Onlookers to Participants:

Improving FSL Students’ Competence and Confidence

by

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A Major Research Project submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Teaching

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Abstract

This research investigates how teachers can improve the confidence and competence of their FSL students. Through semi-structured interviews with two participants including a French Immersion teacher and the FSL systems principal in a southern Ontario school board, an exploration of the issues present in FSL programs is done. Ultimately, four key themes emerged from the data: environment of FSL programs, healthy language identity building, obstacles to success and best practices for teachers. These themes allowed for an analysis of findings.

The primary research question in this study looked at what strategies teachers can use to boost the confidence of their FSL students so that they would act as participants in French beyond the classroom. Results and analysis revealed that building the students’ sense of connection to French is crucial and providing exposure to French culture is one way to achieve this. Results also showed that there are many obstacles for FSL teachers including lacking resources and administrative support that can lead to less engaging programming. Analysis showed that collaboration and resource sharing amongst FSL teachers is key in combatting these issues.
Keywords

FSL programs, French Immersion, Core French, Language Identity, Confidence, Competence

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Introduction to the Research Study

As a nation that prides itself on its multiculturalism and bilingual identity, Canada has an established history of supporting French as a second language (FSL) in public education. One of the primary goals of the current FSL curriculum is that students will “use French to communicate and interact effectively in a variety of social settings” (The Ontario Curriculum, 2013). The curriculum document goes on to emphasize the importance of authentic interactions, promoting oral communication skills and fostering sociolinguistic awareness in order to produce graduates who will be able to use their French skills effectively in the Canadian context. Nevertheless, research has found that many students who undertake FSL programming are unable speak French and struggle to use sociolinguistically appropriate language in conversations (Nadasdi, Mougeon & Rehner, 2005). Despite numerous studies that have documented the limitations of the existing FSL program and that have articulated suggestions for improving instructional approaches, this issue has persisted in our education system (Dewaele, 2004; Mougeon, Rehner & Nadasdi, 2003; 2004). Interestingly, research and dominant pedagogical theory state that the best way to overcome this issue is to expose students to authentic materials or experiences and while this is often done in classrooms it seems that students continue to struggle with their functional French skills and confidence.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how a small sample of educators working in the FSL programs in Ontario are being instructionally responsive to the learning needs of
students who struggle to feel confident and competent in their French skills. Furthermore, it will be the purpose of this study to investigate how FSL teachers are building their program to help their students to develop a healthy bilingual identity and feel connected to French-speaking culture in order to seek out interacting with it authentically. Through the literature review, I will identify what existing research has found to be areas of strength and weakness in FSL programming as well as what it means to have a bilingual identity in the Canadian context. Through semi-structured interviews, I will elicit the perspectives of educators on the strengths and weaknesses of FSL programs, drawing on their lived experience as FSL teachers and/or administrators, while also learning from them what instructional strategies and approaches they enact in their teaching practice to foster students’ skills and confidence in their oral French and their sense of bilingualism.

1.2 Research Questions

The primary question guiding this research study is: what instructional strategies and approaches are being enacted by a small sample of FSL teachers and educators to develop healthy language identities in FSL students, ultimately leading them to be functional users of French in authentic situations? This question looks at what strategies these teachers are using and why they perceive them as effective.

Some subsidiary questions will include the following:

1. What are these teachers’ perspectives on the strengths and limitations of FSL programming in Ontario?

2. What strategies do these teachers use to create a learning environment where students can practice their French skills and feel safe in doing so?
3. What resources support these teachers’ instructional practice?

4. What challenges do these teachers encounter and how do they respond to these challenges?

5. How are teachers addressing the notion of bi/plurilingual identity in their classrooms? What challenges do they face in doing so?

6. What can teachers do to help students feel connected to the French speaking communities around the world?

7. How are teachers addressing French culture in their classroom? In what ways, if any, are they providing students the opportunity to receive authentic exposure? In what ways, if any, are they providing students the opportunity to participate in authentic French situations?

1.3 Background of the Researcher

I was born in Montreal, Quebec to an Anglophone family and spent my early childhood living in a largely Francophone community. My parents placed me in an all French daycare and I later attended grade one at an all French Catholic school. While we spoke English at home I received a great deal of exposure to French both inside and outside my classrooms and benefited as a second language learner from an immersion in a rich linguistic community. Upon moving to Ontario, I was enrolled in French Immersion and quickly moved from grade two to grade three in order to join my peers who were closer to my age and working at a slightly higher skill level in French. At this point, my oral communication skills were very strong and I was quite confident and at ease in my language use.

Unfortunately, many of my teachers were not prepared for my competence level and I was discouraged from speaking quickly, informally, or using my Quebecois accent and its distinct
lexical variants. Over time, this had a massive impact on my confidence in French and would eventually take a lot of work as an adult to overcome while allowing myself to rediscover a sense of my bilingual identity.

Nonetheless, I was fortunate enough to have experienced distinct methods for teaching French to second language learners as an undergraduate student and this has certainly informed my beliefs around FSL education and my passion for seeing it evolve to better suit the needs of learners today. In my personal experience, few teachers were successful in promoting the use of casual French in the classroom and rarely were my teachers able to get my peers talking to each other in French. Instead, there was a large use of English in the classroom and it often reduced any motivation to attempt engaging with French. Many of my teachers did, however, try to implement systems of reward to encourage students to speak exclusively in French but these were sometimes used in problematic ways. For example, it is common for teachers to implement a simple system where students are given a number of paper bills representing money and these are taken away if the student is caught speaking English. Later, they will have less classroom money to cash in for prizes. Overall, this is not necessarily a bad system but in many instances this was used ineffectively in my classrooms. Many students interpreted this as extra motivation to use English in covert ways and avoided speaking all together while others, like myself, used commonly accepted words, phrases or grammatical structures from other regional variations of French and these variants were not accepted as “proper French” in the classroom.

Moreover, my experiences as a French tutor and frequent volunteer in various classrooms have shown me that many of many of my experiences persist today for other
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students. Many students are not in classrooms that provide a low-pressure space for them to practice their oral French skills and as a result these students do not feel comfortable honing their skills in the classroom. Without the encouragement of creativity and making room for error while learning a second language, it is easy for students to feel out of place in using French especially in the high-scrutiny realm of oral production. As a future teacher, this is something I hope to change for my own students. My post-secondary education includes a background in Teaching and Learning French as a Second Language and Linguistics, both of which served to strengthen my resolve in finding practical solutions for improving FSL students’ oral French skills and learning how to best meet the needs of second language learners so they can use their second language in appropriate ways in the real world.

1.4 Overview

Chapter 1 includes the introduction and purpose of this study, the research questions, as well as how I came to be involved in this topic and study. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature surrounding French Immersion education in Canada, sociolinguistic competence in French and the current suggested practices to foster confidence and a healthy bilingual identity in students. Chapter 3 provides the methodology and procedure used in this study including information about the sample participants and data collection instruments. Chapter 4 identifies the participants in the study and describes the data as it addresses the research question. Chapter 5 includes limitations of the study, conclusions, recommendations for practice, and further reading and study. References and a list of appendices follow at the end.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter I review the pertinent research surrounding students in FSL programs within the Ontario context, focusing specifically on their demonstrated competence and confidence in their skills. I will concentrate largely on students in French Immersion programs not only because these programs are widely regarded as offering students the best chance at achieving a high degree of competence in French but they are also largely unique to Canada, providing further insight into bilingualism within the Canadian context (Safty, 1991). I review first the current dominant pedagogical theories for teaching French as a second language in Ontario in order to contextualize the contemporary setting for Ontario students and their position in relation to the larger French-speaking world. I then review research regarding the state of Immersion students' French skills and I consider where their strengths and weaknesses tend to lie. Finally, I explore the issues surrounding language anxiety and identity and their correlations with confidence in using French functionally in the real world, especially for French Immersion students.

2.1 Dominant Pedagogical Theories

2.1.1 The birth and development of French Immersion in Canada

The concept of bilingual education found footing and grew remarkably quickly in Canada beginning in 1965 with a group of Anglophone parents and a team of university researchers in Quebec who persuaded a suburban Montreal school board to experiment with instruction in English and French for Anglophone children (Safty, 1991). Hoping to improve
cross-cultural communication amongst Anglophone and Francophone people in Quebec by immersing English monolingual students beginning in kindergarten in a curriculum taught partially in French, this program was wildly successful (Safty, 1991). So successful, in fact, that it later lead to the development of the French Immersion programs we now see across Canada in public schools and that have helped to make the Canadian education system quite unique (Safty, 1991).

It is especially important to note that Canadian society and its collective sense of identity continues to incorporate a bilingual identity within its multicultural identity (Safty, 1991). This is particularly interesting considering a history of political tension between Anglophone and Francophone people, however, it seems that despite this many Canadian citizens feel bilingual education and identity remain an essential part of Canadian culture (Safty, 1991). As such, French Immersion programs and their ability to offer students a bilingual education and ideology continue to be of great importance to the Canadian education system.

### 2.1.2 The CEFR and the Action-Oriented Approach

Looking even more specifically at the Ontario context, we see that through the years French Immersion programming has adapted to suit the dominant pedagogical approaches that researchers in this field have proposed. The Ontario Ministry of Education has adopted the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the action-oriented approach which seek to create language learners that are social agents, able to interact authentically in the target language in a variety of situations (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). This approach is a step beyond the long-reigning communicative approach that influenced French Immersion programs greatly. While the communicative approach
stated that the goal of teaching a language is to foster communicative competence in real-life situations, the action-oriented approach takes this to the next level by detailing the connections between “teaching and learning, objectives and evaluation, the individual and the social, the classroom and the world beyond” (Piccardo, 2014). Using the CEFR as a tool, with its extensive explanation of specific practices for classrooms using “Can Do Statements” as learning goals for students and the Diplôme d'études en langue française (DELF) as a means of assessing students overall language competency level, French Immersion teachers in Ontario have begun thinking about their teaching in new ways.

Clearly, the CEFR has been adopted into the Ontario context rapidly and with great enthusiasm. The Ontario Ministry of Education has strongly advocated for the implementation of this approach, going so far as to include it in their most recent Framework for Second Languages in Ontario schools, declaring that the CEFR is a “valuable asset for informing instruction and assessment” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). A point which should not be taken lightly as it is worth acknowledging that despite Canada’s long history as leaders in this kind of education system we have nonetheless readily adopted a highly Eurocentric system to help inform future practice rather than continuing to build and improve upon the uniquely Canadian system that speaks to the particular set of circumstances present in Canadian society. Although this system will likely continue to impact future pedagogical practice, it is important that we recognize that the CEFR is not without its flaws and limitations. As Faez et. al reported in 2011, there are several critics of the CEFR who question its process, which relies on teachers or raters to evaluate the proficiency of students who choose to challenge the CEFR levels (A1, A2, B1, B2 at the elementary and secondary school level) through the DELF test (Faez, Majhanovich, Taylor, Smith & Crowley, 2011).
These critics point out that the CEFR does not truly provide a scale of actual learner proficiency but rather the teacher or raters' perceptions of it. In essence, it is the common framework of the teachers or raters and not that of the neutral body the CEFR attempts to position itself as (Faez, Majhanovich, Taylor, Smith & Crowley, 2011). Critics have also noted that the descriptors used by the CEFR to define abilities are somewhat inconsistent as some use specific situations while others do not and roles of participants within one level can be mixed while the divisions between the levels is unclear (Faez, Majhanovich, Taylor, Smith & Crowley, 2011).

The biased nature of results produced through the CEFR combined with the potential for confusion has lead to many teachers feeling unsure of how to effectively implement this approach in their classrooms. Faez et. al found that teachers recognized the potential of CEFR-based teaching in their classrooms, mentioning that it could improve learner autonomy and self-assessment, self-confidence and motivation all while encouraging authentic language use in the classroom (Faez, Majhanovich, Taylor, Smith & Crowley, 2011). However, they also stated that the CEFR felt like an add-on to the already demanding current curriculum leaving them feeling as though they did not have the time to dedicate to implementing its many aspects and activities. Additionally, these teachers felt that they had a limited understanding of the system and its multiple facets, thus feeling unable to properly implement it in their classrooms (Faez, Majhanovich, Taylor, Smith & Crowley, 2011). It is clear that increased professional development and information is required in order for teachers to feel well-equipped to use this system effectively. Fortunately, this is a feasible endeavour and many teachers who participated in the study by Faez et. al agreed that increased exposure and practice will greatly improve their ability to implement the CEFR
(Faez, Majhanovich, Taylor, Smith & Crowley, 2011). Interestingly, many teachers who participated in the study by Faez et al also mentioned that they were unsure of this approach's applicability to the French Immersion context. Perhaps fuelled by confusion around how to implement the system, teachers said that they felt it would have a stronger impact in Core French programs (Faez, Majhanovich, Taylor, Smith & Crowley, 2011). The reasoning behind this is worth noting as the teachers point out that in Core French the language is taught simply as a subject, which suits the CEFR descriptors as they look at the ability of students to use the target language to perform tasks, while conversely French Immersion programs are focused on the mastery of curriculum content in addition to, and through, the target language. Teachers expressed that the CEFR descriptors simply do not acknowledge learners’ ability to successfully complete tasks in various subjects beyond strictly language use (Faez, Majhanovich, Taylor, Smith & Crowley, 2011).

2.2 Current State of Immersion Competence

2.2.1 Strengths and weaknesses in student competence

Fairly extensive research regarding the competence of French as a second language (FSL) learners in Ontario has been done and continues to be of great interest. Learning where students tend to fall on the continuum of fluency and what factors may have lead them there provides invaluable insight that can inform future pedagogy. Many studies have shown that FSL learners in Ontario generally continue to not approach native speaker tendencies in their use of the language despite a long history of research outlining the various factors that can lead to success (Dewaele, 2004; Nadasdi, Mougeon & Rehner, 2003; Nadasdi, Mougeon & Rehner, 2004; Nadasdi, Mougeon & Rehner, 2005). Instead, what we tend to see amongst
second language learners is a strong tendency to use almost exclusively formal and hyper-
formal variants of the language regardless of the social situation, which deviates significantly
from the tendencies of native speakers to adjust their language choices depending on the
appropriate level of formality required (Nadasdi, Mougeon & Rehner, 2003; Nadasdi,
Mougeon & Rehner, 2004; Nadasdi, Mougeon & Rehner, 2005). These findings are
disheartening as they demonstrate that students do not seem to be aware of the various ways
to interact in French, particularly with oral expression which has largely been the focus of
this strand of research.

As such research shows, students are not being equipped with the tools necessary to
enter into the Francophone world and appropriately and effectively interact with other French
speakers. Most studies recommend that the best way to avoid this issue is to increase the
amount of exposure students have to authentic Francophone materials, texts and speakers
(Mougeon, Rehner & Nadasdi, 2003;2004;2005; Dewaele, 2004; Huang, 2014) . However, as
will be discussed further in the following sections, this can be an immensely difficult task as
FSL students often feel disconnected from the French-speaking community and thus likely
struggle to feel authentically connected to a world they remain isolated from. This is an
ongoing issue that truly highlights the disparity between what research shows to be best
practice and what is actually occurring in classrooms.

2.2.2 Practising what we preach; challenges in implementing best practices

Despite the best efforts of researchers, real classrooms are not always reaping the
benefits of what is generally considered best practice in second language teaching. There are
many factors behind this reality, so the issues teachers face on a daily basis can be complex
and multifaceted. Previous research has looked into the problems teachers experience in
integrating all the perspectives research has shown should be present within the classroom. For example, in a study conducted by Ajayi in 2008 looking at English as a second language (ESL) teachers in the United States it was shown that many teachers struggle with practically integrating sociocultural perspectives into their classrooms, particularly in the face of institutional and technological barriers (Ajayi, 2008). Teachers reported feeling that they did not have adequate access to technology, a major barrier to their ability to immerse their students in the living and breathing world of the target language (Ajayi, 2008). Moreover, teachers were frustrated by policies which did not seem to reflect the social and political context within which their students were learning their second language, specifically noting that policies stated they were to largely ignore the connection between their students' native languages and the languages spoken in their communities in order to entirely favour the target language (Ajayi, 2008).

Once again, these issues pose a potential problem in making students feel isolated from the target language. When a language is only shown to exist within the walls of a classroom all while ignoring the larger context within which these students are learning the language, including the relationship between this target language and their native language, students are at great risk of feeling completely disconnected from the language and its culture. Without a connection to the target language motivation levels are highly likely to decline, only further causing students to disengage and reduce their potential to acquire functional language skills.
2.3 Where Confidence Meets Competence: Language Identity and Anxiety

2.3.1 Language Anxiety

For many learners of a second language, anxiety when in situations where they need to use the target language can be a major obstacle to overcome. Interacting with native speakers in nearly any situation, be it informal or not, can cause second language learners to feel insecure about their skills and consequently refrain from interacting (Huang, 2014). This kind of anxiety can even lead second language learners to avoid situations where they might have a chance to interact with native speakers all together. This is particularly harmful as much of research has shown that one of the best ways for students to rapidly improve their skills while deepening their understanding of the many ways to express themselves in the target language is to interact with native speakers in authentic situations (Dewaele, 2004; Nadasdi, Mougeon & Rehner, 2003; Nadasdi, Mougeon & Rehner, 2004; Nadasdi, Mougeon & Rehner, 2005). Experiencing language anxiety is a combination of one's first language (L1) identity, their second language (L2) identity and the relationship between these along with their overall self-confidence (Huang, 2014). As such, the level of anxiety an L2 learner might experience can vary wildly. Nonetheless, some researchers agree that a language learner with high self-confidence is likely to maintain a positive attitude and motivation towards their target language and is therefore more likely to successfully acquire the second language (Huang, 2014). Essentially, self-confidence can be the key that unlocks the door to the target language and its community, as so much of language learning requires making mistakes and having the courage to continue using the language despite these possible mistakes. Consequently, it is important for teachers of second languages to create an
environment in which their students not only feel safe enough to use the target language within the classroom but also one where they are learning the skills necessary to apply what they know in the real world. In other words, second language teachers must not only focus on the concrete skills needed to speak a language, such as grammar or pronunciation, but also the larger skills like confidence and persistence so imperative to L2 learners' success.

Language anxiety can also have a direct impact on students' overall language identity. L2 learners can feel as though they are someone else when using their L2 as they are limited in how they can express themselves, unlike in their native language (Huang, 2014). This is an interesting impact of language anxiety as it shows that the effects of feeling nervous to speak in a second language essentially create a cycle, where one refrains from using the language with native speakers, reducing their chances of learning the various ways to express themselves while making them feel disconnected from the community, which then causes them to likely never acquire these skills and therefore further isolates them from the community so they have even less courage to use the language in real life situations.

2.3.2 Language Identity: Immersionese and La Francophonie

Feeling connected to the language one is trying to learn is imperative if we expect students to be able to connect authentically to the materials and situations they are presented with as learners. However, as Sylvie Roy pointed out in 2010, many French Immersion students do not feel that they fully belong to either the monolingual English community or the monolingual French community in Canada and instead feel as though they exist somewhere between, with a bilingual identity that is not generally seen as sufficient enough to be considered legitimate members of the French speaking community (Roy, 2010). French Immersion students and English stream students often separate themselves socially in schools
so that French Immersion students feel as though they exist within their own social and linguistic world, causing them to be somewhat removed from the monolingual English community around them as well as the French-speaking community they do not yet feel competent enough for (Roy, 2010). Roy also notes that bilingualism as part of Canada's national official discourse is a dominant ideology that impacts all aspects of Canadian society, from federal institutions to daily life (Roy, 2010). She goes on to say that within this context many Canadians feel that in order to belong to either of the language groups, French or English, one must be accepted as members of the target community or, perhaps even more powerful, be able to “speak as native speakers do” (Roy, 2010). With this in mind, it is clear that the legitimacy of one's bilingual identity seems to be constantly under the scrutiny of dominant social and political ideologies which create a complex dynamic in the Canadian context. As such, it can be difficult for students to feel as though they have the right to be active members of the French-speaking community in Canada, causing them to once again feel isolated in learning the language only within the academic setting and continuing to refrain from using it outside of their classrooms.

It is also important to note that being bilingual is not the result of two monolingual identities existing within one person but instead it is its own, unique combination. Often, one culture may hold a greater weight for a particular speaker, likely their first language's community, and they will tend to feel they belong more to this community than they do the other. For French Immersion students, this often means that they may feel or be seen as Anglophone people who happen to be learning French (Roy, 2010). However, their language identity is often much more complex than this suggests. Roy reports that many French Immersion students feel that they are bilingual but “not entirely” as their French speaking
skills are not on par with native speakers (Roy, 2010). French Immersion students and their parents seem to feel that true bilingualism can only be achieved when one can speak both languages with equal fluency (Roy, 2010). Overall then, it seems that bilingualism is of great importance in Canadian society but in order to actually be bilingual one must speak the second language with equal competence to that of a native speaker, which Roy reported includes using slang and speaking fluidly according to French Immersion students and parents (Roy, 2010). This of course is incredibly difficult to achieve, particularly when students continue to feel isolated and thus demotivated from trying to access the French-speaking community. Nonetheless, there is room for hope for French Immersion students who, if they can accept that they possess social and cognitive competencies that differentiate them from monolinguals, will likely be more motivated to apply their abilities and improve upon them through authentic interaction and a persistent effort towards improving their French (Roy, 2010).

2.4 Conclusion

The connection between language anxiety and identity and its potential impact on the development of confident and competent French speakers learning French as a second language in Canada has not truly been made in previous research. Many have discussed that French Immersion students in Canada continue to fail at approaching native norms in their use of the language but this can, in part, be attributed to these learners' sense of isolation and inability to access the target culture. Although many researchers agree that the best way to improve students' skills is to introduce them to authentic materials and social situations it is my belief that if students continue to feel disconnected from the French-speaking world we
cannot expect them to relate authentically to these situations and effectively benefit from them. Instead, FSL programming should focus on building students' sense of belonging first and foremost so that a deeper connection can be made possible. The French-speaking world is vast and diverse so students need early exposure to its many facets in order to positively contextualize themselves within it. In doing so, students will have a better chance at finding what aspects of this culture resonate with them and with what part of the French-speaking community they feel they can belong. Students should not be limited to exposure to French-speaking communities that exist only in European, particularly Parisian, contexts as these are far too narrow for students. Additionally, students should recognize that French-speaking communities in Canada are large and diverse, stretching beyond the borders of Quebec. Through exploration, teachers need to keep the scope of this world broad so that students can find themselves in it. It is the goal of this study to explore how FSL educators in Ontario are effectively introducing their students to the French-speaking world and how this is impacting their sense of belonging, their confidence in speaking the language, and in turn their evolving competence.
Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I describe the research methodology for this study. I begin by reviewing the overall approach, procedures and data collection instruments before elucidating participant sampling and recruitment strategies. I explain data analysis techniques and review the ethical considerations pertinent to my study. I also identify a range of methodological limitations while elaborating on the strengths of the methodology. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a brief summary of essential methodological decisions and my rationale for these given the research purpose.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

This research study was conducted using a qualitative research approach involving a literature review and semi-structured interviews with teachers. In so doing, this research study assumes the philosophical assumptions of qualitative research; including beliefs about ontology and epistemology (Creswell, 2013). Ontologically, the study presents various realities or experiences reported by the participants while epistemologically the study is done in the “field” of the participants (in their workplaces) amongst a teaching community the researcher is connected with in order to have an understanding of the context in which the participants are sharing their views (Creswell, 2013).

Using qualitative methods is particularly effective and in keeping with the purpose of this study as it allows for an in-depth analysis of particular perspectives, allowing these viewpoints to stand as evidence of which methods and practices are working or not working
in classrooms. As is the case with either qualitative or quantitative data, where the data collected is influenced by the researcher, this takes under assumption the fact that these perspectives are valuable (Denzin, 2009). Given the sampling criteria and procedures below (sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2), this study aims to present the opinions of leaders in the FSL teaching community and validate their perspectives on how to foster healthy language identities in the classroom. Through the use of interviews in this study, participants’ authentic experiences provide the basis for the findings.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection used in this study is the semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix B). Semi-structured interviews provide the opportunity to hear about participants’ lived experiences while validating their expertise (Creswell, 2013). The semi-structured format allows for the interviewer to design and build an interview that meets their research focus and questions, while allowing for participants to elaborate and even re-direct attention to areas previously unforeseen by the interviewer. As such, all questions included in the interview were open-ended and provided ample opportunity for the interview to elicit responses that elucidated new concepts or viewpoints.

The interview questions have been grouped into five carefully-considered sections: background information, teacher practices, beliefs or values, influencing factors and next steps. Each of these sections upholds a specific purpose; respectively: allowing for contextualization of the participant’s views, an explanation of their practices in their roles, a deeper understanding of their philosophies and what resource support they draw on, the issues they face in their practice and finally their invaluable personal insight and advice for
future teachers. In organizing the questions this way and ensuring participants were made aware of the groupings participants could pace themselves and their answers during the interview. Questions were also kept in these groupings in order to allow for effective data coding by enabling the analysis of types of questions in conjunction with the analysis of individual questions. Moreover, with similar types of responses elicited around the same time during the interview, participants were given the opportunity to make connections and provide deeper responses. Nonetheless, participants were not be provided with interview questions prior to the interview in order to allow for the most authentic responses while ensuring participants did not become stuck in pre-prepared answers.

3.3 Participants

Participants were selected based on strict sampling criteria as outlined in section 3.3.1. Participants agreed to participate upon being contacted and given a review of the intent of the research. In this section, I describe the criteria used to select these participants, the sampling procedures and provide a brief description of both participants.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

The following are the criteria used in order to select participants along with the rationale behind these considerations.

✓ A minimum of 5 years teaching experience at the elementary level in FSL

Participants must have a minimum of 5 years teaching experience at the elementary level in FSL programs as it is the purpose of this study to learn from experienced educators who
have witnessed the struggle of shaping a healthy language identity amongst their students across several years.

✓ A leadership role in FSL programs, particularly French Immersion

Participants must hold a leadership role in FSL programs and I sought in particular those who have been involved with French Immersion programming specifically. It is important that participants hold a leadership role as it is the purpose of this study to hear from influential members of the FSL programs in Ontario in order to learn more about its strengths, weaknesses and potential to create an environment that nourishes a healthy language identity. Participants with connections to French Immersion in particular were sought as they will have taught in the context that is considered the best environment for improving student confidence and competence in French.

✓ A leadership role in promoting healthy language identity amongst FSL students

Participants must hold a leadership role in promoting healthy language identity amongst FSL students as it is essential that participants have experience and insight on how to help students develop their language identity in the FSL program as well as the challenges and opportunities present therein.

3.3.2 Sampling Procedures

In order to recruit these participants I relied both on my connections and contacts in a teaching community as a volunteer and current teacher candidate as well as actively seeking out known leaders in the Kensington District School Board (name changed to protect the identities of participants) located in southern Ontario. This board is comprised of 115
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schools; 84 elementary schools, 43 of which offer French Immersion programming, and 31 secondary schools, 14 of which offer French Immersion programming. In order to avoid placing pressure to participate on these educators I provided my name and information along with information about the project and allowed them to volunteer to contribute to the study. In so doing I carefully selected willing participants who were recognized as leaders in the FSL programs in the Kensington District School Board and who offered to provide their invaluable insight.

3.3.3 Participant Bios

Participants were carefully selected using the criteria outlined in section 3.3.1. Two participants were ultimately selected who currently hold different positions in the Kensington District Board and therefore begin to represent different perspectives. The participants will be referred to as Wendy and Michael throughout the report of findings (names changed to protect identities). Wendy is a French Immersion teacher in Kensington District School Board with over ten years of teaching experience. She is currently teaching grades three and four in a dual-track school where both French Immersion and the regular English stream are offered. Michael is the system principal for French as a Second Language in Kensington District School Board and holds 30 years of experience as a teacher and administrator. In selecting a teacher and an administrator as participants an attempt at a holistic representation of the issues present in FSL was made.

3.4 Data Analysis

The process of collecting and analysing data for this study was multi-faceted. I first recorded and conducted the 45-60 minute interviews and later transcribed them in their
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entirety. From this I coded each transcript separately using the established research questions as an interpretive tool, focusing on the larger sections as well as the individual questions. I created categories of data (i.e. resources given or challenges faced) and themes across categories (i.e. the environment of FSL). I synthesized where possible and determined areas previously not considered, when appropriate. I also considered “null data”; what participants did not speak to and why this is significant in the findings.

The structure of the interview (Appendix B) allows for interviewees to pass through the “apprehension phase” during the first section of questions by answering familiar questions about themselves and their work (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). With this in mind, the majority of analysis focuses on sections 2-5 once the “exploration phase” was achieved and the interviewee was engaged in an in-depth description of their thoughts and responding candidly to open-ended questions after developing a rapport with the interviewer (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In keeping with the established ideal scenario when conducting qualitative research, data was analysed as it was collected so that an understanding of themes and issues emerged as the process was underway, allowing for adjustments when necessary (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

In order to maintain ethical standards, this study considered several aspects of participant privacy and well-being. Firstly, participants were asked to sign a consent letter (Appendix A) giving their consent to be interviewed as well as audio-recorded. The consent letter gave an overview of the study, addressed ethical implications and specified expectations for participation (one 45-60 minute semi-structured interview). Secondly, all
participants were assigned a pseudonym in order to remain anonymous. Their identities remain entirely confidential and any identifying markers related to their students or schools have been excluded to avoid their apprehension to share information that may feel would jeopardise their positions (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Participants were made well aware of this fact and were notified of their right to withdraw from participation at any stage of the research study in order to protect their sense of ease before, during and after the interview. Thirdly, they were also made aware of the fact that all data (audio recordings) were be stored on my password protected laptop/ipad and will be destroyed after 5 years. This is an essential part of the study as it helped participants to feel they could respond to questions candidly, providing more authentic and valuable data.

There are no known risks to participation in this study, however, participants were reminded that they have the right to decline answering any questions they did not feel comfortable with during the interview as well as re-stating their right to withdraw from participation. This will served as a key part of fostering a rapport with participants, an essential part of achieving the “exploration phase” during the interview (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006) once again promoting their willingness to provide candid responses.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

It is important to note the various strengths underlying the choices in the methodology as well as the limitations inherent in its approach. The scope of the study is small as it draws only on two educators and therefore cannot be used as a generalization of teacher experiences. This said, by focusing on a small group it will be possible to execute an in-depth interview as well as a deeper analysis of responses from each participant. Importantly,
although it is often the case that similar situations are described in inconsistent ways by
different teachers, every perspective is valid in that it creates meaning for the story-teller
(Elliot, 1994). Therefore, it is worthwhile to hear these voices and to learn from the
experience of leaders in the teaching community while also validating these kinds of
perspectives as valuable for education research and future teachers.

Similarly, there is no student or parent perspective due to the ethical parameters
permitted in the Masters of Teaching program at OISE. While these voices are important as
well, this study allows for a validation of teacher and educator voice and expertise in their
field. Since “teachers are knowledge generators rather than appliers of knowledge generated
by outsiders” (Elliot, 1994), it is crucial to recognize teacher and educator voices as experts
on best practices whose insight and experience can help to inform future practice.

3.7 Conclusion

In sum, this study made use of semi-structured interviews with teachers and educators
who volunteered to provide their insight. They were selected for participation based on their
experience, leadership role in the teaching community and their focus on promoting the
development of healthy language identities in the French Immersion setting. Interviews
consisted of five sections of open-ended questions designed to allow participants to elaborate
on their views and draw on their experiences as valid and valuable sources. By analysing a
small sample this study analysed in depth the themes, issues and viewpoints raised during the
interviews. In so doing, this study presents unique insight from teachers and educators that
could inform future practice in FSL classrooms regarding the creation of learning
environments that can help students to develop healthy language identities.
Chapter Four: Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter I report and discuss the findings of this study. The primary research question asked how educators can improve the confidence and competence of their FSL students in their French skills and encourage them to act as participants in French rather than onlookers. Two semi-structured interviews with educators in the French as a Second Language program in Kensington District School Board (name changed to protect identities) were conducted. These educators will be referred to as Michael and Wendy throughout the report of findings (names changed to protect identities). It is important to note once again here that Michael holds an administrator’s position in Kensington District School Board (KDSB) as the system principal for French as a Second Language while Wendy is a French Immersion classroom teacher currently teaching grades three and four. Through this research four major themes emerged: the environment of FSL programs, healthy language identity building, obstacles to success and best practices for educators. This chapter will focus on these themes, the information they reveal as well as the relationships between them.

4.1 Theme 1 – The Environment of FSL Programs

This first theme underpins the key purpose of this research, improving French Immersion programming, as it contains all of the data pertaining to the overall environment of current FSL programs in KDSB. In looking at the general perception of FSL programs by students, parents and the community as well as the curriculum, administrative support and collaboration amongst teachers this theme serves as a window into the landscape of FSL in KDSB. As discussed in Chapter 2, Canadian society’s collective sense of identity continues
to meld bilingualism and multiculturalism (Safty, 1991). The French Immersion program, which was born in Montreal, Quebec and is now seen across Canadian public schools, offers Canadian students the unique opportunity to learn in a bilingual environment (Safty, 1991). With this context in mind, this theme looks at the current environment of FSL programs in a particular southern Ontario public school board in terms of the perception of its purpose, parent expectations as well as teacher and administrator dynamics. What is particularly interesting for this study, however, is that both a French Immersion teacher and an FSL administrator were interviewed allowing for a more balanced perspective on the dynamics of this environment overall. As such, a comparison of aligned or differing views can be made.

The underlying motive behind participation in FSL programs was discussed briefly by Michael as he stated that these programs help to promote acceptance and a broader world view in students. He explained that by valuing the importance of speaking a second language or identifying with its culture students are able to make connections between their culture and others, ultimately recognizing that people are more alike than they are different. In Michael’s opinion this is one of the greatest benefits of students participating in the FSL program as it helps them to become more capable of seeing themselves in others and vice versa. I think what is especially note-worthy about this point is that it speaks to the potential of FSL programs to help promote empathy in our students. Interestingly, Wendy pointed out that it is often the case that French may be a third or fourth language as is the case for what she says is approximately 85% of her students. Wendy went on to explain that in a multicultural school, such as hers, where many of the students are new arrivals to Canada the students will often have a very strong sense of their own cultures and may already feel connected to different languages and cultures as their parents may speak various languages or come from different
backgrounds. I believe this is an extremely important aspect of the dynamic of FSL programs in KDSB and the future of these programs in general. As student populations continue to diversify it is crucial that we consider the variety of backgrounds students hail from and how these can be incorporated effectively in the classroom. This particular consideration and its connection to effective programming will be discussed further in themes 2 and 4.

The perception of the purpose or value of FSL, however, is not always shared by all stakeholders and this can present some challenges for educators. Michael pointed out that there can sometimes be a negative mindset surrounding French language learning in some communities as parents may not see the value of it and in turn their children come to school with those same biases. I believe this statement demonstrates that open communication between parents and schools is key in ensuring parental expectations are realistic and valued. Wendy noted much the same as Michael when she stated that whatever occurs in the home environment is brought with the student to school every day and although she as a teacher cannot control this influence she can regularly communicate with parents about refraining from discouraging their students or expecting their language levels to rise immediately. I think the importance of managing parental expectations cannot be understated and this report from Wendy speaks to the purpose of managing these expectations: maintaining student motivation. She explains that she sometimes finds parents have unrealistic anticipations about their child’s acquisition of French and has noticed that reminding parents regularly that their new language learners will not be perfect in their language skills right away is an important step in preventing students feeling discouraged at home. This account is important because it speaks to the significance of trying to create consistency between the school and
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home for students, particularly in expectations around their learning and encouraging their progress.

Beyond these ideas, three sub-themes appeared strongly throughout the two interviews and allow for a deeper analysis of what makes up the environment of FSL programs in KDSB. Each of these sub-themes is essential in understanding a broader picture of FSL programming as it stands today as well as how it could progress in the future.

4.1.1 Sub-Theme – Curriculum: Progress and Challenges

Both interviewees commented on the FSL curriculum and its strengths as well as its challenges (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). What is very interesting, however, is their differing stances on the effectiveness of the current curriculum in terms of implementation by classroom teachers which I believe speaks to their different perspectives due to their roles. Michael pointed out that the FSL curriculum has come a very long way over the years and in so doing has forced publishers to begin changing the types of materials they provide. This point is significant as he is referencing the many changes present in the newer Ontario FSL curriculum that are a clear departure from previous versions (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). He went on to say that the greatest progression in the curriculum is the inclusion of cultural concepts and that putting this wording directly into the curriculum helps to ensure teachers are including it in their classroom. This assertion from Michael speaks to the evolution of the current curriculum and its intended purpose as a step towards emphasizing cultural connections in every aspect of learning (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).

However, Wendy’s perspective on this was that it is not necessarily a reality in most French Immersion classrooms and I think that this speaks to her lens as a classroom teacher on the
frontline of implementing the curriculum. She argued that the design of the curriculum makes it seem as though inter-cultural knowledge is secondary to supposedly core concepts like reading, writing and listening and that this is particularly clear to her in team meetings where decisions on how the strands will be addressed are made. Wendy stated that cultural concepts are rarely discussed in these meetings and tend to only arise as ideas for a surface activity around special holidays. This is especially interesting because it points out the consistent gap between intentions and reality that can be seen in schools. While the curriculum has indeed come a long way, school teams may often continue to waiver from what is known to be best practices in an effort to simply get through content.

Moreover, Wendy noted that she often sees teachers leaning on pre-fabricated units on “random topics” such as pizza or the circus and that this speaks to teachers feeling unable to access more complex and engaging resources. This statement speaks to the severe difficulties in access to appropriate, authentic and fresh resources which continues to be a huge factor in French Immersion programming and FSL programming in general as will be discussed at length in sections 3.2, 4, 5.1 and 5.3. Wendy went on to note that since there is already so much to cover many teachers seem to tack on cultural concepts intermittently as a means of checking it off the list. She stated that since it is impossible to learn all that is contained in the curriculum in a single year it is important for teachers to determine what is necessary to teach and what is most valuable to learn. Wendy argued that by embedding the development of a healthy language identity into their program teachers can help students to feel motivated to continue learning the language because they will see themselves as lifelong language learners. Michael echoed this sentiment as he stated that by including the learning of culture student motivation to continue pursuing French will increase as they see
themselves in this culture. I think it is crucial to note that both Michael, an administrator, and Wendy, a classroom teacher, felt strongly that connecting to the Francophone culture and allowing it to form a part of the student’s identity is an effective way to keep the student engaged in their language learning.

4.1.2 Sub-Theme – Administrative and Board Level Support

Administrative support is another important piece of the puzzle in running effective FSL programs. Perhaps due to her role as a classroom teacher, Wendy spoke far more frequently about the need for strong administrative support. She pointed out that one of the challenges faced by French Immersion teachers and the program in general is that administrators, particularly principals and vice-principals, tend not to be able to speak French. I think this insight from Wendy shows her sense of lacking representation for FSL in administration which can lead to less focus on FSL overall. Wendy stated that amongst the twenty administrators she has worked with only two were able to speak French. This is a particularly interesting point as it demonstrates that the consistency of low numbers of French speaking educators is only exacerbated at the administrative level, adding a new layer of challenges to the program. Wendy went on to say that she feels it is important for there to be board level administrators who can help mentor French Immersion teachers in much the same way there are Math coaches or Literacy coaches in KDSB. This statement struck me as a really revealing one because it speaks to the undervaluing of FSL programs in terms of widespread support, despite its extreme size and popularity in KDSB. By implementing these kinds of programs and boosting administrator knowledge of FSL programs I believe huge strides in running more consistently effective programs could be achieved.
4.1.3 Sub-Theme – Collaboration Amongst Teachers

Teacher collaboration was a concept that came up regularly in both interviews and I think this is largely because it is perhaps the most effective means to helping FSL programs to evolve, particularly in terms of better addressing student language identity. Wendy made a critical point at the end of her interview as she stated that FSL courses and Professional Development even from high level institutions are not providing quality information or resources to address healthy language identity building and as such we cannot expect teachers to embed these ideas into their programs as they are lacking the experience and the knowledge to do so. This is an extremely important statement because it encapsulates what forms a large part of the problem in implementing consistent programs that nourish language identity. By focusing collaborative meetings on curriculum content and specific skills many teachers are left feeling overwhelmed and unequipped to address larger issues like language identity and it continues to be largely ignored. Without effective dissemination of knowledge through teacher education, professional development and team meetings around the crucial component of language identity to help FSL students and a disproportionate focus on particular skills like reading, writing, listening and oral communication these programs fail to emphasize the aspect of language learning that will keep students motivated to continue learning: a deep sense of connection to it.

However, both Michael and Wendy emphasized the importance of teacher collaboration and its effectiveness in helping teachers to surmount a variety of issues, including lack of knowledge or resources. Michael pointed out the fact that newer teachers may feel isolated when they are unaware of the available resources and he stressed the importance of a school climate that encourages sharing and support between teachers. I think
this statement is significant as it gets at the idea that a school environment can hugely impact the experiences of teachers, particularly new ones. Wendy commented frequently on the importance of teacher collaboration, stating several times that she often sees that teachers do not share their ideas particularly in French Immersion and instead each teacher is working in isolation. This coupled with the severe lack of French Immersion resources, Wendy states, causes teachers to constantly be re-inventing the wheel rather than building on ideas and evolving the program through collaboration. I found this statement to be striking as it would seem that teachers would be inclined to work together to reduce the additional workload present in French Immersion since they often have to create resources to fill in the gaps between curriculum expectations and available content in French. Another surprising statement made by Wendy was that she has found that, particularly in French Immersion, teachers feel the pressure to be wonderful, self-sufficient teachers and that sometimes this can translate to “hoarding” all of their innovative ideas rather than sharing with others. While this can be seen as a surprising and disheartening revelation I think it can easily be understood and sympathized with when one considers the vastly different experience of a French teacher from that of an English teacher. Due to the lack of resources and support most FSL teachers are forced to create a significant amount of their own resources. When this kind of workload is added on to the already overwhelming schedule of classroom teachers, along with the general lack of support, many teachers may feel a deeper sense of attachment to their work and an unwillingness to give it away.
4.2 Theme 2 – Healthy Language Identity Building

The next theme to be considered essentially acts as the core of this research. The Healthy Language Identity Building theme looks at any and all instances of data where the notion of students building their language identities as bi/plurilinguals and how this can be effectively done in the classroom is discussed. This theme also includes discussions around student confidence in their second language learning, their motivation to participate in the classroom and the teacher’s role in helping students to achieve a sense of belonging to Francophone culture. Two sub-themes presented themselves strongly throughout the interviews and formed a crucial component of examining the notion of a connection with the French language as a learner. These two sub-themes include the data around authentic exposure to French in the classroom as well as discussions around the introduction to, and engagement with, la Francophonie. Importantly, these sub-themes relate directly to one of the key messages presented in this study which states that in order to create a learning environment where these authentic tasks and exposure to culture can be effective in building students’ language identity it is essential that teachers first ensure that students understand that they belong to this group not only as onlookers but as participants. Both interviews provided substantial data to support this belief.

4.2.1 Sub-Theme – Authentic Exposure in the Classroom

The idea of authentic exposure is an essential aspect of any strong FSL program and is a powerful tool in ensuring students have a deep understanding of the diversity amongst Francophones, thereby encouraging their sense of connection with it. This has been a supported concept in second language acquisition research and many researchers emphasize
the importance of exposure to authentic language (Dewaele, 2004, Huang, 2014, Mougeon, Rehner & Nadasdi, 2004; 2003; 2005, Piccardo, 2014, Roy, 2010) In this study, both interviewees spoke to the importance of exposing students to French language and culture in authentic ways. Both participants explained that rather than only showing students artificial or rehearsed French in the classroom (i.e. through worksheets, textbooks, etc.) it is crucial that teachers expose students to French being used in real contexts in the world. Michael pointed out that there are vast resources for this for teachers who are willing to seek them out online, including for example YouTube videos. Michael’s mention of YouTube in particular demonstrates that in modern classrooms the potential for teachers to access multimedia resources to support their program is hugely increased. Wendy supported this statement as well as she claimed in her interview that she thinks multimedia can be a powerful way to introduce authentic resources, especially in helping to expose students to the many varieties of French around the world. I think the fact that both interviewers focused on this idea shows that due to increased access to internet in most classrooms, there has been a large shift in where resources can be found. It is no longer the case that students are restricted to the four walls of the classroom and the books provided. I think these statements also speak to shifting expectations for the responsibility of the teachers, particularly in seeking out resources that can be used in the classroom on their own.

Another paradigm shift that was spoken of by Wendy was that teachers need to move away from worksheet tasks and focus on finding ways for their students to engage in real activities in the community using French as the means of communication. She stated that by giving students opportunities to take action as citizens or engage with different varieties of French around the world in real ways students are far more motivated to participate and will
build their sense of ability to use French practically for something that is meaningful to them. This statement resonated with me because it speaks to the importance of allowing students to direct their learning and using this as the tool for motivating them to engage with the language. I believe that providing these kinds of opportunities to students is one of the most effective ways to build their sense of belonging to Francophone culture as they engage with it in the real world rather than in artificial settings only. Ultimately, this is a way to help students feel more like participants than onlookers.

4.2.2 Sub-Theme – La Francophonie and French Culture

Perhaps the most important and effective concept to introduce students to when trying to encourage their language identity is that of Francophone culture or la Francophonie. Both interviewees emphasized the importance of this area in any FSL program especially in helping students to connect with French language learning authentically. Michael poignantly stated that it is important to introduce students to the diversity of la Francophonie with an emphasis on the similarities between cultures and that in so doing we can begin to shift students’ perspectives from seeing Francophone culture as “they” to “we”. This statement strikes me as especially profound as it represents not only what FSL learning can do for students but also what should be a top priority in FSL programming: building a sense of connection with others. In making this statement Michael makes it clear that it is this shift in thinking that will help students to recognize the connections they already have with Francophone culture and begin to feel a part of it. Wendy also emphasized the importance of helping students to see the similarities between their culture and French culture but she also pointed out that in order for teachers to effectively do this it is crucial that they first ensure their students have a strong understanding of their own backgrounds and cultures. I think this
insight is incredibly useful in beginning to determine how a program that supports healthy language identity development can be implemented and what steps need to be taken to help students experience an authentic connection to la Francophonie. By first focusing on their understanding of their own cultures and later linking it to French culture and allowing comparisons to be made I think that a deeper sense of belonging and understanding of what it means to be part of la Francophonie is achievable. Wendy clarified that in order to successfully build a healthy language identity in her students she thinks it is important to see it as adding French into their already developing identities in general. This statement really resonated with me because it is a perspective that values the cultural backgrounds students already possess and recognizes that joining la Francophonie is essentially adding another layer to their identities. Another statement made by Wendy truly captures the underlying belief that feeling a sense of belonging to la Francophonie is achievable. She states that it is crucial teachers make it clear to their students that “French is French is French is French” and that while it holds many faces around the world, while it may sound different depending where you are, it is all equally valuable. This is an extremely important concept that should be emphasized in all FSL classrooms. Further discussion around this aspect of FSL programming will be discussed in section five.

Wendy also stressed the fact that it is crucial to explain to students that being Francophone simply means being someone who speaks French and that this is a group they belong to already because of their participation in FSL programs. I believe this can be a powerful revelation for students particularly as they struggle with the confidence to say that they are, in fact, bilingual. When students are unable to feel sure of their abilities and their permission to participate in their target language it is no surprise that motivation levels will
be negatively impacted. Without that sense of belonging learning French can become fairly meaningless and this is what, as both interviewees emphasized, FSL programs must strive to avoid.

4.3 Theme 3 – Obstacles to Success

This theme considers the various obstacles that teachers, administrators and FSL programs as a whole face in creating strong and effective programming. Importantly, this theme includes any data related to the impact of a community’s socioeconomic status on these programs along with the issue of access to resources, funding and space in a school environment. The data presented in this theme is supported by research that states funding and lack of resources continues to plague second language teachers, particularly as they attempt to integrate dynamic activities that provide appropriate sociocultural viewpoints (Ajayi, 2008). Once again it is beneficial to have data from both a classroom teacher and an administrator in order to have a more well-rounded perspective on these concerns.

An obstacle that adds a complex dynamic to FSL programs and particularly French Immersion is the socioeconomic status of the community and their ability and willingness to help contribute to accessing authentic resources. As Michael stated, many resources and authentic experience opportunities such as field trips have a cost to them and it is not always within the budget to gain access to them. His acknowledgement of limitations in this statement is important as discussions around the plethora of available resources can often ignore the accessibility issues inherent in participating in these valuable activities. I believe this relates again to administrative support in really paying careful attention to budget choices to avoid relying too heavily on community input and instead working towards
ensuring the FSL programs receive the same opportunities that the English program does based on what the school can provide.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle faced by FSL teachers, particularly in French Immersion, is adequate access to resources in appropriate French language levels that meet curriculum expectations. Wendy reported this severe need when she stated that although there are constantly new and wonderful resources being created in English there are far less so for French and even provided textbooks tend to be years behind as the French version is created as an afterthought. I feel that this is a really important message particularly from an experienced French Immersion teacher. The statement demonstrates that even a teacher with many years of experience feels the struggle of lacking resources in running her program. Wendy also explained that she feels that this issue leads to outdated resources or very basic resources being created by teachers who feel stretched for time and it is this that perpetuates student demotivation and isolation from what they are looking because the result is overly simple tasks that do not connect to students’ lives. Wendy’s statement here represents the domino effect that these obstacles faced by FSL programs create and that is sometimes magnified in the French Immersion program where much more curriculum content is given in French. The sheer lack of resources leads to teacher isolated creation, decreased willingness to share, increased separation between FSL educators, decreased understanding of support needed. All of these factors play a role in leading to programs that continue to isolate students from the content they are learning and decrease their sense of participation in French culture because the resources are not evolving as they should. Interestingly, Michael also commented on the impact of a community’s socioeconomic status in accessing resources. He explained that, as discussed in section 1.2, administrative support is key in
helping FSL programs to run effectively and their support in teacher access to resources is no exception. Michael claimed that it is essential for administrators to value the French program, language and culture and support the teachers’ requests for resources because when schools have limited budgets it can mean that FSL programs are left behind. This is a key statement, particularly from an administrator himself, as it reiterates the necessity of teamwork between administration and teachers in supporting effective programs. By working together to select appropriate resources, FSL classrooms can be supported more fully. Interestingly, Wendy commented on this as well in pointing out that since many administrators do not speak French or know much about FSL programming they often do not know what resources to order and ultimately the decision may lie in the hands of inexperienced or unknowledgeable teachers. This statement represents two of the major hurdles in smooth FSL programming in that there is often a disconnect between administrators and teachers as well as a lack of effective dissemination of knowledge for FSL teachers either through collaboration or professional development. Once again, we see a connection here to the importance of teacher teamwork along with administrative support as discussed in sections 1.2 and 1.3. Ultimately, in order to surmount these concerns it is important for teachers as well as administrators to take initiative in filling those gaps by remaining open to sharing knowledge, valuing FSL programs in schools and building on one another’s ideas to help evolve the program.

4.4 Theme 4 – Best Practices for Educators

Finally, the purpose of this theme is to examine the data concerning what could be considered best practices for teachers and administrators in order to run strong and effective FSL, particularly French Immersion, programs consistently across the school board. It acts
essentially as a culmination of the knowledge gained throughout the data and its themes as both participants shared their ideas about what solutions are possible. In looking at discussions around the importance of a teacher’s role in the classroom and the ideal skills for them to acquire along with the relationship they develop with their students, their assessment practices and the specific resources or activities they draw upon this theme provides an exploration of what can create an effective learning environment for FSL programs. Ultimately, the results presented in this theme serve as an example of what practices teachers and administrators can act upon to improve their programming and support the nourishment of healthy language identities in their FSL students. The vital role of the classroom teacher including their teaching practices and the learning environment they create as well as specific resources or activities that teachers can use practically are discussed.

In looking at all instances of data that concerned teaching practices and the constructed learning environment it was clear that both participants felt that is the classroom teacher who most heavily impacts results. Michael commented on the importance of teacher enthusiasm and rapport with students in helping to keep students interested and comfortable in the classroom. This statement summarizes a crucial factor in making any classroom successful: the relationship teachers are able to build with their students. In any classroom setting it is extremely important that students feel safe and encouraged by their teacher and this is perhaps even more true in a second language classroom where discomfort levels can be significantly higher. One particular aspect of a teaching style discussed especially by Wendy was that of correction. Wendy stated that she has witnessed classrooms where students are not allowed to speak unless they spoke in French and frequently a token system was used to keep the students in competition for who spoke French the most. This statement
really resonated with me as it spoke to my own personal experiences as a French Immersion student as well as what I have continued to witness in schools as a volunteer or teacher candidate. Wendy explained that while she feels competition can be a great thing in the right context she does not feel that an FSL classroom, especially an immersion one where new and complex topics are being covered, is the appropriate context for competition in language use. I believe that this insight really gets at the underlying issue of a need to be more aware of how teaching practices impact students’ ability to develop their language identity. Wendy also commented on the importance of teachers modelling strategies for error correction such as teachers purposefully modelling looking up new words in the dictionary or correcting mistakes during lessons. I think this mention of teacher modelling is key advice for new teachers because it demonstrates a simple but effective way to build a learning environment where students can accept the inevitable errors that come with language learning. When students are unable to feel comfortable experimenting with language or speaking up at all there is little opportunity to develop a sense of belonging to the target language. Both Wendy and Michael also stressed the importance of creating a classroom dynamic where students know that when mistakes are made it is not acceptable to put others down. I think these statements speak again to the importance of creating a safe classroom dynamic and ensuring students are not nervous to experiment with French for fear of correction or shaming either from their teachers or peers. It is important for language learners to experiment without reserve.

Both interviewees also stressed the importance of teacher’s taking the initiative to push their programming towards a focus on language identity building. This is discussed extensively in section 2 of this chapter. However, it is important to note again here when
considering best practices for educators that both participants felt it was highly important for teachers to collaborate and concentrate on evolving their programs as much as possible. Since this can be difficult considering the obstacles faced by FSL teachers, as discussed in sections 1.2 and 3, it is helpful to consider advice provided by both participants. Michael pointed out the importance of a school-wide dynamic that supports collaboration. This statement speaks to his administrative lens but was also echoed by Wendy when she said that more administrators need to work closely with the FSL staff and value its presence in the school. The overall dynamic of collaboration is key in helping teachers to evolve their individual programs. Wendy also advised new teachers to seek out experienced fellow staff who appear open to sharing and to work as closely with them as possible. I think this advice is pointed and practical for new teachers to consider. Although not all staff may be working collaboratively in all schools it is possible to seek out those that are and work together to improve the overall climate of the school.

Throughout the interviews both participants discussed specific activities or resources that could be used by FSL teachers and this data will be presented in this sub-theme. Michael stated that teachers should seek out multimedia resources as frequently as possible particularly when trying to bring in cultural awareness. I think this advice is especially practical as access to authentic perspectives from a variety of French cultures around the world are accessible online, be it through websites, news sources or videos on YouTube. Wendy also claimed that she finds websites like Radio Canada’s Zone Jeunesse and Canadian Parents for French a useful place to start. I think the mention of these websites in particular is helpful in that they represent some of the online resources that provide age appropriate opportunities for students to engage with the French language in authentic ways.
Again, it is crucial for teachers to take the time to seek out their own resources to fill in the gaps that are caused by the severe shortage of viable resources for FSL programs. Although this presents its own obstacles as discussed in section 3 it is important for teachers to recognize the power of teamwork in reducing lower level activities in the classroom.

4.5 Conclusion

Overall, this study presented four key themes that allowed for an analysis of FSL programs, particularly French Immersion, in KDSB including: the environment of FSL programs, healthy language identity building, obstacles to success and best practices for educators. The data presented in this chapter supports the key message of this paper in that focusing on the nurturing of healthy language identities in students will increase their motivation and sense of belonging to French culture so that they can continue to use their skills in the real world. Both interviewees provided extensive insight into the challenges presented in FSL programs, particularly as they relate to developing healthy language identities, as well as practical strategies for surmounting them. Perhaps the strongest message that emerged from the interviews is the critical importance of collaboration amongst teachers and administrators in FSL with a focus on evolving the program towards an emphasis on students’ sense of belonging to French culture. The data supported the belief that by focusing on this development of healthy language identities more students will engage with French as participants rather than feel restricted from it as though they are onlookers.
Chapter Five: Discussion

5.0 Introduction

Many French as a second language (FSL) students report feeling nervous to interact in French, particularly with an audience they know is Francophone (Huang, 2014; Roy 2010) and it was this unfortunate reality that formed part of the inspiration for this research. In this study I set out to explore how FSL teachers can help their students to build healthy language identities that include a sense of authentic connection to the French language so that they can feel confident and competent as bi/plurilinguals. The Ontario FSL curriculum makes frequent reference to the importance of using authentic materials in order to improve students’ sense of connection to what they are learning (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). The belief here is that by exposing students to authentic Francophone resources they will be able to see the diversity, complexity and nuances in French culture and this will encourage their ability to see themselves in these representations. This assertion is supported by both participants in this study and I believe it is a crucial consideration for any FSL educator. However, it was my belief as I began this research that you must first help students feel they are allowed to participate rather than simply act as onlookers no matter how authentic the materials are. Without the belief that they have the ability and the right to participate students will continue to feel disconnected from the French language and will not pursue it beyond the classroom. The findings in this study support this assertion while also pointing to the many challenges and opportunities present in FSL programs in Kensington District School Board (KDSB). The focus of this chapter will be to summarize these findings, unpack their implications for
stakeholders in FSL and provide my recommendations in order to address these issues along with an outline of areas that require further research.

5.1 Overview of Findings and their Significance

The findings of this study revealed four main themes, including: the environment of FSL programs, healthy language identity building, obstacles to success and best practices for educators. From each of these themes emerged key findings that illuminate the current state of FSL in Kensington District School Board while also pointing to the need for change in order to improve the program overall. Overall, findings and analysis showed that exposure to the diversity present in la Francophonie is key and that collaboration amongst teachers is crucial in combatting the ongoing issue of lacking resources in FSL. It was also shown that there are many factors that ultimately lead to what I have termed the FSL Challenge Cycle; outlined in section 5.2. In this section, I provide an overview of these main findings and speak to their significance.

In looking at the data concerning the environment of FSL programs it was made clear that the student population in these programs continues to grow and diversify, with many students speaking other languages at home beyond English and French. This speaks to the importance for considering the backgrounds of students, particularly in relation to their linguistic skills and cultural knowledge. The data also revealed the slightly differing perspectives on the revised FSL curriculum in Ontario as Michael, the administrator, felt that the curriculum has greatly progressed and the emphasis on cultural connections helps ensure teachers are covering this appropriately in their classrooms. The teacher’s perspective present in the data, Wendy, was that authentically connecting to French culture is still largely
overlooked in most classrooms as she stated that this kind of knowledge is often seen as secondary to skill-based components such as speaking or writing. These perspectives both agree that exposing students to French culture is crucial and that this is acknowledged in the curriculum but they represent differing views on whether or not this is actually occurring in classrooms. It was also found that FSL teachers are severely lacking resources in French and this has led to many teachers relying on either pre-fabricated units on “random topics” rather than topics that relate to students’ lives such as pizza or the circus. Moreover, the data showed that collaboration amongst teachers is crucial in any education setting and can greatly improve programs but this is not always occurring in FSL communities. The teacher perspective in this study noted that many FSL teachers must entirely create their own resources as a result of the severe lack of French resources and this often means basic worksheet work. As Wendy explained, this also leads to a tendency for FSL teachers to hoard their work and develop an unwillingness to share as they feel a heightened sense of ownership over the resource. It was also noted by Wendy that teachers feel a high degree of pressure to be viewed as competent teachers and the need to create resources which are often simplistic means many teachers shy away from sharing their work for fear of being seen as a “bad teacher”. These findings in the data are highly significant as they offer insight into why the presence of effective collaboration and complex, engaging tasks continues to be inconsistent across FSL classrooms and communities.

The data also pointed to the importance of administrative support in helping FSL programs to run effectively in schools. The ongoing issue of lacking FSL teachers is exacerbated at the administrative level and, as Wendy pointed out, this often leads to less support overall for French programs in schools. With so few administrative-level staff
members who speak French or have experience in the FSL environment it is no surprise that
this aspect of the school community is so often put on the back burner. Lacking knowledge
or awareness amongst administrators especially around how to support their FSL staff was
presented as a major issue by Wendy. Interestingly, the data given by the administrator
perspective in this study, Michael, also acknowledged the crucial need for administrative
support in running effective FSL programing both in providing resources and carving out
time for teachers to meet and collaborate. Michael explained that the division of funding is
largely reliant on administrator discretion and when these administrators lack awareness of
FSL program needs the teachers and their classrooms continue to suffer from lack of
resources and encouragement to collaborate in order to fill the resource gap. These findings
clearly outline the underlying issues present in the FSL community that contribute to the
ongoing challenges faced by FSL teachers. The implications present in these findings and
how they fit into the self-producing cycle that I believe is present in FSL programs will be
made clear in section 5.2.

Additionally, the data strongly presented that authentic exposure to Francophone
culture and language is the key to encouraging students to build their language identity and
sense of connection to French. Authentic exposure to la Francophonie was presented as the
best way to accomplish this. It was noted by Wendy in particular that building students’
sense of their own backgrounds and culture and allowing them to see the similarities with
French is an effective method in helping students to be able to connect with French and
French culture. The data also pointed to the importance of removing stereotypes in French
cultural education, avoiding tokenizing French experiences and ensuring students recognize
the huge diversity present in la Francophonie. Both participants acknowledged that in
emphasizing the diversity amongst French speakers FSL learners will have a better likelihood of seeing themselves in it as well. These findings reveal the concrete ways teachers can be encouraging their students to develop a sense of connection to French and French culture. Although authentic exposure is now widely recognized as key in ensuring students develop a connection (Huang, 2014; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013; Roy 2010) these findings offer a specific means by which this can be done.

Finally, the data concerning what is considered best practices for FSL educators showed that the teacher’s behaviour and program management have the largest impact on student success overall. The data pointed out the importance of teacher modelling; in corrective strategies for lacking vocabulary and in enthusiasm for pursuing acquisition of the target language. This finding speaks to the huge impact of the teacher on the effectiveness of FSL programs. Their role in the classroom is heightened by virtue of the added need for students to witness strategies and recognize the value in acquiring the French language. It was also made clear in the data that FSL teachers need to seek out collaboration opportunities and act as leaders in creating these connections. Similarly, the data revealed the need for FSL leadership in mentoring new teachers to support them in navigating the challenging landscape of FSL programming. Once again, the need for collaboration is heightened in the FSL community due to the lack of support and resources. The implications of this finding and its role in perpetuating a cycle I believe is present in FSL is further clarified in section 5.2.
5.2 Implications

These findings come together to imply a variety of things for different stakeholders in FSL including teachers, principals and school boards as well as providing implications for myself as a future teacher in this context. In this section I underscore the implications of the findings given in section 5.1 and clarify the connections between them as I present what I believe is the ongoing cycle in FSL programs that perpetuates the challenges faced by teachers and other stakeholders.

Interestingly, neither participant directly articulated the connection between authentic resources and ensuring students feel as though they can be participants as was the original assertion going into this research. While both spoke to the importance of authentic materials and creating a sense of connection with Francophone culture the importance of building students’ sense of their right to act as participants instead of simply onlookers was not addressed as directly as I had expected prior to beginning the research. This implies that further research regarding the relationship between authentic exposure and confidence to participate should be done to determine the strength of this connection. Similarly, both participants requested an explanation of what I meant by language identity and tended to refer to this concept in other ways throughout their interview, often using “connection” instead. This finding in combination with the lacking emphasis on participation throughout the data points to the importance of further research on language identity building and its connection to authentic exposure as a tool to encourage participation. With more knowledge around this educators could begin incorporating it more frequently into their programming and the impact on students could be explored. It remains my belief that building students’
own language identities with a confidence in their bi/plurilingualism will allow them to connect authentically to resources they are given and that it is through this process a true connection with French that will extend beyond the classroom can be achieved.

Additionally, the continued diversification of the student population participating in FSL found in the data and the need for considering the students prior cultural and linguistic knowledge in the French classroom suggests a direct connection to the additional finding that exposing students to the diversity in la Francophonie is an effective way to develop their language identity. These findings combine to imply the need for teachers to focus on creating explicit connections between the experiences of their students and the many experiences possible in Francophone culture. Once again, the severe lack of resources mentioned by the participants connects here in that it may be challenging for teachers to develop lessons that create the opportunity for these cultural connections to be made. The profound need for resources to support teachers implies the need for increased support and resource generation which again connects directly to the finding that teacher collaboration is perhaps the most direct way to fill this gap. As the data showed that teacher collaboration is not necessarily occurring in effective ways it is clear that teachers need to be provided with more opportunities to work together.

Finally, the findings culminate to imply what I believe can be referred to as the FSL Challenge Cycle. Through the examination of the findings presented in this study it is clear that many of the factors influence each other heavily and can, in my view, be seen as a self-perpetuating cycle. The data presented by Wendy helps to support the connections made in this cycle as her reports of teacher and student experiences lead to this conclusion. By
delineating this cycle I hope to reveal the ways in which it can be dismantled in order to improve the landscape of FSL overall. The FSL Challenge Cycle in my view includes the severe lack of French classroom resources (ie: materials), leading to teachers constantly needing to create their own as described by Wendy. This leads to simplistic tasks and a tendency to not share with other teachers for fear of being seen as a “bad teacher”. Simplistic tasks mean less cultural connections and far less encouragement for students to act as participants while reduced collaboration may mean the program is not evolving as rapidly as can be seen in the English stream. This may lead to reduced student engagement which means reduced connection to the French language and culture overall. This factor can lead to increased student drop out which inevitably means even less students going on to be FSL teachers after graduation. Less fresh and dynamic FSL teachers entering the system ultimately perpetuates the cycle of reduced resource generating, reduced collaboration and a slower evolution in programming that can keep students disengaged. I believe that this cycle is the reason behind the large gap between research and practice and it is this cycle that we must seek to dismantle in order to improve FSL programs.

The implications present in this study also contribute significantly to my own intentions as I look towards entering the French Immersion context as a teacher. In having a deeper awareness of the issues inherent in what I have termed the FSL Challenge Cycle and the concrete ways that teachers can help students to build a healthy language identity I have formed new and more profound commitments as a future teacher. I am keenly aware of the implication that much of the responsibility for change lies in my own hands not only for my own classroom but also my future school community. The need for improved collaboration and resource generating mean that I will need to act as a leader in encouraging resource
sharing amongst the French teachers in my school community. Additionally, the implications present in the data that many programs include less engaging tasks for students point to my own role in working to change this in my future classroom. By keeping a focus on creating opportunities for students to feel and act as participants in Francophone culture I hope to be a leader and collaborator who helps to evolve the FSL program. It is also my commitment to advocate for FSL programming particularly with administrators due to the finding that few administrators are aware of the needs and challenges in FSL.

5.3 Recommendations

Through the findings and their inherent implications there are many clear areas that require attention from the various stakeholders in FSL in order to evolve the program towards a focus on building healthy language identities. In this section I outline my recommendations based on these findings. Essentially, these recommendations act as ways to intervene in the FSL Challenge Cycle I have presented and also further support teachers as they navigate teaching in the FSL context.

In order to address the lack of administrative awareness or understanding of the challenges inherent in FSL I recommend the introduction of professional development specifically for administrators that focuses on supporting FSL programming. This professional development should raise administrators’ empathy for FSL teachers and provide them with strategies for developing supportive FSL communities in their schools. Additionally, I recommend that board-level administrators with knowledge of FSL programs be enlisted as mentors for FSL teachers in a similar way that there are math or literacy coaches in KDSB. I feel that this kind of leadership would be especially beneficial for new
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teachers in FSL who are experiencing the added pressure of filling the resource gap for their classrooms.

Similar to these administrative mentors I believe it would be incredibly beneficial to create and implement a teacher mentorship and collaboration program where French teachers are paired up with other French teachers and given an appropriate amount of time during their professional development days to work together. I feel that it would be most beneficial if FSL teachers who teach in similar contexts (ie: core or immersion, junior or intermediate, etc.) were paired together with the encouragement to generate and share their resources widely. A program like this would not only help to meet the needs of individual teachers, particularly new teachers, who may be struggling but also begins to address the larger issue of lacking resources and minimal collaboration. By improving the willingness of teachers to share with an ongoing partner it is my belief that some of the fear to share their work widely may be dismantled and an increase in widespread distribution of resources could be achieved. Along with this, I recommend an increased focus on professional development that is geared specifically towards FSL educators in order to address these feelings of isolation even further. In the scope of my research I was only able to find one conference intended for FSL teachers, held annually by the Ontario Modern Language Teachers Association (OMLTA) every spring. This OMLTA conference, while very beneficial, represents the underrepresentation of professional development opportunities geared towards French teachers in particular.

To address the perpetual issues around resources I believe a shift in prioritization is necessary. It is my recommendation that, perhaps as part of the professional development for
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administrators, more school boards encourage funding to be allocated to FSL resource acquisition. Based on the data that stated much of the funding decisions lie in the hands of administrators I would recommend a clear communication between FSL teachers and their administrators is necessary in order to ensure sufficient resources are being acquired. To facilitate this I believe it would be important to create an opportunity for FSL teachers to meet with their administrators and discuss the needs present in the school community. These kinds of conversations would be possible in the mentorship programs suggested above and could form the catalyst for major change in a school climate.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

There are many aspects of FSL programming that would benefit from further investigation in order to strengthen the findings and implications found in this research. As this study relied on two semi-structured interviews and a qualitative analysis of them it is clear, first and foremost, that a broader data range would help to solidify the findings presented in the data. Additionally, with the advantage of hindsight reviewing this research there are several questions that I believe would deepen the understanding of the issues presented in this study. Questions that I feel require further research are:

1. Do Core French teachers’ experiences mirror what was presented in the data by a French Immersion teacher?
2. Are FSL teacher experiences different across the divisions (ie: primary, junior, intermediate and senior)?
3. What is the perspective of school principals? Do these perspectives mirror the administrator perspective presented in the data?
4. What is the perspective of other board-level administrators on the needs of FSL programs? Do they mirror the administrator perspective presented in the data?

5. How many administrative-level members of the Kensington District School Board speak French? Are these people advocating for FSL programs in the schools they influence and in what ways?

6. Are there differing perspectives from school principals who come from dual-track schools where both French Immersion and English stream programs are running versus principals from single-track schools where only French Immersion is present?

7. What professional development is available for administrators in expanding their awareness and knowledge around FSL programs? How can these opportunities be improved to further administrative support for FSL in their schools?

8. What other professional development is available specifically for FSL teachers and how can these opportunities be strengthened?

9. How could a mentorship and collaboration program be implemented in schools or school boards?

These questions represent my recommendations for future research and also acknowledge the perspectives that were not represented in this study. Reaching out to a wider range of teachers and administrators would greatly deepen the strength of the findings presented here while further research regarding professional development and mentorship programs would provide greater insight into the ways that teachers could be supported.
5.5 Concluding Comments

Throughout the data explored in this study it has been made clear that there continues to be many obstacles present in the FSL environment for teachers, students and administrators. It is my hope that the findings and implications presented in this research will provide FSL educators with a deeper understanding of these obstacles and how they can be surmounted. I believe that this data speaks directly to FSL teachers, administrators and recruiters who seek to hire FSL teachers. Firstly, the data presented here validates FSL teacher experiences and also provides some concrete solutions and strategies for evolving programming towards a focus on healthy language identity building. Secondly, the data also suggests the need for a greater responsibility to be placed on administrators as they support their FSL teachers as this is crucial in helping programs to run effectively. Lastly, the data suggests the importance of seeking out future FSL teachers who are committed to the idea of encouraging the development of a healthy language identity in their students in order to support the sustainability of the program in the long term.

Overall, the perpetual issues present in the FSL context are caused largely because of what I have chosen to call the FSL Challenge Cycle, as explained in section 5.2. By dismantling this cycle and working towards an evolution of the program I believe it will be possible to create more engaged students who feel a deeper sense of connection to their bi/plurilingualism and who ultimately continue on to use their skills beyond the classroom.
References


Denzin, N. (2009). The elephant in the living room: Or extending the conversation about the politics of evidence. Qualitative Research, 9(2), 139-160


Appendices

Appendix A – Consent Form

Date:

Dear _______________________________,

My Name is Erin Duncan and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on how teachers and educators help students in French Immersion programs to develop a healthy language identity as bi/plurilinguals. I am interested in interviewing teachers and educators who have experience teaching French Immersion and who are leaders in the teaching community. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal
presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a research conference or publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. This data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only people who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vamic. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to participation, and I will share with you a copy of the transcript to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Erin Duncan
erin.duncan@utoronto.ca
Course Instructor’s Name: Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vamic

Contact Info: angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca

Consent Form
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I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Erin Duncan and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________________

Name: (printed) __________________________________________

Date: _________________________________________________
Thank you for participating in this research. The aim of this research is to learn about how teachers can support their French Immersion students in developing healthy bi/plurilingual language identities in order to connect authentically with Francophone cultures. The interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes and consists of 25 questions focused on your experience with French Immersion students and language identity. I want to remind you that you may refrain from responding to any question at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Listed here are the questions to be used during 45-60 minute interviews. They have been grouped into sections in order to allow for effective organization of data collected.

Section 1: Background Information

1. What do you teach? Where do you teach?
2. How many years have you worked as a teacher or in your current role as an educator?
3. How did you become involved or interested in FSL language identity?
4. So I can better understand the students you influence and your interactions with them, can you tell me a bit about what they are generally like? What is their life like outside the classroom? Do they have any connections to authentic Francophone cultures? What is their level of interest or commitment to developing a connection to Francophone cultures? Do you believe they see themselves as part of the Francophone culture in Canada? Do you believe they have a sense of a bilingual language identity?

Section 2: Teacher Practices (What/How?)
5. How do you introduce Francophone culture in your classroom? What steps do you take to familiarize your students with diverse Francophone cultures? To what extent do you believe they are able to connect to this concept?
6. How do you introduce language identity in your classroom? What steps do you take to familiarize your students with the notion of a bilingual language identity? To what extent do you believe your students have developed their language identity?
7. How do you know that language identity should be taught to students?
8. To what extent have your students supported each other through the development of their language identities? How do you create a supportive learning community?
9. Do you believe that a student’s language identity can be actively discussed in the classroom? Do you believe that language identity can become part of assessment practices? If so, how can language identity be assessed? If not, how can it be addressed concretely in the classroom?

Section 3: Beliefs/Values (Why?)

10. What prompted you to begin focusing on language identity in your practice?
11. What do you believe students gain from developing a healthy language identity and sense of connection to Francophone culture?
12. Can you tell me how your students have generally responded to discussions about language identity in the classroom? Can you give me an example to illustrate?
13. What resources do you use to help you bring a sense of connection to Francophone culture into the classroom?
14. What resources do you use to help you bring the concept of language identity into the classroom?

Section 4: Influencing factors (Who?)

15. Have you faced any obstacles or challenges in creating a connection with Francophone culture in the classroom? Have you faced any obstacles or challenges in discussing language identity in the classroom?
16. What kind of feedback have you had from people regarding your practice of focusing on language identity in the classroom?

Section 5: Next Steps (What next?)

17. Who/what voices must be included in a healthy language identity program?
18. What advice would you give to a beginning teacher looking to nourish a healthy language identity in their French Immersion students?
19. What goals do you have for your practice of building healthy language identities in your classroom?