1.1 Linguistic Heterogeneity

Each teacher describes her own class and school, French and English streams, as diverse linguistically and culturally. Teachers report the student populations for each school as accurate representations of their catchment area. Two of the three teachers say their students are almost all first or second-generation immigrants to Canada while the other teacher doesn’t mention that particular detail. During a lesson, Lily was surprised to learn just how many students were relatively new Canadians:

I think 23; actually the whole class are all first or second generation Canadians yeah, including myself and the other [in the room]. Put your hand up if you’re born elsewhere, like four; put your hand up if your parents were born elsewhere, majority; grandparents, the rest. Maybe like two didn’t.

Although some of the students’ linguistic backgrounds are unclear to her, Lily says, “at least half of them speak another language at home or at least their parents do,” similar to the Toronto District School Board’s statistics (2010, p. 16). Rose says the majority of her students may speak as many as three or four languages, while, “I think I can count on my fingers maybe one or two only speak two language, you know, English and French.” The three teachers cite Mandarin, Cantonese, ‘Chinese’, Greek, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Urdu, English, Arabic, Korean, Polish, Ethiopian, Spanish, Turkish, and Russian as just some of the languages their students might speak at home though they can’t gage how fluently they may speak.

The reality of the classroom, as the report by the TDSB indicates, is one of great diversity (2010). These teachers somewhat acknowledge the diversity in their classrooms and are faced with an opportunity to teach to diversity which, according to Nieto (2005),
starts by placing a high value on students’ identities (including language) (p. 35). Stille and Cummins (2013) look more for “instruction that affirms students’ identities” (p. 631) as evidence of plurilingual education; this acknowledgement is a step in that direction.

**4.1.2 Struggle for Legitimacy**

Throughout each of the three interviews, power relationships between English and French and Non-Official Minority Languages (NOML) are evident. All three teachers struggled to find a place for French as they perceive the context to be anglodominant; NOMLs are rarely seen or heard by two of the three teachers. One teacher says that, “[home language] doesn’t come up too much just because the French tends to take most of the time” and that the home language and background of the students doesn’t matter much when learning French. Another did recognize that her class and school population is diverse but there was no evidence that home languages were present in the classroom. These findings are in line with much of the literature and policies in Ontario (Cummins, 2014; Hayday, 2001; Dei et al., 2003). Rose is the outlier and does use the students’ home languages to bridge into French learning, which is supported by Cummins’ 1979 work involving the Language Interdependence Hypothesis.

We feed off from each other. So for example we learned to count to ten en français. It’s un deux trois quatre cinq sept huit neuf dix then … one [student] is like oh [teacher’s name], so and so speaks Spanish uno dos tres cuarto cinco seis and then we count in Spanish; we count in Urdu; we count in Arabic; we count in Mandarin as well. So we play little games like that and then I feel they can connect back to their own languages.
With teachers feeling there is little time to address learning French, there is also the sense of lacking time to engage students’ other languages. French language learning is of great importance to these teachers. It is one of their highest priorities in the FI classroom. Inside the classroom, all three teachers are concerned with providing students with a French Immersion environment that aims to provide as much high quality French exposure as possible so French speaking will become relevant and accessible and a legitimate, realistic goal in an English dominant Canada. Rose says the only French her students are exposed to is in the classroom.

When asked about strategies to encourage students to speak French outside the classroom, Lily’s quick response was, “Haha! Good luck outside the classroom! [There, they speak] English.” French does not have a place there. Inside the classroom, one teacher reports that students can be punished for speaking English and rewarded for speaking only in French; speaking a NOML doesn’t seem to be occurring. The reality of French being relegated to certain spaces and the desire to boost French language’s status is in line with Caron-Réaume’s (2010) sentiments and observations.

Iris says her students often revert to English and use many Anglicisms grammatically. English speaking is seen as the only opposition to French speaking in a binary understanding of the language learning dynamic. Iris wonders how her grade 5 students’ French abilities are affected when certain subjects begin to be instructed in English. Iris sees the increase in English instruction as a threat to her students’ budding French proficiency. Research by Cummins (1979) would suggest that the multilingual input would foster greater cognitive abilities in the students and not take away from their language learning. With so little French exposure already, she worries they won’t have a
strong enough foundation in French to withstand increased English input. No mention of NOMLs is consistent with lack of policy and research in this area.

The teachers consistently talk about the benefits of bilingualism in Canada, about the earning power of speaking both of Canada’s official languages (Bourdieu, 1986). This focus seems to be an effort to buttress French’s legitimate importance in Canada. Iris talks to her students about her previous employment to underscore the opportunities made available to her thanks to speaking French.

4.2 Instrumental Motivation

Coming from a place of struggle, French learning seems to require some external assistance to increase its appeal. Teachers seem to cling to the social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that French language abilities can garner for their students. To access the benefits of speaking both Canada’s official languages, one must have a solid understanding of the language’s mechanics – however, it seems not necessarily its culture.

4.2.1 French for Hire

The teachers each feel that the greatest motivating factor for being and working hard in the French Immersion program is connected to job prospects after graduation. Iris’s students are aware why they are in the FI program:

asked them why do you think your parents um push you to be in immersion and why do you think we’re doing this? And they all know: because we’re going to get jobs. So that’s pretty clear to them.
Iris mentions that her school is new and that many French Immersion schools are being built in her area. She feels fairly strongly that her own job prospects are good thanks to her French abilities and muses about what may happen if the demand changes to ‘Chinese’ instead of French but is comforted by the fact that French is an official language in Canada and many other countries thanks to a history of French colonization. The parents of Lily’s students “recognize that French is going to help them where they are. In terms of Canada and you know they look in terms of government jobs. They are looking ahead for their kids.” The push for employment seems to be the one big selling point for the FI programs even though research shows so many cognitive benefits (Cummins, 1979, 1986, 2006; Haque, 2012; Piccardo, 2013; Stille & Cummins, 2013).

4.2.2 Curriculum for Efficacy

In Lily’s late FI class, she underscores that:

especially for this program, their weak point is oral. I try to do a lot more oral. …

To be honest for any language learner most of them aren’t going to end up writing essays or you know being French professors but a lot of them will use their oral French.

She focuses on preparing students to communicate orally. Rose worries that the lack of explicit grammar objectives and change in how much French instruction the FI program requires per year in the curriculum means that students won’t be able to function in French at the necessary level:

I feel like I have to take so much longer on everything. And I would normally be teaching content like social studies but I have to teach French now since they
don’t have the language of instruction down it is making it even harder to teach them terminologies.

She is concerned with students’ abilities across the board. Iris struggles with the tension between using a challenging enough level of French and teaching content. Resources and text books in French use unfamiliar vocabulary as they are for first language speakers. This makes her question how much they are truly understanding in the classroom and how well they would do outside of the classroom. She states, “I think that they have a good ear for it, but when I see their writing and when they respond to me they have very, very poor grammar and syntax.” Her teachable moments focus on pronouns and other grammar points because she worries about their ability to communicate effectively. The language lessons focus on, “language taken in isolation” instead of a, “consideration of the role of languages in a general” manner (Piccardo, 2013, p. 603).

4.3 Language Acquisition Theory

4.3.1 More is Better

Lily, Rose, and Iris say students who speak more than one language at home do well in their classes. Sometimes they pick it up faster than those coming from Anglophone households. When talking about this with Lily, she points out that some students just pick it up faster than others indiscriminate of any qualifier but also that, “the reason they [take French Immersion] is because they do speak another language. Like, I think once you speak another language it seems like the normal thing to do, to learn another one.” Two of the three teachers mention that the students who struggle are often Anglophone, learning French as only their second language. Iris says one of her
Anglophone students has recently left the program as it was proving to be too difficult for him. One of the teachers says a previous experience working at a school with primarily Anglophone students in her French Immersion class was very different from her current class with a diverse population. The Anglophone students seemed to lack motivation and be in the program more for the scheduling and bussing situation than for the educational benefits. Considering the prevailing assumption that FI is designed and intended for Anglophones and the lack of research into the NOML student experience in FI, the teachers’ observations cannot be corroborated further.

4.3.2 Additive vs. Subtractive Bilingualism

One teacher is concerned that if the trend of increasing diversity continues, the FSL will be difficult to teach as the students won’t have a common baseline and the program will lose the benefit of having a common Latin root to English. She seems to feel that it makes it more difficult for students to add yet another language to their roster.

Now we’re servicing such a diverse population that it’s hard to gauge where the students are at. Some of them are struggling with even the basic understanding of English and now they are learning multiple languages at the same time.

Another teacher questions the impact and benefit of introducing subjects in English within the FI program – that this may take away from the students’ French learning: “how is [English instruction] going to benefit them as FSL students - if as soon as they’re getting stronger in French, we start to remove that time in French instruction?”

Cummin’s (1979, 1986) supports the opposite of these findings with the theory of the Common Underlying Proficiency: languages don’t need to have the same linguistic root
to aid in the acquisition of subsequent languages. Whereas another teacher doesn’t foresee any change in FSL programming regardless of any such population change because students’ home languages don’t impact their ability to learn French. Without the consideration of other languages, this teaching method may be a form of Cummins’ (1979) subtractive bilingualism where the target language takes priority over other languages at the risk of total suppression of those languages.

4.4 Program Issues

All three teachers talk about how busy they are creating their own materials and often also their own curriculum. Lily and Iris both mention having students with IEPs and the amount of accommodating and modifying that is expected of them. Iris talks at length about the Ministry minutes she is obligated to observe in her schedule for each subject and how strict it is; she feels she doesn’t have time for anything.

Lily had a lot to say about the issues with the FI program: “There is always a lack for French I find. We do a lot of stuff ourselves. Resources are scarce. It’s money, I’m sure; it usually is, right.” She also hasn’t had any offer of professional development to support the new curriculum nor has she seen the report cards reflect the curriculum’s increased focus on speaking and listening. “They often bring in all these new things but the support is often lacking everywhere in most subjects but especially French I find.” Lily sees the lack of support also extended to students with Individualized Education Plans in FI:

It’s one thing to have a kid with an IEP in motor skills – fair enough, you can still learn another language and be successful; it’s another thing to have an IEP in the
English language and be in the Immersion program and expect that child to be successful and that one teacher to be able to address all of those needs. She thinks the FI program should require more than parental discretion to enter, but she supposes that:

the reasoning behind it is that they don’t want to stream. So, everybody should have the right to be in whatever stream they want, unless it’s a math program and then they don’t have a problem saying ‘oh you didn’t pass the test.’

Lily’s experience touches the issues raised in Mady and Arnett (2009), where students struggling with first language acquisition were excluded from FI and counters Arnett (2010) finding that FSL strategies have been seen to effectively scaffold for a variety of learners.

While Lily is concerned with the effect of a more inclusive entrance process, Rose has more issue with the changes happening within the curriculum and how it is being administered. She finds that the program is no longer an immersion experience and also finds the questionable quality of other French teachers to be an issue:

I have seen a decline in the quality of French over the years. Especially with students getting less amount of French exposure … we don’t have enough strong French teachers to support the high demand of French Immersion programs and as a result, some boards had to cut down the hours of French instruction.

Program decisions are made on a board level informed by the provincial curriculum as the study by Mady and Black (2012) indicates as well as an increase in popularity for the FI program. Lily’s issue made point to a lack in product for the current demand.
As mentioned previously, French resources are already scare; in addition, Lily and Iris both said they didn’t have access to resources in languages other than English or French to support students who may speak Non-Official Minority Languages. Lily says she is aware there is an ESL teacher for students in her school who’ve been in Canada for 4 years or less and need the support. The lack in resources to support NOMLs in FI is in line with the lack in research concerning NOML’s experience in FI.

4.5 Language Purity – Multilingualism, Languages as Separate Entities

4.5.1 Teacher Perspectives

Despite the diversity of backgrounds and home languages of her students, one teacher doesn’t think those details affect much the way her students learn French.

I don’t know if it would change my approach in any way. I mean, I do think that there are some languages that, and I know because I’ve had kids who’ve picked it up faster because of same structures or they understand things because it’s done the same way in their language, other than that I don’t think I would approach things differently because it doesn’t really seem to change the way they learn French.

She focuses solely on developing their French skills. Much like Lily, Iris also sees their French learning as isolated from knowing other languages for the most part and doesn’t know how much they know of the other languages:

that’s the thing, I don’t know how fluent they are in the others but I’ve just, they’ve told me like oh um, I speak a bit of this or I speak this or my mom and dad speak that. So I’m just assuming that they have that third or fourth language.
The other languages are separate from the classroom space but the teachers are aware or suspect the students’ abilities to speak them at home, in their day to day lives, just like the definition of multilingualism indicates (The European Commission, 2007, p. 6, in Cenoz, 2013, p.5).

### 4.5.2 Assimilation Strategies

Creating a French environment is a priority for all three teachers. Two of the three teachers have French books only (except French/English dictionaries) in their classrooms and seem to speak only French during class time. Those two teachers report not having access to multi-lingual resources like dual language books or dictionaries other than French/English. French is often taught as a stand-alone lesson, in isolation from culture, focusing on grammar or a skill such as listening or speaking. Strategies in one classroom are in place to encourage speaking French where students are rewarded for good behaviour by being given a certain amount of time to chat with a friend as long as it is in French. If they revert to English however, they can be punished by having to roll a die and perform the task associated to the number they rolled. These strategies are in place with the intention of ensuring students practice French in the classroom setting and serve to create a French only atmosphere. Without the understanding of the influence and existence of NOMLs, the binary dynamic of French vs. English and the struggle to have students become French speakers feeds into the assimilative, normative practices of the greater Canadian society and educative processes (Dei et al., 2003).
4.6 Language Complexity – Plurilingualism, Languages as Tapestry

4.6.1 Teacher as Example

All three teachers speak at least two languages and have some understandings of others. All three have immigrant stories in their family history that mirror the students’ histories. Lily speaks English and learned French in school; is of Irish descent. She uses both languages at different times with her students and around the school; students are aware of her background. Iris speaks English and French, and has some familiarity with Tagalog as her mother speaks it; her background is Filipino and French Canadian. Iris tells her students about how being a French speaker gets her job opportunities. Rose speaks Creole, French, English, and understands a little of some other Latin languages; she immigrated to Canada from Mauritius as a teenager. Rose says she loves learning languages and articulates well the intricacies of being a speaker of languages when she questions the boundaries of what it means to know a language:

What qualifies you to actually be bilingual? You know what I mean? Because then like for me, I speak Creole – but you know Creole, is it a language or is that a dialect? So does that mean I’m plurilingual because I speak English, Creole, and French – but I also understand some Spanish and some Italian but I can’t speak Italian… The more I learn the more complex things get. It’s like there’s no, it’s not very, not static. Everything is dynamic, keeps evolving, keeps changing.

Rose brings this understanding to her teaching to “build that safe environment where they feel comfortable and feel safe” by leading by example in her lessons and bridging what she knows to new languages and materials. The teachers’ histories and diverse relationships to different languages provide excellent examples of what Moore and Gajo
(2009) mean when they define plurilingualism as, “the study of individual’s repertoires and agency in several languages” (p. 139).

4.6.2 Plurilingual Strategies

Rose feels lucky to be teaching the grade 2 curriculum that includes content on celebrations from around the world because “I think the acquisition of a second language requires a look at a different culture.” She uses languages she and her students know to bridge between what the students know and to validate where the students are coming from:

My classroom is very dynamic and we certainly embrace every culture and this is the way to, I find it gets them motivated and engaged and it is also part of their identity that they are discovering as well and they come to school excited because ‘we’re going to talk about that because [the teacher is interested in it too].’

Rose appreciates the ample multi-lingual and cultural resources that her school provides in its library and through their ESL teacher that support her students in learning French and to validate their home languages.

I have to say, I am blessed and am very lucky to work in a school where we’ve got tons of capacity in terms of like the ESL teachers are really knowledgeable and our library is full with dual language books. So we’ll have books in anglais/français, urdu/français, urdu/anglais: that kind of stuff.

She also uses the Accelerated Integrated Method to teach French to her students – a series of meaningful gestures that support verbal language development that she learned at a professional development session offered through her board of education. Rose’s
strategies, school resources, and attitude reflect current research such as Piccardo’s plurilingual vision of synergy between known languages and the target language (2013).

### 4.6.3 Multiliteracy strategies through cross-curricular teaching

Iris does a lot of cross-curricular planning in her grade 4/5 class to make sure she covers all the subjects and the French language objectives – weaving together literacies of different subjects, “I kind of mix my health into my French and I do those cross-curricular things where I need to.” She finds she can incidentally cover a lot of the grammar points and specific language points, “when we’re reading stuff I’ll stop and ask ‘what kind of transition words do you see?’ And stuff like that.” She encourages her students to be aware of their language learning throughout content lessons:

One of the things in the curriculum is to address the challenges of listening and to talk about the challenges and I always related it back to like no matter what language you’re learning, the challenges are going to be the same. … We had a discussion about okay, put yourself in the shoes of someone learning English …We kind of talked about the challenges of listening in French and [similar issues to English learning] came up.

Teaching in a cross-curricular manner may be considered similar to Piccardo’s third point on plurilingualistic synergy, “the transfer of skills should play a pivotal role and be seen in a cost-efficiency perspective: not only would useless repetition be avoided, but also the greater awareness and self-esteem of learners would potentially optimize learning” (Piccardo, 2013, p. 304).
4.6.4 Strategies to Highlight Language Variation

Iris’s students are encouraged to make the link between the occurrence of accents in French and how it is similar to there being accents in English.

I showed them a little Radio Canada clip and we had to listen to it six times before they really understood that they were just talking about the weather and Unicef clips from France, so it’s French from France more or less and they really had to listen like several times to those too.

From these clips, Iris says she is looking at French learning from a social justice angle of broadening the students understanding of diverse accents and “versions of French” by watching French videos that come from a variety of cultures. She talks about the diverse nature, or web of French from around the world and how she has been exposing the students to it:

the really big thing I want to show them is like there are kids that speak French in Haiti, there are kids in Senegal that speak French and parts of Egypt. I think that’s so important for it to be on their radars.

Iris’s intuition to highlight the differences and similarities in the French language across the globe is reflected in Moore and Gajo’s assertion of the non-linear nature of language acquisition, “keen emphasis is given to the social, cultural and political dimensions of language appropriation, in situated contexts” (2009, p. 144).

4.6.5 Globalization Citizenship

Lily has started a project this year called the Global Citizen Project.
We’re basically trying to get the kids to recognize that they are a part now of really of it’s really a global ya know, the world is getting smaller. So we’re introducing the kids to different parts of the world and cultures and trying to tie it to Toronto.

Lily’s notions of language diversity and language variation are represented in terms of particular compartmentalized notions of language and culture along the lines of nationality and falls in line with the binary understanding of being a member of a nation-state rather than a global community (Banks, 2008). Part of this project involves going to Kensington Market, an area in downtown Toronto that has a strong Chinese immigrant history. This meant that: “the kids with Chinese background were recognizing stuff… so they definitely bring background knowledge into it.” Lily thinks that, “the Global Citizens [project] is sort of bringing in more of [the students background cultures and languages] into school, which is kind of neat.” The project was in its early stages at the time of the interview and Lily’s description of this part showed some evidence of, “an awareness of the complexity of global issues” (Leduc, 2013, p. 399).

Another part of this project uses a tool called Culture grams, an online site which gives a glimpse into peoples’ lives around the world; the students “…seem really interested in that.” In the past, she has sometimes integrated the opportunity to use what they know of their own language or culture in the classroom integrated it in art or drama: we’ve done art projects where the kids wrote their names, well actually some of them just chose languages they liked. A lot of them used their home country language you know whatever their parents speak.
Opportunities for students to make connections to their own lives and backgrounds through these activities are a step towards what Stille and Cummins (2013) intend by, “instruction that affirms students’ identities” (p. 631) yet they need to included greater, “awareness of the complexity of global issues and tier inherent power struggles” mentioned by Leduc (2013, p. 35) to provide a critical perspective of global citizenship which may in turn support a plurilingual, synergic curriculum (Piccardo, 2013).

Conclusion

These themes emerged from the data as indicators of teachers’ perceptions and acknowledgements of students’ plurilingual repertoires. The teachers individual outlook often coincided with another’s making the theme grow in important. Other themes were deemed essential for the weight of the participant’s enthusiasm or the depth of the participant’s answer. In the following chapter, I will discuss the findings’ implications, make recommendations, and suggest further research.
Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

At the heart of the research question at hand is the desire to know and support the students in our French immersion classes. Throughout this process, the teacher-participants have been rich sources of information who have provided honest accounts of their experiences working with diverse student populations in the French immersion programs in the Greater Toronto Area. Their experience and expertise have made this project possible. Thanks to them, we have a snapshot of what it is like at the present moment in that context. It has been incredibly meaningful and inspiring for me to speak with teachers who were willing to share their experiences in order for me to learn from them.

Notable in my interview questions, my position as researcher has been overt: I have assumed language teachers, as learners of diverse languages themselves, would bring their own rich multitude of linguistic identities to their teaching practices and welcome the changes in the new FSL curriculum, that support oral, authentic communication and metacognitive strategies, as a chance to bring in the rich linguistic knowledge of NOML speaking students in their classes. What the findings show is that the teachers tend to maintain the ideal that language is anchored in a grammar syllabus, be aligned with a purist, assimilationist language ideology, and to support an instrumentalist motivation for language learning.

From the data, it seems as though there is a struggle between the teacher’s agency and what the teachers perceive to be increasing program demands. Tension caused by changes or demands in the curriculum and student populations; teachers seem to be so
focused on the teaching, learning, promotion of the French language that they cannot or do not consistently acknowledge or support the plurilingual repertoires of over 50% of their student population. As illustrated in Figure 1 below, the plurilingual population, speakers of NOMLs are often below the radar of the teachers, conveyed by the dotted line, as they work to create the French immersion classroom. Certainly some of the strategies used by and perceptions of these excellent teachers are examples of a plurilingual paradigm, which is why the diagram does show a connection.

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 1. Teachers perceive expectations and struggles of creating a French Immersion classroom and tend not to exemplify a substantial understanding and implementation of plurilingual strategies to address the plurilingual and multicultural population.*

The initial purpose of this study was to understand the techniques successful teachers use to teach French language to the currently linguistically and culturally diverse student populations. From the research, I discovered some suggestions for plurilingual perspectives, pedagogies, and activities that explicitly allow students to utilize other
language knowledge and think metalinguistically in such a way as to support this student population’s acquisition of French language. In my findings, it would seem that classroom teachers are sometimes using these research-recommended techniques but are primarily focused on creating a French only environment. To further unpack this finding, I will revisit the four supporting research questions from chapter one.

**How Does Accessibility to French as a Second Language Programs in Canada Impact the Diversity of the Student Population in FSL Programs?**

Contrary to the trend suggested in the research done by Mady reviewed in chapter two, there doesn’t seem to be much impediment for students to enter into FI programs in the Greater Toronto Area. All three teachers report having students from a variety of backgrounds and ability levels which are accurate samplings of their catchment areas. Although one of the teachers felt that there should be more restrictions of access to FI based on student ability and occurrences of IEPs, and another observed that there happen to be few students with IEPs in her class (which is consistent with Mady and Arnett (2009)), there seems to be no exclusion based on the idea that it may be difficult for students whose home language is not English, nor any prejudice towards NOML speaking students.

**What Are Teachers' Perceptions on the Linguistic Identity Development of Students in their Classrooms?**

Teachers showed concern for the French development of their students across the board but were confident that students were already bi/multilingual or on the road to
becoming. “Bilingual” and “multilingual” are the terms the teachers are familiar with to describe one’s mastery of two or more distinct languages; these terms support a segregation of languages disallowing a more complex notion of language. From the data, it seems that teachers generally felt that there lacked enough time and exposure to French language to offset the influence of English language instruction and exposure. Concerning NOML identities in their classrooms, two teachers said they didn’t know much about their students’ home languages or abilities. When asked about students’ home languages, resources available, or consideration for these students when lesson planning, answers given didn’t show a complete sense of the complexity of their students’ linguistic identity.

**What Kinds of Strategies and Teacher Attitudes Support and Acknowledge Students with Diverse Linguistic Backgrounds?**

To answer this question, it was necessary to mainly look to the budding research on plurilingualism. In chapter two, various research by Cummins, Stille and Cummins, Moore and Gajo, and Piccardo provide some direction and examples of what a plurilingualistic educator and education may look like. Teachers would consider language learning from a broader, more holistic perspective that includes consideration and puts value on students’ previous or other linguistic knowledge in order to support the subsequent language acquisition. In chapter four we see evidence of this happening by some teachers through metalinguistic strategies, activities that let students bring their own cultures and languages into the classroom content, and teachers’ interest in students’ various identities.
How do Teachers See the Growing Population of Speakers of Non-Official Minority Languages Affecting Their Classrooms? What Does it Mean for the Future of French Education?

Before beginning my research, I thought teachers would see students’ diverse linguistic identities as assets to the FSL classroom: Cummins’ shows that students who have experience learning and learning in another language have gains learning and learning in a subsequent language. I thought teachers would consider those students to be excellent candidates for FI. However, Mady (2013) presents teachers’ perspectives on NOML speakers in FSL that indicate FI teachers agree less that students whose first language is not English should take core classes rather than FI. Teachers may not be aware that over 50% of the FI student population do not come from English speaking homes at the present time. The teachers that I spoke with did not predict much of an impact from the growing population of NOML speakers on FI or their teaching because diverse student languages, cultures and identities were perceived as peripheral to learning French and learning in French. One teacher talked about her current school’s NOML speaking students’ greater level of motivation and abilities in the program compared to students at a previous school who were predominantly Anglophone and suggested by this that the difference is attributable to her current students’ plurilingualism. It is interesting that the same teacher expressed concern for the future of teaching in FI if the students do not have English as a common language as it has the same root language as French. Another teacher saw no change in her programming regardless of whatever other languages the students speak. The third teacher mused about the possibility of another language becoming more popular to learn than French causing her to lose her job. These
teachers’ concerns are in line with the teachers in Mady (2013) but counter a plurilingual perspective and the existing research on language acquisition.

Situating these Findings within Existing Research

As seen throughout chapter four, these findings point to a lack in research into NOMLs’ experiences and effect on curriculum and pedagogy. The literature review in chapter two included a lot of documentation of the exclusion of NOML speakers and research on the benefits of their inclusion in core French programming. The current FI student population certainly attest to NOML speakers’ inclusion yet the teacher perspectives and practices mostly seem to exclude the NOMLs from the classroom content and pedagogical considerations.

The current teacher perspectives are seem to be influenced by the established hegemony of the English language in English speaking Canada and the history of the FSL programming goals: become bilingual, English/French. Policies and practices do not reflect findings in Cummins’ extensive research (1979, 1983, 1986, 2001) into the positive effects of acknowledging and using students’ home languages in the target language class nor do the findings reflect the recent research into plurilingual pedagogy (Piccardo, 2013).

Implications for Classroom Practice

As the literature review suggests, linguistically and culturally diverse students can benefit from a plurilingual education in FI as it could validate knowledge acquired of and in other languages and support learning French. The findings suggest that Toronto area
classrooms have such a population of students yet teachers’ perceptions and practices and Ministry and School Board policies don’t yet reflect the research. For my own future students, I aim to establish a classroom that uses the students’ home languages as an entry point for French language learning; find critical resources that seek to acknowledge the interconnectedness of languages and different peoples on the planet as well as the power struggles that ensue from the complex relationships between humans, languages, politics, and class; and be passionate about inclusion, equity, and pedagogy.

**Limitations and Further Study**

As this study was exploratory in nature and limited by the small sample size, it is not possible to generalize the findings. It would be beneficial to conduct similar additional studies with a larger sample size so saturation may be possible to more accurately gauge the classroom practices and teacher perspectives of the plurilingual student population and curricula as it pertains to those students’ experiences and needs. That being said, from some teachers’ discourses being quite contradictory to my initial ideas about seeing more plurilingual acknowledgment through the fostering of authentic communication and the use of metacognitive strategies as suggested in the new curriculum, it may be useful to reflect on the relationships between/within the students’ languages. It could instigate research into ways to support a less essentialist, purist, structuralist notion of languages, their learning and teaching. There is also a dire need for research into NOMLs’ experiences, their effect on curriculum and pedagogy and their consideration in policy.
Conclusion

Through this study, I was able to gain a greater understanding of the complexities of language education in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world. From the teachers’ perceptions and practices, I learned how complicated it can be to balance and integrate multiple and diverse learner needs, pedagogies, and curricula. I see how it is increasingly pertinent and pressing to address our learners’ rich and diverse linguistic and cultural knowledge so they may develop and deepen multiliteracies.
References


Leduc, R. (2013). Global citizenship instruction through active participation: what is being


APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: ___________________

Dear ___________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying teacher perspectives for the purposes of investigating teacher perceptions and strategies for teaching and learning FSL with plurilingual students as a major assignment for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Dr. Arlo Kempf. My research supervisor is Christine Connelly, Ph.D. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 40 minute interview that will be tape-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, or anywhere else that you might prefer.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or a publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the tape recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

If you have any questions about the proposed study, please contact me at echsmith@gmail.com or you may also contact Dr. Christine Connelly (my MTRP Supervisor) at 416-978-1989 or christine.connelly@utoronto.ca
If you have further questions about the rights of the participants in this study, please contact the Office of the Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

If you agree to be interviewed, please sign the attached form. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Emily Smith
MT Candidate, Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

Consent Form

I, ____________________________, acknowledge that I have been asked to take part in a research project about teacher perceptions and strategies for teaching and learning FSL with plurilingual students and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Emily Smith and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: __________________________

Name (printed): ______________________________

Date: ______________________________
Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. Introductory Questions:
   a) Could you tell me a little about yourself?
      a. Additional prompts:
         i. What subjects/program are you currently teaching and at which level?
         ii. How long have you been teaching in this program?
         iii. What other subjects/programs have you taught and for how long?
         iv. How and where did you first become a teacher?

2. Questions about Participant’s Linguistic Profile:
   a) What is your preferred language?
   b) Which languages do you speak fluently or have studied?
   c) How did you learn those languages? (e.g.: spoken at home, traveling, academic setting, etc.)
   d) Do you consider yourself to be bilingual/multilingual?
   e) What does being bilingual/multilingual mean to you?

3. Questions about Bi/multilingualism in the school:
   a) Considering the FSL program you teach, do you consider your students to be bi/multilingual?
      a. Are they on the road to becoming?
   b) In your FSL population, what languages do your students speak at home?
   c) Does the linguistic landscape of your class differ from the rest of the school’s? If so, how?
   d) In your classroom or at the school, are there any support materials such as dictionaries, computer programs, posters, etc. in other languages other than English to/and French?
   e) Has there been a chance for your students to bring their home language into the French classroom? Or school? If so, how?
   f) What kind of thought do you give to your students’ home language when preparing lessons?

4. Questions on Pedagogy and the New 2013 French Curriculum:
   a) What are you working on with your students at the moment in French?
      a. Are these kinds of activities typical in your classroom?
      b. How are the students responding to it?
      c. Has there been evidence of your students’ multilingual repertoires in their responses to these activities?
   b) What kind of routines have you set for your students to encourage them to speak French in/out of class?
a. Why do you think they work or not?
b. What do students’ experiences with speaking home languages other than English or French imply for such routines?
c) Are you using the new French 2013 curriculum document from the ministry of education?
d) How would you describe it compared to the old curriculum?
e) With the new curriculum in effect, in what ways have your activities or foci changed in the classroom, if at all?
   a. What will these changes mean for plurilingual students?
f) What challenges could teachers face implementing the new curriculum?
   a. Have you received support for the changes?
   b. What challenges could teachers face with respect to supporting plurilingual students?
g) Authentic communication seems to be its goal, what activities could support this goal?

5. Questions on Utilizing Students’ Linguistic Diversity in the Classroom
   a) What effect might it have to bring in the students’ linguistic backgrounds to the FSL classroom?
   b) How can teachers support French learning through different cultures and languages? Is it useful?
   c) With the growing number of students who speak languages other than English or French at home entering Canadian schools, how do you think this will affect FSL programming?
   d) What do you imagine will happen to FSL if the trend continues? What could the FSL programs do to accommodate this population?