Towards Inclusive Pedagogy:
Including Students with Communicative Challenges and Special Education Needs in Ontario’s French as a Second Language Classrooms

By

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Abstract

Ontario’s commitment to bilingualism is evidenced by its emphasis on mandatory French as a Second Language (FSL) education. The values of acceptance and inclusion in the FSL classroom have not always been reflected in the FSL curriculum. In 2015, however, the Ministry released a policy document on integrating students with special education needs in FSL. In light of this, the purpose of this research is to reveal methods currently practised in FSL classrooms, which address the various learning needs of students with communication, speech, or language learning challenges. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews with three French teachers in Ontario: two Core French teachers, and one French Immersion teacher. Findings from these interviews reveal a connection between second language and special education teaching methodologies as used in different foreign language learning contexts. The teachers expressed concerns that the meaning of success in language learning as outlined in Ontario’s FSL curricula ought to be reassessed in order to enhance opportunities for success for students learning with special education needs. The implications of these findings suggest that a concentrated effort be made to aid FSL teachers in determining realistic and equitable goals for target language acquisition for students learning with communicative challenges.

Keywords: French as a Second Language (FSL); Special Education; Language Learning Difficulties
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

Ontario’s long-standing commitment to bilingualism is evidenced through its emphasis on mandatory second language education at the junior and intermediate levels in public schools across the province (Arnott & Mady, 2013). In accordance with the Canada-Ontario Agreement on Minority-Language Education and Second Official-Language Instruction (2014), students enrolled in publicly-funded schools in English language boards in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), are required to study French as a Second Language (FSL) from Grades 4 to 8, and earn at least one FSL credit at the secondary school level in order to obtain their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD). Students may choose from one of three programs offered, including Core French (CF), Extended French (EF), or French Immersion (FI). This commitment to French education as the second official language indicates that the provincial government places significant emphasis on the acquisition of the country’s second official language at an early age.

However, there have been exceptions to this rule. For many years, school administrators have allowed for exemptions from FSL for some students learning with special education needs (SEN). This has contributed to a significant decline in the enrolment of students with SEN in FSL programs. According to the bilateral agreement on minority and second language instruction, by 2018, the province intends to “increase the percentage of students with special needs enrolled in the Grade 9 Core French program from 46.6% to 51.6%” (CMEC, 2014, p. 37). In order to meet this performance target, the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), have outlined a series of initiatives intended to support educators and students alike in achieving this goal.
Some of these initiatives include “facilitating the sharing of best practices…”, “long-term positioning of the promotion of French-language education in Ontario…” and “specialized training related to the improvement of student performance” (CMEC, 2014, pp. 32, 36). These initiatives suggest that opportunities exist for differently-abled students to seriously pursue FSL beyond the elementary level. This research will therefore seek to inform educators of some of these existing opportunities, and explain the many ways in which FSL educators may incorporate inclusive strategies in their individual classrooms in order to effectively cater to students learning with special education needs.

As noted by Ontario’s Ministry of Education (2015), students who are currently enrolled in one of the three FSL programs are also achieving above the provincial standard in reading, writing and mathematics. This suggests that there are numerous benefits associated with second language learning. In spite of these findings, many students in Ontario’s schools either opt not to pursue French studies beyond Grade 9, or are exempted due to SEN or English language barriers (CMEC, 2014). Further, according to Canadian Parents for French (2010), the current Ontario curricula implicitly excludes a number of students, including Allophone students, and the province does not currently have policies in place to offer alternate FSL instruction to students with specified or non-specified learning difficulties. This is surprising, given the fact that current research has shown that students with SEN benefit from learning a foreign language (Arnott & Mady, 2013; Arnett, Mady & Muilenberg, 2014; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). There appears, then, to be a discrepancy between the ministry’s appreciation for foreign language learning, and its commitment to ensuring that every student is given the opportunity to acquire the French language.

1 Allophone students in Canada are those whose mother tongue is neither English, nor French.
1.1 Research Problem

FSL educators must consider native language skills before attempting to determine students’ foreign language aptitude. As noted by Ganschow (1998), “…both native and FL learning depend on basic language mechanisms…problems with with one language skill are likely to have a negative effect on both the native language and the FL system” (p. 249). This would suggest that students who excel in their first language of instruction are far more likely to excel in a foreign language because of their proficiency with universal language mechanisms. This presumption, however, according to Kennedy (2015), has invariably excluded students with language or communication-based learning difficulties, such as students with dyslexia, those with a stutter, selective mutism, or an unspecified communication difficulty. Ontario’s FSL curricula promote the role of information and communications technology in FSL classrooms, offering opportunities for students to use online thesauri, and other reference works as tools for creating and editing their work (Kennedy, 2015, p. 49). These language learning tools can drastically change the experience for students with speech impairments in the FSL classroom. It is also important to note that the curriculum states that students should be able to “communicate their findings to different audiences, using a variety of formats and technologies” (Kennedy, 2015, p. 48). These aspects of the curriculum are of particular relevance when considering opportunities for the advancement of inclusivity in the classroom, and should be integrated, not solely as an adjunct, but rather, as a core component of daily classroom instruction.

According to Speech-Language Pathology Services of the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) (TDSB, 2014),
When a person has trouble understanding others, or sharing thoughts, ideas, and feelings completely then he or she has difficulties with language. When a person is unable to produce speech sounds correctly or fluently, or has problems with his or her voice, then he or she has difficulties with speech.

The TDSB recognizes the difficulties that students with a speech-language difficulty may encounter, and offers early intervention services meant to assist students from as early as junior kindergarten. The Kindergarten Early Language Intervention (KELI) program is an example of an intensive early intervention program aimed at aiding students with delayed oral language development (Speech-Language Pathology Services 2012). While this initiative is commendable for its goal of providing foundational support to promote language development, there remains very little mention of aid available to students beyond the Grade 3 level, and even less evidence of aid available to these students in an FSL classroom. This research focuses specifically on educators’ experiences teaching students with communicative challenges, such as those which interfere with students’ oral and written language development and overall academic achievement in the second language classroom.

While there is certainly a great deal of scholarship devoted to literacy development across Ontario’s literacy curriculum, there are far fewer studies focused on the factors influencing development in the FSL curricula for students with speech-language or communication difficulties (Arnott & Mady, 2013). Until very recently, second language development and speech impairments have been studied in isolation of one another. As a result of this, children with speech impairments are being left behind in the FSL classroom as a result of a lack of alternate methods of instruction presented in the FSL curriculum, which is currently catered primarily toward students who excel at the English language, and so, require less support in the second language classroom (Kennedy, 2015). Assessment methods outlined in the FSL curricula are often focused on accuracy and speed in reading and writing, as well as on accuracy and
fluency in oral communication. These practices, according to Geva, Wade-Wooley and Shany (1997), automatically isolate students with language learning difficulties.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore educators’ experiences with teaching students with language learning challenges and other SEN in the FSL programs in the GTA. In so doing, my research aims to suggest alternative means by which junior and intermediate FSL teachers and administrators may adopt new perspectives on second language literacy, incorporate different strategies and activities for learning in the classroom, as well as consider alternative forms of assessment and evaluation so as not to discourage or exclude students learning with dyslexia, speech-sound disorders, and/or other social communication difficulties. While some scholars suggest that a student’s performance in a second language is contingent upon that student’s performance in their first language (Ganschow, 1998), this should not deter students with SEN from pursuing FSL. This study will explore several inclusive practices that should be integrated in FSL classrooms so as to allow differently-abled students to maximize their full potential in FSL, regardless of their level of performance in the English language classroom.

Second language acquisition is of utmost importance in today’s globalized society. Given Canada’s partiality for multiculturalism and its commitment to expanding the cultural knowledge-base of its citizens, there is no question as to whether or not FSL will remain at the forefront of elementary and secondary education in Ontario. Differently-abled students are no exception to this reality. As a result, it is our responsibility as educators to ensure that the curriculum is reviewed and reassessed so as to cater to the needs of each student in our classroom in a most consistent and effective manner. This study explores the current practices of FSL teachers in the GTA, as well as their experiences with making accommodations for students
with communicative challenges and other SEN within the confines of the Ontario curricular expectations. In so doing, the research in this study sheds light on opportunities for advancement and differentiation, aimed at cultivating a more inclusive atmosphere in FSL classrooms for students requiring differentiated instruction and accommodations or modifications for assessment and evaluation.

1.3 Research Questions

The primary question guiding this study is: What methods, if any, are currently practiced in junior/intermediate FSL classrooms across Ontario to address the various learning needs of students with communicative challenges and other SEN? Sub-questions to further guide this inquiry include:

- Are French instructors made aware of all students’ learning difficulties beforehand? If so, are educators currently required to offer additional assistance or alternative methods of assessment and evaluation to these students?

- What are possible strategies that FSL teachers believe would minimize foreign language learning anxiety for students with dyslexia, a stutter, or selective mutism?

- How can FSL instruction, assessment, and evaluation be revised so as not to exclude or deter these students from pursuing French as a second language at higher levels of education?

- How feasible would it be for FSL instructors to incorporate such differentiated learning strategies into their classrooms to assist these students?

1.4 Background of the Researcher

As a student who began studying French in Trinidad for one year before moving to Toronto and continuing in CF classrooms from Grade 7 onwards, I am confident in my
familiarity with various aspects of the CF curriculum. English is my language of origin, as well as my mother tongue, and so I had never experienced learning difficulties as an English Language Learner (ELL). However, I did have an accent when I moved here, and various aspects of my native dialect have always piqued my interest as I grew older and began to understand that language and literacy development vary drastically on an individual basis. I continued my French language studies throughout my undergraduate career, and as an FSL learner, I encountered numerous difficulties, but often realized that my confidence in my ability as a fluent speaker of the English language afforded me greater confidence in my career as an FSL learner. I now wonder how students who lack such a solid foundation in English, or their respective language of origin, must cope in the FSL classroom, which heavily emphasizes accuracy and fluency in pronunciation, reading, and articulation.

As a teacher candidate, I had the opportunity to work with students with SEN in the CF classroom, and I have noticed the struggles that they encounter on a daily basis. I have observed students with selective mutism unable to participate in class discussions, and I have witnessed others unable to complete written tasks without the teacher’s support and direct supervision. I have also been pleasantly surprised by the quality of work received from these same students when they were offered opportunities to complete differentiated tasks or to use different mediums of communication. I believe that many students with similar challenges in Toronto and the GTA have formerly been exempt from FSL solely on the basis of their special education needs. I would love to learn how we, as educators, can bridge this gap for students with language or communication-based learning difficulties so as to ensure that they have equitable access to FSL education.
1.5 Overview

I have conducted a qualitative research study by interviewing individuals in the field of education who are familiar with one or more of the current Ontario FSL curricula (CF, EF, or FI). I have interviewed two teachers who are currently in the CF classroom, and a third FI teacher. Each of these research participants provide insight into the intricacies of second language teaching and learning, and allow for a deeper understanding of the obstacles that students with communication difficulties encounter in the FSL classroom. These teachers provide invaluable insight into their own experiences in the classroom and the shortcomings that they believe exist in the curriculum, as well as any lack of resources affecting their ability to adopt more inclusive strategies.

In chapter 2, I provide a literature review in the areas of second language acquisition, communication-based difficulties, and inclusive pedagogy. Following this, I have explained in greater detail the nature of my research and the manner in which it has been presented throughout the paper. Next, in chapter 3, I discuss the research methodology, recruitment, and data collection process. In chapter 4, I present my research findings, and elaborate on the manner in which they relate to and coincide with the existing research on inclusivity in the second language classroom. I then explicate the implications of my research findings in chapter 5, examining how they will likely influence my own pedagogical practices in the future, as well as the possible implications for educational policy and the educational research community. Before concluding, I address the areas in which I believe my research requires further information, suggesting opportunities for broader inquiry. I am aware that this is not a quantitative research paper, and so, I have not interviewed any students for the purposes of this study. As a result, there are certainly limitations to my findings. This paper does, however, present a coherent and
concise analysis of the issue and the manner in which educators are currently coping with inclusion in their classrooms. I have set the results of my findings in the context of the existing knowledge and scholarship about second language teaching methodologies and special educational needs. In so doing, I inform further research in this somewhat neglected area of inclusive pedagogy.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I review the literature in the areas of second language learning, communicative challenges, and inclusive pedagogy. More specifically, I review existing research on the implications of various communicative challenges on students’ speech perception, reading acquisition, oral articulation, and language development in French as a Second Language (FSL). I start by reviewing the literature in the area of foreign language learning and I consider obstacles and opportunities for literacy development among students with communicative challenges and other special education needs (SEN). Next, I review research on developmental speech disorders in order to determine which areas of Ontario’s FSL curricula present opportunities for integrating inclusive pedagogy. Finally, I discuss some of the differentiated programming suggested by scholars in support of students with communicative challenges so as to improve upon their auditory and written proficiency, as well as their confidence in their abilities throughout the second language learning process.

2.1 Inclusive Pedagogy

The Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) notes that “inclusive education is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 4). For the purposes of this study, the term is used strictly in the FSL classroom setting. The persons marginalized or excluded in this case are those students with communicative difficulties who require differentiated instruction and/or accommodations to cater to their preferred styles of learning. The research presented in this study will shed light on both the need and opportunities
for inclusive pedagogical practices in the FSL classroom that can serve to integrate students with communicative challenges as equal members of the second language learning community.

2.2 Literacy Development for Second Language Learners

As aforementioned, it is commonly believed that students’ success in a foreign language is often directly contingent upon their performance in their native language (Ganschow, 1998). As researchers grapple with this traditional assertion, they must also consider the possibility that the process of foreign language acquisition may serve to benefit students learning with SEN. Paradis (2010) notes that there currently exists no universal explanation for or answer to the role that communicative challenges may play in the process of first or second language acquisition. He explains that each students’ learning difficulties will have very different effects upon students’ abilities, noting that “delay, disruption, and variations in acceleration rates, can combine in different ways” (p. 231). It is therefore of utmost importance that FSL educators are made aware of students’ communicative challenges in the first language of instruction. This would allow educators to better understand the varied developmental patterns of each student’s communicative difficulties before determining and implementing the necessary course of action in the FSL classroom.

In order to better understand the nature of foreign language development, it is important to first consider the varying components of language development. Kahn-Horwitz (2015) explains that language literacy is developed phonologically, phonetically, semantically, syntactically, and orthographically, and foreign language learners must develop ways of learning new orthography, as well as unknown phonology, vocabulary, morphology, and syntax. Kahn-Horwitz (2015) also found that with the focus on reading comprehension “as a central means for language input,” there is now a significant emphasis on spelling skills as a critical factor in
literacy acquisition (p. 612). As a result, she concludes that while scholars continue to question the most effective means by which spelling can be taught to foreign language learners, there remains no ambiguity regarding its importance to language mastery (Kahn-Horwitz, 2015). Both Paradis (2010) and Kahn-Horwitz (2015) acknowledge that syntactic development neither occurs at a specific time in the language learning process, nor does it follow a uniform progression. Rather, it is contingent upon the students’ abilities. It is of the utmost importance that FSL educators are aware of and responsive to this reality in their classrooms, understanding that their students should not all be held to the same standards of evaluation and assessment.

Today, policies have been put forth by Ontario’s Ministry of Education in an attempt to combat the decreasing level of enrolment in FSL for students with SEN. Some of these current policies include Realizing the promise of diversity: Ontario’s equity and inclusive education strategy (2009), and Including students with special education needs in French as a Second Language programs (2015). These policies aim to realize the ministry’s five-year goal of increasing enrolment of students with SEN in FSL programs by the year 2018. The difficulty now remains in putting these policies into practice. As a result of this, scholars have only just recently begun to explore the benefits of these methods of instructional accommodation, including the use of assistive technology in the classroom (Liakin, Cardoso, & Liakina, 2015).

Throughout this study, I explore the various means by which educators may consider the implementation of adaptations for students with communicative difficulties so as to facilitate inclusivity within the context of the existing FSL curriculum.
2.2.1 The historical perspective

In 1980, Ontario’s Ministry of Education introduced Bill 82 as an amendment to the Education Act, requiring the province’s publicly-funded school boards to ensure that school administrators and educators take responsibility for “…the education of all students, including those with special needs” (Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE), 2011, p. 1). While Bill 82 certainly posed numerous challenges for educators and administrators alike, it did reflect the beginnings of the Ministry’s shift toward “universal access” to public education (CODE, 2011). Since then, there has been little focus on the importance of developing similar initiatives in FSL curricula. There has, however, been a progression of the dialogue from the late 1990s regarding trends in difficulties for second language learners, and opportunities that have arisen in response to these difficulties (Ganschow, Sparks & Javorsky, 1998). The Ministry now advocates for inclusive practices for all students in FSL classrooms across the province.

In 1998, Ganschow, Sparks, and Javorsky spearheaded a discussion involving the impact of learning difficulties on foreign language acquisition and its pedagogical implications. They noted that early diagnosis of language learning problems was key to ensuring that students with speech impairments were not unintentionally excluded as a result of standardized measures presented in the curriculum (Ganschow, Sparks & Javorsky, 1998). They also discussed the importance of adjusting both the learning and evaluation processes so as to minimize failure for these students. They concluded that the diagnosis of a learning challenge should not allow for exemption from the FSL requirement, nor should it suggest a need for exemption. At the time of the publication of their research in the late 1990s, the Ontario FSL curriculum did not yet reflect a strong commitment to differentiated instruction or accommodations for students with SEN.
It was not until 2013 that the Ontario Ministry of Education published a document entitled, *A Framework for French as a Second Language in Ontario Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12*. The three primary goals acknowledged in this document were: “to increase student confidence, proficiency, and achievement in FSL; to increase the percentage of students studying FSL until graduation; to increase student, educator, parent, and community engagement in FSL” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 8). It would appear that the second of these three goals is directly dependent upon achievement of the first. Two years later, the Ministry released a companion resource guide for Ontario schools entitled, *Including Students with Special Education Needs in French as a Second Language Programs*. This document stands as the first comprehensive resource meant to address the importance of adopting new initiatives in the FSL curriculum so as to encourage more inclusive practices for all students. Data presented in this document shows that the enrolment of students with SEN in FSL programs in Ontario in 2012 and 2013 decreased dramatically during the transition from Grade 8 to Grade 9. In response to this, as of 2015, the Ministry now advocates for the need to recognize that “students with special education needs have diverse strengths, interests, abilities, and challenges” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 20).

The Ministry’s new policy regarding inclusivity in 2015 is reflective of Arnett’s research (2013), in which she addresses challenges concerning “the appropriateness [of FSL programming] for students with diverse needs…” (Arnett, 2013, p. 104). She addresses the issue with a focus on educators who are fixated on the ‘ideal’ way to teach French, which does not align with the ideas of inclusive pedagogy (Arnett, 2013). According to Arnett (2013), this dated approach to teaching FSL is of little relevance to students’ lives and interests, and has
intentionally excluded students with SEN on the presumption that they are unable to learn many of the same things other students could.

Luckily, this ‘ideal’ model has been restructured in recent years. Today, the current Core French (CF) curriculum states that “teachers bring enthusiasm and varied teaching and assessment approaches to the classroom, addressing individual students’ needs and ensuring sound learning opportunities for every student” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, pp. 12–13). According to this curriculum document, the Ministry recognizes that while classroom teachers are the key educators for literacy, they also need “the support of the larger community to create a learning environment that supports students with special education needs” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 35). This suggests that the support for students in FSL with learning difficulties does not rest solely with the classroom teacher, but rather, requires the involvement of the special education teacher, the principal, and parents. The 2013 curriculum also acknowledges that assistive technology may be deemed necessary for some students learning with SEN.

This shift toward accommodation has prompted further research in recent years, with a greater focus on the need to include all students in the FSL classroom by means of alternative language learning and cognitive strategies, as well as by using instructional and technological tools. Recent scholarship reflects many of the changes in the most recent curriculum. As explained by Ruberto (2013), for example, students with dyslexia are frequently in a position of failure in the FSL classroom, especially with regards to their proficiency in writing and reading (Ruberto, 2012, p. 20). She has argued that it is important that FSL educators develop a series of strategies to aid these students in their pursuit of orthographic proficiency. Similarly, Liakin, Cardoso and Liakina (2015), who represent some of the most recent scholarship in this subject
area, argue that FSL educators have the ability to enhance in-class interactions by using assistive technology software so as to aid with pronunciation in the target language and promote higher levels of confidence among learners with learning difficulties.

2.2.2 Obstacles and opportunities

The exemption of students with SEN from FSL programs is in decline. According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2015), “…current legislation and policies in Ontario do not endorse exemptions for students with special education needs from FSL programs – it is expected that all students in English language publicly funded schools will have access to FSL programs” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 14). In line with the Ministry’s former policies on exemptions, Arnett, Mady, and Muilenburg (2014) note that when educators allow for exemptions of students with SEN from FSL programs, they perpetuate this idea that these students are incapable of acquiring FL knowledge. In allowing students to be exempt from FSL programs, this also demeans the value of FSL, treating it as a secondary concern among other core subjects. According to the Ministry of Education (2015), such exemptions have diminished participation of students with SEN in FSL. Enrolment dropped from over 89 per cent in Grade 8 to under 47 per cent in Grade 9 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 16). Rather than dismissing the need for inclusive initiatives in the FSL curriculum, Arnett, Mady, and Muilenburg (2014) convincingly argue that school boards would benefit from realizing the full potential of the FSL framework, and the opportunities available for including students with SEN.

A greater understanding of the limitations is needed on the part of educators in order to better meet the needs of all students in FSL programs. In 2013, Arnott and Mady researched French literacy development in the cross-curricular context at the primary level in Ontario. They compared and contrasted practices in the English language classroom to those of the CF
classroom, concluding that CF teachers are in fact literacy teachers, having to incorporate literacy-based practices in their classrooms, regardless of their contextual constraints. Arnott and Mady (2013) advocate for CF programming to become part of the “literacy across the curriculum” movement, which suggests that students should be developing literacy skills not only in literacy, but also in mathematics, science, social studies, visual arts, and music (p. 120). They spearheaded this approach, and are among the first scholars to view FSL acquisition in the same manner as English language acquisition. In so doing, they advocate for the same degree of literacy support and professional learning opportunities for FSL educators as that which is available for English language teachers. This is especially important today as the Ministry moves toward inclusivity for all students in FSL, and adopting a stricter stance toward exemptions. In order to achieve the levels of inclusivity proposed by Ontario’s Ministry of Education, greater emphasis needs to be placed on the value of second language learning for all students.

In the past, it appears that the systematic barriers to inclusivity outnumbered the opportunities for inclusion, but within the last three years, there has been a move toward assistive strategies meant to enhance the FSL educators’ role. According to recent research findings by Lapkin, Arnott, and Mady (2009), “professional learning opportunities can enhance the awareness of resource teachers and FSL teachers of the practical applications of research findings related to supporting all students in FSL programs” (as cited in Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 14). These opportunities, according to Lapkin, Arnott, and Mady (2009), encourage teachers to pursue development of “phonological and metacognitive awareness, the explicit teaching of reading strategies, assistance in developing and applying reading skills, team teaching, the provision of social support, and the use of assistive technology” (as cited in Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015, p.13). If the school boards are to view FSL acquisition in the same
manner as English language acquisition, as per Arnott and Mady’s proposed approach, it is crucial that FSL educators be provided with the necessary resources so as to ensure inclusivity for students with communicative challenges and other SEN.

2.3 Understanding Developmental Speech Disorders

According to the TDSB’s Special Education Plan (2015), the Ministry of Education defines a speech impairment as “a disorder in language formulation which may be associated with neurological, psychological, physical, or sensory factors that involves perceptual motor aspects of transmitting oral messages and that may be characterized by impairment in articulation, rhythm, and stress” (Toronto District School Board, 2015, p. 50). Some of the speech-language difficulties recognized by the TDSB are: dyslexia, selective mutism and, stuttering. The TDSB’s Special Education Plan (2015) states that in determining speech impairment exceptionality, the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) considers classroom documentation, educational assessment, input from parents/guardians, and finally, professional assessment.

For the purposes of this study, the most suitable definition of dyslexia is in line with the scholarship of Joanisse, Manis, Keating, and Seidenberg (2000). They note that dyslexia “…derives from deficits in the representation and use of phonological information” (p. 31). According to the International Book of Dyslexia, “…dyslexic children have specific impairments in representing, storing, and retrieving phonological information” (as cited in Georgiou 2006, p. 228). Both definitions subscribe to the phonological deficit hypothesis, which explains that reading difficulties among students with dyslexia stem from their inability to correctly connect sounds to letters (Ramus & Szenkovits, 2008). As a result of this deficit, students with dyslexia are more likely to struggle with reading acquisition, and would likely benefit from being
introduced to the top-down approach when learning to read. Rather than encouraging these
students to sound out words before grasping the overall meaning, FSL educators should instead
encourage them to work backwards, ensuring that they are first able to grasp an understanding of
the concept of the term before learning to pronounce or read the word in a complex sentence.

2.3.1 Reading acquisition

Given the phonological difficulties experienced by students with dyslexia and stutters, it
is important to consider the existing programming aimed at catering toward their needs in the
classroom. At the elementary level, it is more than likely that a student in CF with a speech
impairment has already been identified and assessed. They have likely undergone the various
developmental stages for reading acquisition in the English language classroom, but have only
just recently been introduced to the CF curriculum in Grade 4. When scholars explored reading
and spelling acquisition in French, they found that older readers did not always rely on
phonological processing when reading and writing. Rather, this was more characteristic of
younger readers, while older readers were far more likely to follow indirect routes when
developing and maintaining reading acquisition (Sprenger-Charolles, Linda Siegel, & Philippe
Bonnet, 1998).

Sprenger-Charolles, Siegel, and Bonnet (1998) presented their comparative research on
phonological mediation and its connection to orthographic factors across multiple languages.
Where they had formerly assumed that students whose language of origin is French would have
relied strictly on phonological processing when learning to read and write, they later found that
this was not necessarily the case for all FSL learners. They noted that “it seems important to
examine in depth reading and spelling acquisition in French whose orthography is often seen as
deep, but, in fact, is not as deep as English orthography” (Sprenger-Charolles et al 1998, p. 141).
By contrast, orthographic processing was more prominent among FSL students at later academic stages. This would mean that L2 French learners were expected to rely on the bottom-up approach to reading in which they would break words down, understand the individual sounds, and finally try to understand the meaning of the whole word. Based on the results of their study, one could argue that French language reading acquisition may be more challenging, but is by no means impossible for students with a speech impairment. Le Bouthillier and Dicks’ study (2013) of French immersion learners revealed similar results, showing that not all L2 learners will depend upon the same set of linguistic conventions, but the planning stage in the writing process is of utmost importance for all learners, regardless of their different needs and abilities.

Miller-Guron and Lundberg’s findings (2000) are well-aligned with both of these hypotheses. They argue that English-speaking students with dyslexia benefited from second language acquisition in task performance and reading efficiency. Miller-Guron and Lundberg’s studies show that when students with dyslexia were faced with a second language text, they were more efficient than they would have been if presented with their native language text. Geva, Wade-Woolley, and Shany’s research findings (1997) suggested that there was a discrepancy between students’ abilities to read isolated words across two languages. The students used for their research were able to read isolated words at similar levels of speed and accuracy, but were less successful when reading more substantial portions of text. Clearly, there remain uncertainties regarding the best route for students with SEN in pursuit of second language acquisition, but the findings suggest that varying strategies will have corresponding impacts on students’ language learning processes.
2.3.2 Speech perception and discourse cohesion

In addition to reading acquisition, one of the greatest obstacles for students with a speech impairment is oral articulation, which is perceived very differently on an individual basis, depending upon “…listeners’ unique abilities” (Ingvalson, Ettlinger & Wong, 2012, p. 42). Whether they struggle with oral presentation as a result of a stutter or selective mutism, or are unable to read aloud because they are dyslexic, they are automatically disadvantaged in the traditional second language classroom. This is largely because the Ontario French curricula focus a great deal on the element of oral fluency and articulation.

Ingvalson, Ettlinger, and Wong (2012) investigated bilingual speech patterns and training paradigms in schools, concluding that “…there is extensive evidence of individual variability, seen both in the ability to differentiate difficult non-native contrasts and in the ability to improve with training” (p. 35). Liakin, Cardoso, and Liakina’s (2015) focus on learner autonomy coincides perfectly with the idea of individual variability in non-native speech perception. Both studies suggest that bilingual performance among non-native speakers should not be held to a universal standard. Individual differences remain at the forefront of the second language learning process, and so inclusivity can only be fostered in a setting that allows for differentiated instruction and alternative methods of assessment. Based on their research findings, one might conclude that Ontario’s Ministry of Education could benefit from restructuring its assessment criteria in order to ensure that students with speech impairments are not held to the same standard of oral language competence in either informal or formal talk or discussion. Rather, students with communicative challenges should be given more opportunities to engage in informal talk as a method of formative assessment, as opposed to formal talk, which often assumes the form of presentations or in-class debates.
2.4 Inclusivity in the Core French Classroom

For the purposes of this study, the concept of inclusivity is restricted to inclusive practices in the FSL classroom, which seek to eliminate barriers for students with speech impairments. The purpose of this research is to inform educators about the opportunities for making French language instruction accessible for all students regardless of their diverse needs. Whether this inclusivity is achieved by means of alternative methods of assessment or differentiated instruction, or an effective combination of both, it is important that one considers the possibilities, or otherwise risk deterring these students from pursuing foreign language acquisition altogether. As noted by Joy and Murphy (2012), although there remains no universal understanding of inclusive education, there is a shared understanding of its goal, which is “to be a means of improving educational participation and opportunities for all” (p. 104). Joy and Murphy (2012) conducted research on the experiences of Grade 6 students with SEN in Intensive French (IF) programs, discovering that when educators focused on extensive modelling, scaffolding, and repetition, students were able to develop their own strategies to “decode and comprehend the French language” (Joy & Murphy, 2012, p. 110). Some examples of techniques used in Joy and Murphy’s study included songs to stimulate memory, role-playing skits, word walls, phrase starters, and dictionary binders. The IF classrooms explored in Joy and Murphy’s study (2012), illustrate communities within which all students are “working from a basic level, on the same playing field, at the beginning of language…For children with [special education needs], this approach represents an opportunity to start over” (p. 111).

Joy and Murphy’s intensive classroom places emphasis on the educator, rather than the students, as the facilitator of a positive classroom atmosphere. Varin (2012) also focuses on ways in which the FSL teacher can aid students with communicative challenges in a positive learning
environment. He suggests that L2 French teachers should “engage dyslexic students in pedagogical activities which focus on different types of spelling regularities and irregularities and activities which require L2 French students to manipulate and reflect on orthographic units by identifying and correcting errors, then justifying their corrections” (as cited in Kennedy, 2015, p. 282). Varin raises a very important point geared towards inclusivity in the FSL classroom. Dyslexic students require more frequent assistance with spelling and need to be given the opportunity to identify their own spelling errors, as opposed to repeatedly being told that they are wrong. This would suggest that FSL teachers should refrain from using explicit correction or recasts as the common form of error feedback in the classroom, where “…a teacher both initiates and completes a repair within a single move” (Lyster & Saito, 2010, p. 269). This practice diminishes students’ involvement in the corrective process. Instead, teachers should ensure that they include a combination of clarification requests, which “indicate to students that their utterance has been misunderstood by the teacher…” and metalinguistic feedback, which “contains either comments, information, or questions related to the well-formedness of the student’s utterance, without explicitly providing the correct form” (Lyster & Ranta, 1997, p. 47). This type of error correction is more likely to involve the learner as an active participant in the learning process, as opposed to simply indicating that an error was made.

Of course, this demands greater time and effort on the part of the L2 educator. While many students struggle with spelling in a second language, orthographic proficiency is especially difficult for dyslexic students, and they are far less likely to use spelling strategies to improve their own writing than are other L2s without a speech impairment (Kennedy, 2015 & Noémia, 2015). As a result, Varin (2012) would argue that the teacher should not excuse dyslexic students for inaccuracies in spelling. Rather, the responsibility rests with the educator to foster a learning
environment within which the dyslexic learner feels comfortable identifying and correcting their own errors without fear of being ridiculed for these inaccuracies.

2.4.1 Methods of assessment and differentiated instruction

Given the obstacles for both students and educators, the question remains as to what can be done so as to make FSL classrooms more inclusive for students with communicative challenges, without diminishing the students’ ability to acquire the basic tenets of the French language. One must consider the current methods of assessment for students with communicative challenges in the areas of dictation, articulation, and communication. The current CF curriculum calls for assessment practices that “support all students, including those with special education needs, those who are learning the language of instruction...” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 22). The curriculum also explicitly states that assessment should be “ongoing [and] varied in nature...” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 23). However, the achievement chart suggests that there remains a significant focus on vocabulary, organization of logical thoughts, and clear expression of ideas. While the achievement criteria encourage communication in oral, visual, and written forms, it also stresses the importance of being able to interact with peers by engaging in “one or all of three forms of oral language: informal talk, discussion, and formal talk” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014 p. 32).

Strategies for development of oral language skills are, and should be, among the most prominent of instructional strategies in FSL, but it is important to consider what activities coincide with the Ministry’s definition of the “authentic communicative tasks” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 32). Surely, this model has evolved with time. According to the Ministry of Education (2015), differentiated assessment strategies would include some combination of the following: “early identification of at-risk students; use of technology, including assistive
technology; varying the assessment format (e.g., oral, written, visual); allowing additional time; providing alternative locations with fewer distractions; providing opportunities for self-assessment and individual goal-setting” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 41). As seen in Joy and Murphy’s study (2012), it is important that FSL teachers have the “encouragement, support, and trust” (p. 112) of their administration. In addition, they argue that FSL teachers “work together as a team, plan together and support each other” (p. 112). While the IF classroom will obviously not exist at every school, it is possible for FSL educators to work with their administration to structure second language learning programs that support students with communicative challenges in a more authentic way, using tactics of SLT that coincide with special education practices.

A more natural approach to language learning would encompass a number of strategies aimed at addressing the needs of students with speech impairments, emphasizing their strengths, and de-emphasizing their shortcomings. One important concept that may assist L2 educators and students with speech impairments in the core FSL classroom is what Swain, Lapkin, Knouzi, Suzuki, and Brooks (2009) refer to as the process of “languaging” (pp. 5 – 29). In 2006, Merrill Swain coined this term, defining it as “the process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language” (as cited in Swain et al, 2009, p. 5). The concept is aligned with Vygotsky’s idea that “language is one of the most important mediating tools of the mind” (Swain et al 2009, p. 5). While all L2 students will likely benefit from “languaging” (Swain et al, 2009, p. 5) as an integral part of the language learning process, students with communicative difficulties in particular could likely undergo a transformative experience in their L2 acquisition. “Languaging” would involve the verbalization of difficult ideas and concepts, encouraging L2 students with speech impairments to externalize their thought processes so as to “transform from
surface understanding to a deeper more conceptual one” (Lapkin, 2010). “Languaging” would be one example of differentiated instruction that minimizes extensive resource requirements on the part of the educator, while also maximizing the potential for overall communicative success of the learner. It would involve a routine that focuses on visual aids co-constructed by teachers and students, including scrapbooks, skits, and photo-word walls that allow students with communicative challenges to visualize, represent, and verbalize various concepts.

Another opportunity for differentiation that would likely maximize student participation in FSL would be the use of Wendy Maxwell’s Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM) program, in which teachers use a series of hand gestures accompanied by corresponding vocabulary words in the target language in an effort to communicate meaning to students (AIM Language Learning, 2012). According to Maxwell (2001), the AIM method was designed to simulate visual and kinesthetic learning environments that would allow L2 learners to develop strong oral skills following the prolonged use of the target language in the whole-group setting. While there still exists some uncertainty regarding the universal success of AIM (Arnott, 2012), there is something to be said of the program’s benefits for L2 students learning with SEN. These students who may not otherwise be able or willing to participate in discussions or written activities may still be able to “…internalize the high-frequency vocabulary on three levels: (a) kinesthetically, (b) auditorily, and (c) visually (Arnott, 2012, p. 20). This would certainly present the FSL teacher with an opportunity to promote an inclusive atmosphere in which all students are not only able to participate, but also able to achieve some degree of communicative success in the target language.
2.4.2 Opportunities for technological integration

In addition to differentiated instruction and alternative methods of assessment, there are also now opportunities for technological integration in the classroom. Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) devices and other methods of augmentative communication have been introduced in independent classrooms, allowing students with speech impairments to meet the demands of the language curriculum in spite of mechanical obstacles. Liakin, Cardoso, and Liakina (2015) explain that “recent developments in voice-to-text abilities have encouraged ASR’s implementation in computer-assisted language learning” (p. 2). They further identify the following benefits of ASR software: “(1) learner fit; (2) explicit teaching; (3) opportunities for interaction with the computer, including the ability for learners to speak and analyze their own production; (4) comprehensible and accurate feedback; and (5) the development of strategies for learners to gain an understanding of new features on their own, outside of the language learning or classroom environment” (Liakin, Cardoso & Liakina, 2015, p. 2). According to their research findings, the most important element of ASR is perhaps the fact that it is speaker adaptable, so that students with various levels of dependence can all benefit from the same ASR application, therefore diminishing associated high costs.

Not all scholars agree with the integration of technological software such as ASR in the FSL classroom. Earlier studies conducted by Mostow and Aist (1999) initially suggested that ASR technology was not in fact as beneficial for L2 learners as it may have been for L1 learners with communicative challenges. They raised questions regarding the lack of authenticity of “computer tutors” (as cited in Liakin et al, 2015, p. 4). However, in later years, the effectiveness of such software has been proven to fulfill purposes beyond its intended needs. Cucchiarini, Neri, and Strik (2015) studied the impact of ASR technology on the oral proficiency of Dutch L2
learners, finding improvements in pronunciation and articulation (as cited in Liakin et al 2015, p. 4). While many teachers and parents continue to view mobile devices with a high degree of skepticism, perhaps it is necessary to consider the possibility that mobile devices with ASR software applications would allow teachers to support struggling readers and writers without having to isolate them from the general classroom, therefore improving reading and writing confidence and oral proficiency.

Technological integration is not limited to the use of ASR software applications. As a matter of fact, ASR devices in the second language classroom could hopefully serve as the first of many examples of learning in the virtual environment. Lee and Pass (2014) explored the role and benefits of Massive Multiplayer Online (MMO) gaming in relation to English Language Learning. They propose that the online gaming community provides students with an opportunity to engage in authentic, but informal conversation, where anxiety is kept at a minimum. They noted that the writing process in the gaming environment exists in several forms “i.e., chatting (interaction), forum participation, blogs, and fan-fiction” (p. 94). While their research is specific to ELL students without a specified communicative challenge, many of their proposals are in line with the needs of students with speech impairments in the FSL classroom. They claim that “based on Vygotsky’s…sociocultural theory viewpoint, language learning should be in an interactive environment. However, language learning classrooms often fail to be a social, interactive community” (Lee & Pass, 2014, p. 96). This is often true of the traditional second language classroom in which independent learning is prioritized.

While there are many opportunities for Ontario’s FSL classrooms to be engaging and interactive, there are few existing opportunities for students with language learning difficulties to engage as meaningfully and effectively in such a group dynamic. Though not necessarily
“authentic,” the online gaming community might just foster such a context within which these students could feel more motivated, and less anxious when participating in a collaborative setting. They are not required to respond immediately, and can therefore listen more attentively, and become more active readers (Lee & Pass, 2014, p. 98). As with ASR software, video-gaming could likely prove to be yet another supplemental instructional device used to accommodate the varied needs of students learning with speech impairments in the FSL classroom.

2.5 Conclusion

In this literature review, I acknowledged the main speech-language difficulties that impact second language acquisition in order to better understand the areas in which students with communicative challenges experience greatest difficulty in second language acquisition. I looked at research on obstacles and opportunities for students with speech impairments in the CF, EF, and FI classrooms in Ontario. I also looked at methods of differentiated learning and assessment for these students, so as to inform educators of opportunities to incorporate inclusive pedagogy in a meaningful and effective way. This review elucidates the extent that attention has been paid to second language learning for students learning with communicative difficulties and other SEN. It also raises questions about the connection between native language deficits and second language articulation, and points to the need for further research in the areas of speech recognition technology and acquisition of metalinguistic knowledge.

In light of this, the purpose of this research is to learn what practices can be realistically integrated in the FSL classroom for students learning with a communicative challenge so as to ensure that these students do not remain apprehensive toward opportunities for second language learning and development. By focusing on educators’ attitudes toward second language development and speech-language barriers, I hope to provide a better understanding of the need
to cultivate a more inclusive atmosphere in FSL classrooms across Ontario. In the following chapter, I explain the process by which I have collected information from interviewees, as well as the method of data analysis used to synthesize and interpret participants’ responses.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I explain the research methodology that has been used for the purposes of this study, which looks at teachers’ experiences with students with communicative challenges and other special education needs (SEN) in French as a Second Language (FSL) classrooms. I identify the various methodological decisions that I have made, as well as the reasons supporting these choices, given the research purpose. First, I address the research approach and procedure, explaining the implications of qualitative research and inquiry. Next, I identify the participants for this study, addressing and justifying reasons for their selection, as well as criteria required on their behalf and why satisfaction of these criteria was important for the purposes of this study. I then explain the research on purposeful sampling and recruitment and selection of participants, while also discussing my own method employed throughout this process. I then proceed to describe particular ethics that have been integrated throughout my own research, as well as the methods by which I sought to uphold specific ethical standards. Lastly, I acknowledge both the methodological strengths and limitations of the study.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

As noted by Creswell (2007), “qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 37). Through the processes of data collection and analysis, this study about students with communicative challenges in the FSL classroom presents the different perspectives of participants in a reflexive and interpretive manner that is in line with the explorative nature of qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). This study adopts a phenomenological qualitative research approach to
investigate the experiences of a handful of teachers in FSL classrooms across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). According to Creswell (2007), a phenomenological qualitative study should “[describe] the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 57). This approach is best suited for this particular study as it is of utmost importance that participants share their actual experiences in the FSL classroom. This research process also includes a review of the current and relevant literature targeted at addressing the research questions and purpose of the study. It entails the conduction of semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with three teachers who have fulfilled a number of sampling criteria.

Unlike quantitative research, where the researcher collects and analyzes numerical data in order to better understand and provide answers to the research problem, the findings of this qualitative research study address the research problem, reconsidering the existing approaches and solutions proposed by the educational research community in recent years. Qualitative researchers, according to Newman and Benz (1998), “reflect some sort of individual phenomenological perspective” (p. 2). While this is certainly true, this perspective by no means dominates the precision or accuracy of the research findings. Newman and Benz (1998) identify the qualitative approach as the naturalistic approach, which is used “when observing and interpreting reality with the aim of developing a theory that will explain what was experienced” (p. 3). In response to the research purpose and questions of this study, this research has engaged participants in a process meant to elaborate upon their experiences. Rather than using their experiences to confirm or refute a theory, the research findings instead served to develop a rationale to explain the phenomena in the FSL classroom, thus providing a more detailed understanding of the current trends and challenges of inclusive pedagogy in FSL. For these purposes, qualitative research was the more relevant of the two.
3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

Regarding the interview and data collection processes, I chose to use a series of semi-structured interview questions for the purposes of data collection. Interviewees were provided with scripts prior to face-to-face interviews, allowing them to view the questions beforehand. Although the questions were pre-determined and provided to the interviewees in advance, these interviews were open-ended in order to allow for a certain degree of flexibility and authenticity. In order to achieve this desired level of flexibility, I asked a combination of specific grand tour questions and prompts intended to elicit authentic and descriptive responses. As noted by Leech (2002), grand tour questions “ask respondents to give a verbal tour of something they know well” (p. 667). These questions allowed participants an opportunity to elaborate on aspects of their experiences working with students with SEN in FSL. Prompts were used throughout the interview as a means of obtaining a greater level of detail when desired.

I structured my interviews so that the participants’ personal backgrounds were addressed at the start, followed by their individual experiences in their respective FSL classrooms. I concluded with participants’ perspectives on opportunities and challenges for future FSL educators. The interview structure has been outlined in the interview protocol, which is located in Appendix B of this paper.

3.3 Participants

I adopted purposeful sampling when recruiting participants for face-to-face interviews. For the purposes of this research, it was important that the participants shared the commonality of experience in either the Core French (CF), Extended French (EF) or French Immersion (FI) classroom, having worked with a range of students with communicative difficulties or other SEN. Participants were not all familiar with the recent changes in the Ministry of Education’s
commitment to students with multiple exceptionalities. Whether teachers were familiar with these changes implemented in 2015 or not, did not necessarily inhibit their ability to discuss their observations and share their insights regarding the most appropriate means of incorporating students with speech impairments in FSL classrooms. The participants do, however, share the common experience of dealing with a student with SEN in the FSL classroom setting. As a result, the participants were carefully chosen to ensure that they had all experienced the phenomenon in question.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

The chosen participants for this study are FSL educators in the GTA. By choosing to limit this study to participants in the GTA, I focused on the pedagogical practices, challenges, and opportunities as they exist within the confines of the Ontario FSL classrooms and curricula. It was not the goal of this study to gather evidence from educators outside of the province of Ontario. For the most part, the selected interviewees represent the challenges faced and the opportunities made available to them within their capacity as FSL educators in the GTA. Due to the small, selective sample of participants in this study, the participants I chose to interview have had some experience with using technology in the classroom for the purpose of differentiated instruction. While this is not among the sampling criteria for participants in this study, it was important that each of the participants were at the very least open to the idea of incorporating various forms of technological modification or differentiated instruction. Participants were required to satisfy the following sampling criteria:

1. Teachers have taught in the CF, EF, or FI classroom at a school in the GTA
2. Teachers have had experience working with at least two students with communicative difficulties or SEN in FSL classrooms
3. At least one teacher has had experience working in the capacity as a special education teacher as well as an FSL teacher over the course of their career as an educator. According to Robinson (2014), “the more inclusion and exclusion criteria that are used to define a sample universe, and the more specific these criteria are, the more homogeneous the sample universe becomes” (p. 26). The sample criteria used for this study were not extensive, but were specific, and so sample homogeneity is geographically evident, but the range of their teaching experiences are somewhat varied. While one of these teachers has had experience working as both a special education teacher and French teacher, for example, the other two have not. These teachers have also taught in a variety of second language settings, including the CF, EF, and FI classrooms. These factors play a significant role in influencing the teachers’ perspectives on the extent of inclusivity that is possible in the FSL classroom.

3.3.2 Participant recruitment

This study employed a combination of both convenience and purposive sampling strategies. While I relied to a certain extent on participants’ willingness and proximity, I also requested participation based on my assumption of a theoretical understanding of the topic and unique or important perspectives on the research questions.

I initially conducted a judgement sample of participants, following the four-point approach to qualitative sampling. This approach involved the following steps: (1) defining a sample universe; (2) deciding on a sample size; (3) devising a sample strategy; and finally (4) sourcing the sample (Robinson, 2014). I then carefully structured the aforementioned sampling criteria, and selected participants based on appropriateness and their fulfillment of this criteria. Participants were informed of the topic of study and were then asked if they would like to participate in the capacity of an interviewee, keeping in mind various demands of participation,
including: (1) time commitment; (2) criteria used to determine eligibility; and (3) preferred location of the semi-structured face-to-face interview.

3.3.3 Participant biographies

All three participants selected for this research are currently French teachers at English language public schools affiliated with an Ontario school board. At the time of this study, they had all been teaching in the French classroom for at least five years. Here, I describe each in greater detail, using pseudonyms to maintain their confidentiality.

Deana

Deana has been a CF teacher with a school board in the GTA for fifteen years. She currently teaches French to students in Grades 6 through 8. Before beginning her career as a CF teacher, Deana taught Special Education for three years.

Haley

Haley has been teaching for twenty years. She currently teaches Grade 1 FI, and previously taught Grades 7 and 8 CF for roughly three years and EF for six years. At the time of the interview for this study, she had been teaching in the FI classroom for eleven years.

Karina

Karina is also currently a teacher with a school board in the GTA. She has been teaching for five years in the capacity as a CF teacher. She currently teaches FSL to students in Grades 4 through 6. Prior to this, Karina was a junior FI teacher with an English language private school board in the GTA.

3.4 Data Analysis

Thorough and thoughtful analysis of qualitative data provides insight into participants’ experiences, highlights their perspectives, and shows patterns in behaviour that would not
otherwise be evident through quantitative analysis. According to Creswell (2007), “data analysis is not off-the-shelf; rather, it is custom-built, revised, and “choreographed” (p. 150). Content analysis was given primacy in this study. Content, gathered from the interviewees’ responses to interview questions were analyzed based on two levels: the basic level and the higher level. The basic level, according to Hancock (2002), includes a surface-level interpretation of what was said throughout the interviews, with little elaboration on the implications of research findings. The higher level of analysis, however, “…is concerned with what was meant by the response, what was inferred or implied” (Hancock, 2002, p. 17). This involves a more interpretive level of analysis concerned with responses, as well as inferences made, potential implications of these responses and recommendations based on scholarship explored by educational researchers in the previous chapter.

The data analysis throughout this study does not adopt a uniform approach; rather, it represents the respondents’ statements by describing, reflecting upon, and interpreting their ideas before organizing or classifying them according to shared similarities (Creswell, 2007). The data analysis of this research also sought to maximize the benefits of qualitative research, focusing on interpretations and inferences of participants’ statements and responses. In keeping with the demands of phenomenological qualitative research, data analysis involved a description of the personal experiences, an analysis of significant statements, and a culminating statement regarding the implications of the respondents’ experiences.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

Effective phenomenological qualitative research involves a certain degree of flexibility aimed at addressing the research purpose in a fair and credible manner (Tracy, 2010). Some related ethical concerns of this particular study include equitable selection of participants, respect
for participants’ privacy, lack of pressure, and unbiased presentation. In order to proactively address these ethical concerns, I made every effort to prepare materials well in advance for participants, inform them of the sampling criteria, and address their concerns and questions beforehand. I ensured that participants in this study were appropriately informed of the parameters of the research in person as well as in written form. The associated ethical implications and the expectations of participants have been outlined in the letter of consent and interview protocol templates attached to this chapter in Appendices A and B.

Tracy (2010) notes that there are eight criteria for excellent qualitative research. Among these eight criteria, she explains that the research must consider four key ethical concerns, which include: “(1) procedural ethics; (2) situational and culturally specific ethics; (3) relational ethics; and (4) exiting ethics” (p. 840). The primary concern of this study is with procedural ethics, which is focused on “the importance of accuracy and avoiding fabrication, fraud, omission, and contrivance” (Tracy, 2010, p. 847). With the Ministry of Education’s recent focus on inclusivity of students with SEN in the FSL classroom, it was possible that participants may have felt compelled to agree with the changes. In order to ensure that respondents felt at ease with sharing their sincere beliefs regarding inclusivity and/or exemption, participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time, as well as their right to refuse to answer any questions. They were also assured that all personal data would be safeguarded and names and places of employment would not be disclosed. In addition to this, participants have been guaranteed that other than myself and my course instructor, no other person would have access to the interview transcripts or recordings, all of which have been stored on my personal computer for a period of up to one year following the completion of this project. This also encompasses exiting ethics, ensuring
participants that the research would be presented in a manner that avoids any and all unjust or unintended consequences.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

One of the key drawbacks of this study includes the limited number of participants involved in this study. This research study has been completed within a two-year time frame. As a result, the extent of teacher participation in this study was limited to three. Due to the time and ethical restraints, it was not possible to include the perspectives of the school boards’ speech-language professionals, a contribution that would have likely aided one’s understanding of the types of resources required to cater specifically to the needs of students with communication challenges. This did, however, allow for the research to cover a deeper understanding of the three interviewees’ experiences with students in the FSL classroom, looking particularly at the pedagogical implications of inclusivity and special education in the context of the second language classroom. The teachers’ first-hand accounts, although few in number, were intended to be extensive in quality and validity. Contributions from these three expert teachers provide key insights into both the opportunities and difficulties associated with delivering effective second language instruction for students with SEN. One particular strength associated with these participants was that they have all not only taught in the CF classroom, but some have also had experience teaching in either EF and FI classrooms, or special education classrooms. These experiences serve as opportunities for them to draw comparisons among the three, as well as to consider SEN in the context of foreign language teaching.

As noted by Aaron Cooley (2013), “…a driving aim of ethnography and qualitative work must be to attempt to understand a social experience or phenomena in the terms of those involved and to think through it in terms of an observer (laden, of course, with one’s biases)” (p.
Cooley (2013) is accurate in that another limitation imposed by qualitative research is the unavoidable fact that one’s biases are at the very surface. However, as long as one ensures that biases do not dominate documentation and analysis, biases in research and interactions could actually enhance the relationship between the researcher and their interviewees. As Cooley (2013) insightfully points out, “…the focus on connecting one’s work to those individuals who are in need of empowerment is a vital step in the continued evolution of qualitative research…” (p. 258). This is especially true of the research conducted in this study. Discussion was used as the primary tool for deconstructing the experiences of teachers in the Core FSL classroom, and connecting their experiences to the evolving policies involving students with speech and language impairments or other SEN.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explained the research methodology used throughout this study. I opened with an explanation of the research approach and overall procedure, elaborating on the reason for having chosen phenomenological qualitative research and comparing and contrasting the differences between this and quantitative research. I then described the participants of this study, explaining preferred criteria of interviewees as having had experience in the capacity as an FSL teacher, as well as experience working with students with SEN. Next, I described my instruments of data collection, and the use of semi-structured face-to-face interviews as the primary source of data collection. In addition, I justified my reasoning for the use of purposeful sampling as my chosen recruitment procedure. I then explained my preferred method of analysis for the research data, and my explanations for approaching the research in this manner. I proceeded to elaborate on several ethical issues and the risks of participation before concluding with the methodological limitations of this study. At that point, I also highlighted the strengths,
all of which are permitted within the context of a phenomenological qualitative research study. In the following chapter, I report on the research findings gathered from interviews with the selected participants. I consider the ways in which these research findings coincide with the existing research literature in Chapter 2, thereby unearthing some possible answers to my initial research questions.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I report and discuss my research findings as I seek to discover opportunities for including students with special education needs (SEN) in Ontario’s French as a Second Language (FSL) programs. I draw upon the comparisons and commonalities between the scholarship presented in Chapter 2 and the findings of my interviews with three FSL teachers in the GTA. The information in this chapter is presented thematically, as I explore the practicality of including students with SEN in the FSL classroom. The first three themes explore the nature of the existing framework of FSL programs in Ontario, and the subsequent opportunities and implications for students with SEN. The final theme investigates the ways in which these teachers’ attitudes toward inclusivity either align with or contradict the opportunities for integration as outlined in the existing scholarship. I use these themes and emerging sub-themes to categorize the experiences and opinions of the research participants. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a summary of the research findings, as I discuss the ways in which these perspectives influence the field of FSL teaching for students with exceptionalities.

This chapter addresses the following themes:

1. Significance of oral proficiency and participation
2. Diversified instructional and assessment practices
3. Assistive technology and student engagement
4. Practicality of the inclusive environment
4.1 Significance of Oral Proficiency and Participation

Oral proficiency lies at the forefront of Ontario’s FSL curriculum documents, each of which places significant emphasis on students’ ability to express and clarify their thoughts in French, communicate authentically in different settings, and to seek out opportunities to “…not only enhance their competence in communicating information, but also explore and come to understand ideas and concepts…” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 20). This focus on oral proficiency is evidenced throughout the curriculum documents, and assessment and evaluation practices measure the many ways in which students are able to apply the knowledge and skills that they have acquired by means of successful, effective, and authentic communication. The documents appear to have been written within the methodological framework of the learner-centered method of second language teaching (SLT), which promotes communication, interaction, participation, and confidence as key components of the overall vision for FSL (Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). The curriculum documents exist as a guide for educators, who must determine how they wish to interpret the curricular expectations for the purposes of effective instruction in their respective classrooms.

4.1.1 Communicating in the target language

When asked to comment on the importance of oral proficiency in FSL, Deana spoke with unwavering confidence about her focus on authentic communication. She noted that most of her French classes are done orally, with “…maybe 10 minutes of something written toward the end of the period.” Karina, on the other hand, stated that she “…[tries] to incorporate oral at the beginning; get them speaking in the target language, playing a game, get them warmed up in some capacity like that and then they would move into their individual work…” Interestingly, both of these Core French (CF) teachers share a similar understanding of the value of oral
proficiency in the target language, but both appear to incorporate communication in very
different ways, with varying levels of frequency and intensity. Beyond recognizing the value in
oral communication, it is also likely that these teachers are responding to the Ontario Ministry of
Education’s (2013) curricular expectations, which require educators to meet certain standards of
oral fluency and articulation.

4.1.2 Communicative challenges and oral confidence

The difficulty with incorporating oral proficiency to the extent that is recommended by
Ontario’s Ministry of Education is that students with communicative challenges and other SEN
are often expected to attain the same levels of competence as their peers. When asked about
effective methods of instruction for engaging students with SEN who lack motivation in the FSL
classroom, Deana explained,

I find that the best way to engage students with special education needs is to pull them in
orally. So to have them do oral presentations, the oral readings, anything. If they need the
extra support, I put them beside me even during a presentation; to make them more
comfortable, as an anchor.

Deana’s experience with students with SEN in FSL has typically been with those who experience
greater difficulty with written production skills, as opposed to oral. In response to these students’
difficulties with written production, Deana has instead focused her attention on these students’
ability to communicate meaning orally. She not only acknowledges, but also seeks to respond to
the presence of what scholars have referred to as “individual variability” (Ingvalson, Ettlinger &
Wong, 2012, p. 43). Ingvalson, Ettlinger, and Wong (2012) explain that this individual
variability among learners suggests that the ability to listen and respond effectively to content
presented in the target language will not always be consistent among all students. Based on this
premise, it is therefore assumed that it is the teacher’s responsibility to recognize and cater to
their students’ different needs and abilities.
As Deana has shifted her focus to oral communication in order to engage students with SEN, she has also witnessed many examples of communicative anxiety over the years in her CF classrooms, and strongly believes that “…it’s all about making [these students] comfortable with the presentation…” Both Haley and Karina have had similar experiences with communicative anxiety in their respective classrooms. With regards to her primary FI classroom, Haley explained that many diagnoses of SEN are often identified at this age, and these needs tend to influence the students’ ability or desire to communicate openly in the target language. She noted that “…in the young age, you can see their anxiety, or you can see that something is a little bit different…how they’re processing, or communicating…” Karina also sees a great deal of communicative anxiety amongst her junior CF students, but believes that there are many opportunities for the classroom teacher to inspire confidence among their learners, including using strategies such as game-based learning, and group projects, which typically reduce unusually high levels of communicative anxiety.

These FSL educators’ focus on oral proficiency is not at odds with the expectations outlined in the curriculum documents, and while there is certainly merit to the need for oral proficiency in the FSL classroom, there is an equal need for corresponding differentiated practices, accommodation, modification, and alternative assessment that would allow for a growth mindset for students with SEN. As the existing scholarship suggests, students’ performance in the second language (L2) classroom should not be held to universal standards, but individual differences among learners must continue to inform and reform pedagogical practices. (Ingvalson, Ettlinger & Wong, 2012; Liakin, Liakina & Cardoso, 2015). In subsequent sections, I expand upon these research participants’ individual approaches to diversified practices in their classrooms for students with communicative challenges and other SEN.
4.2 Diversified Instructional and Assessment Practices

Effective differentiated programming in the FSL classroom can support and encourage students with communicative challenges and SEN to become more confident in their roles as second language learners. Scholars suggest that inclusive practices often serve as an opportunity to level the playing field so as to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to engage with both the content and their peers in meaningful ways (Joy & Murphy, 2012). Differentiated instruction and assessment practices will not always look the same for every FSL instructor, nor will they serve to benefit each student in the same way. Some teachers may choose to focus on differentiated instruction within the framework of assistive technology, while others may place greater emphasis on using tactics that de-emphasize students’ shortcomings, and instead choose to focus on their range of abilities. It is important that educators are aware that methods of diversification in the FSL classroom ought to be just as varied as are their students’ abilities.

4.2.1 Opportunities for differentiation

When asked about her beliefs regarding inclusivity in FSL, Deana firmly stated that students with SEN are certainly deserving of a place in the FSL classroom. She explained that she is always seeking out opportunities for integration, and tries to motivate these students to participate both orally and in written form. She creates different tests for her students with SEN where “…instead of having to remember a word, they’ll have the word in a word bank and they fill it in.” She also insists that their degree of participation in the classroom “…depends on [their] motivation as well, and most of the time, too, it depends on the teacher’s personality. If they think Madame cares, they’ll do the work, if Madame doesn’t care, they won’t do it.” She also stated that “If I’m doing something oral, I do find that I’m a little more lenient with special education students because I feel like already, they have done so much by just having the
courage to get up there and do the presentation.” She spoke of more severe cases in which her students’ SEN created an overwhelming sense of anxiety that often deterred them from engaging orally with their peers. She said, “I’ve actually had kids stand up there and cry, and sorry, I’m not there to torture anybody. I let them just stand with me and present individually.” It is evident that Deana’s commitment to inclusivity exists not only in terms of differentiated instruction, but also with regards to modified assessment practices designed to create opportunities for success.

Karina spoke specifically to cases of testing anxiety in her classrooms, and as a result, does very little testing in her FSL classrooms. She noted, “I don’t think that’s a true evaluation. I do monitor their day-to-day activities. I assess them as they are working. We do a lot of oral presentations. We do a lot of written work in terms of group projects.” She believes that testing does nothing to assist students in the process of second language acquisition, but rather, it simply makes students more anxious. This is especially the case for students with communicative challenges such as dyslexia, which significantly compromises students’ ability to read as a result of “…specific impairments in representing, storing, and retrieving phonological information…” (Georgiou, 2006). When confronted with written tasks, or unit tests which require reading for comprehension, these students would be automatically placed at a disadvantage in the classroom.

Haley’s approach to differentiation is very interesting in that she asserted that second language acquisition in itself not only allows for, but requires the use of differentiated instruction. She believes that there are opportunities for differentiation in almost every aspect of SLT. She noted,

…I find that many of the strategies that we use to teach a second language…using a lot of picture cues or actions and gestures, a lot of repetition, it really helps students with needs in different ways – so many of the second language teaching strategies benefit learners who have different kinds of needs as well.
Arnett (2014) shares this belief, noting that “teaching strategies commonly recommended for students with learning difficulties…are highly congruent with the teaching strategies that inform good FSL instruction…” (p. 448). This is an important consideration for FSL educators because FSL teaching, and by extension, SLT methods should not be viewed as disconnected from special education. Rather, as Haley has pointed out, it is a process by which educators must incorporate, to some extent, communicative teaching methods that include repetition, as well as gestures, photos, videos, and other forms of multimedia as cues to generate ideas or deepen understanding. Haley also explained,

…with the primary kids, I use puppets a lot so if they were speaking very quietly for guided reading or mumbling, they have puppets and they could choose lion or tiger puppets and give the puppets a voice. That really helped a lot.

The use of manipulatives such as puppets in the primary or even the junior FSL classroom as a means of diversifying instructional practices would likely benefit those students learning with communicative challenges and/or levels of communicative anxiety. Haley’s approach to SLT is reminiscent of Swain’s (2006) process of “languaging,” which encourages learners to externalize their thought processes in an attempt to deepen their understanding. By seeing the SLT process as one which encompasses the use of gestures, videos, skits, puppet-shows, and other methods of visualization and external representation, Haley manages to incorporate methods of communicative language teaching (CLT)\(^2\) in a manner that does not discourage students with SEN, but rather, aids them.

While the means of diversification among these three research participants are very different, all are geared toward creating and sustaining comfortable and equitable classroom

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\(^2\) Communicative language teaching (CLT) is a language teaching method through which “…the learner is helped to activate and integrate [specific knowledge of linguistic forms] for meaningful communication” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 126).
environments, within which all students are able to contribute equally in ways that are most suitable to their respective needs and preferences as learners.

4.2.2 Challenges posed by inclusion

There are many opportunities for diversification of instruction and assessment. However, all of these practices are not always applicable in certain classroom settings, or with certain students. In addition, a lack of classroom resources sometimes makes it difficult for teachers to incorporate diversification in effective and meaningful ways. Karina spoke of a past student who refused to speak in her classroom. She explained how she struggled to find ways in which she could actively engage and fairly assess this student. She said, “…when it came to assessing him, it was really hard because if I followed what I have as assessment criteria…first semester, he said and did nothing. He just listened. Couldn’t verbalize anything.” Karina was uncertain about the ways in which she could assess learners, who, like this student, struggled with communicative issues to the extent that they were completely unable or unwilling to speak, and therefore, unable to fulfil oral assessment criteria.

Deana also spoke of a similar situation in which a student of hers “…would not speak; not even in English. He would not write anything for me. He would just sit…he does not bother me or disrupt my class…” Despite Deana’s attempts to use methods of differentiated instruction with this student, she was unable to assist him in advancing in the language learning process. Deana felt that this student would have likely benefited more so from time spent in the special education classroom than in the FSL classroom. While Deana strongly believes that most students should be allowed to pursue FSL education regardless of their SEN, she also felt that this particular student was an exceptional case, and on his high school transition recommendation sheet, she recommended for him to not have to take FSL. Haley shared a similar experience
when she taught CF in the earlier years of her career. She had an English Language Learner (ELL) in her French classroom, who was unable to speak either English or French. Haley often used French class time to help this student learn how to read in English. She said, “…there was no growth mindset for this child, so I fought for him to be exempt from French.” While Haley believes that most students with communicative challenges are capable of being successful in FSL programs, she believes that the choice was not one to be made by teachers, the administration, the board, or the Ministry of Education. Rather, she explained that students and their parents or guardians should typically be given the choice to determine whether the student should be learning French, or devoting this time to other academic pursuits.

All three experiences with these students, especially the former two, are very much in line with the challenges that a teacher may face if they had a student learning with selective mutism in their FSL classroom. These students will often be left behind in an FSL classroom that focuses very heavily on students’ ability to “…discuss subject matter…prepare and give oral presentations…participate in dramatizations and conduct surveys and interviews…” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 12). While the Ministry (2013) does explain in its curriculum that students with exceptionalities “…may need to be given additional time to complete assignments or tests, they may need to do tests orally…and they may need more explanations about what is expected…” (p. 8), it fails to include other opportunities for pre-emptive accommodations or modifications. The following section looks specifically at some of the current uses of technological resources as a means of creating a more inclusive environment for students with communicative challenges and other SEN.
4.3 Assistive Technology and Student Engagement

When used effectively, assistive technology in the second language classroom can significantly influence students’ sense of belonging and learner autonomy, therefore enhancing their desire to actively engage in whole-group activities (Liakin, Cardoso & Liakina, 2015). All three research participants interviewed for the purposes of this study implement technology in the FSL classroom in a variety of contexts, each seeing its value in fulfilling many different curriculum expectations.

4.3.1 The practicality of assistive technology

Deana, who focuses on using the target language as a means of communication as frequently as possible in her CF classroom, uses technology to support the learning process, but does not focus on software as a vehicle for second language acquisition. She uses the ELMO projector with her intermediate students, but stated, “…I am very behind on technology, that’s where I would need my professional development…I haven’t received it; I haven’t sought it out.” She noted that even though her students have not specifically asked to use very much technology in the classroom, she does wish that she was able to bring these opportunities to them in more significant ways.

Karina also uses the ELMO when working with the class as a whole group. She said, “I project all the information on the screen and the students can read; we read as a class together…When the students have projects to do, they do PowerPoint presentations.” In addition to these strategies, Karina also spoke of the importance of other French language applications as a means of showing students that opportunities to learn French do in fact exist outside of the confines of the classroom, and can often be accessed at home or at public libraries. She noted, “We use the iPads as well and…on Fridays they use programs like Duolingo or other
websites that are French-oriented…It’s really important in the French program to really think about how technology can be incorporated.” Like Deana, Karina agreed that she felt as though there is still more that she can do to incorporate technology more meaningfully, but time constraints often pose limitations to this. In addition to the time constraints, it was also suggested that there was a lack of training made available to FSL teachers. I explain the challenges posed by the lack of professional development (PD) opportunities later in this chapter.

4.3.2 Assistive technology as an all-inclusive solution

Technology, in the form of the ELMO and Microsoft PowerPoint can certainly serve as a tool for teachers to share content knowledge with their students. Technology can also be implemented so as to modify the very nature of the language learning experience. Haley saw numerous opportunities for assisting students with SEN by implementing technological software as a means of enhancing language acquisition for all students. She said, “…talk-to-text is so beneficial. Recording answers on the iPad is equally beneficial.” She also saw certain software as being particularly useful for recording and tracking progress, therefore making ongoing assessment more feasible for the FSL teacher. She noted,

...so many different apps can be used to track or create portfolios or to share with the students or parents…like a Grade 1 will voice record what they thought about what they did, or the process. It’s so beneficial for kids, especially if they have difficulty writing it all out due to fine motor skills, or processing…there are so many steps that could be lost in writing out their thinking that it’s so beneficial to use these tools to make all students successful in the FI classroom. Whereas maybe ten years ago, they were told it’s not the classroom or program for them, that’s not the case anymore.

The use of technology, according to Haley, extends beyond simply serving as an aid to students with SEN. Rather, she believes that it is a practice that should exist as a necessary and foundational component of FSL education, meant to enhance opportunities for language acquisition for all students. Surely, it can be used to facilitate ease of assessment for the FSL
teacher, but it should also be seen as a tool for students to record and reflect upon their own progress throughout the language learning process. These practices assist educators in fostering a stronger sense of learner autonomy, which, according to Liakin, Cardoso, and Liakina (2015), is among the most important factors contributing to students’ development of conversation skills in the French classroom.

4.4 Practicality of the Inclusive Environment

All three French teachers interviewed for the purposes of this study shared different perspectives on the practicality of including students with communicative challenges and other SEN in their FSL classrooms. While they were generally in favour of the move toward more inclusive and equitable SLT practices, they were somewhat hesitant about the availability of resources and opportunities for PD to aid them in fostering higher levels of inclusivity. In addition to PD, all three interviewees also cited support of the school administration as a key component in advancing many classroom initiatives. According to Joy and Murphy (2012), successful integration demands the “…encouragement, support, and trust” of the administration, as well as the collaboration of FSL educators at the school (p. 112).

Two of the participants interviewed for this study spoke specifically of a lack of communication between the FSL teacher and the administration regarding identification of students’ SEN. This often leaves the FSL teacher unaware and unable to proactively implement accommodations or modifications that specifically cater to the needs of these students. Integration cannot be expected to begin and end with the classroom teacher.

4.4.1 The importance of communication with the school’s administration

When asked if she was informed beforehand of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) or other special accommodations, Karina laughed, saying, “I think I’m supposed to be…sometimes
I’ll come to the homeroom teacher and ask, that’s usually the way it works.” Deana shared Karina’s sentiments, noting, “…sometimes the classroom teacher would tell me, but I have not been informed by the administration.” Deana felt that she is often able to “…pinpoint the students that will need the extra help within the first two weeks of school.” She attributes this in part to the fact that her own son has a learning difficulty so she finds herself “…a little bit more aware of the challenges and empathetic toward these students.” Arnett, Mady, and Muilenburg’s findings (2014) support Deana’s belief, as their research suggests that teachers who have had personal experience with a learning difficulty were more inclined to take a stance on issues pertaining to students with SEN in FSL. They concluded that “…a teacher’s personal experience with disability could make a difference in how the student is viewed by the teacher” (Arnett, Mady, Muilenburg, 2014, p. 455). This could also offer another explanation as to why Deana has a very positive attitude toward inclusivity in FSL classrooms. Rather than viewing difference as a difficulty, she views it more so as an opportunity.

The fact that FSL teachers are not informed of SEN or learning difficulties beforehand suggests that oftentimes, unless the FSL teacher is able to identify challenges experienced by individual students, and find the time to follow up with the students’ homeroom teachers, or with the administration, these needs would likely go unnoticed. In turn, the student would not receive the appropriate accommodation to aid them in the FSL classroom, thus perpetuating the misinformed belief that students with SEN cannot succeed in the second language classroom. The challenge with informing the teachers beforehand of learning difficulties is that this might serve to “…perpetuate inequities” rather than to prevent them (Arnett, Mady & Muilenburg, 2014, p. 449). Jordan, Lindsay, and Stanovich (1997) found that depending upon the lens through which teachers viewed specific learning difficulties, they might interact with students
with SEN in a “less academic way” therefore diminishing these students’ overall educational experience (as cited in Arnett, Mady & Muilenburg, 2014, p. 449). Communication between the administration and teachers, therefore, would likely need to be accompanied by a series of resources and professional development opportunities aimed at assisting FSL teachers in effectively supporting students with learning difficulties. I discuss the potential for these resources and opportunities in the following sections.

4.4.2 Availability of resources

If students with SEN are to be successfully integrated in FSL programs across the province, certain changes to the existing framework of FSL education will likely need to be implemented. When asked about what modifications would need to be put into effect in order to maximize the potential of students with SEN in FSL, Karina cited funding and training as two necessary components of revitalizing FSL education. While she currently has her own classroom, she noted, “…many, many French teachers are on the cart and that makes a huge difference. They need their own space…It just makes it a lot harder to address the needs of students if I’m travelling on a cart.” Karina found that in her own experience, students’ attitudes toward French language learning changed drastically when she was teaching on a cart versus when teaching in her own classroom. She argued that when students saw her on a cart, they assumed that “…this is fun time, it’s not really work time…The whole attitude changes.” Karina believes that if the Ministry is to pursue French education for all, “there needs to be a whole change, not just with assessment, but with the whole thing. Otherwise these students will just get shoved under the rug.” She noted that the homeroom teacher “…[gets] support from the HSP [Home School Program] class or something. We will need that same kind of support in French, and how is that going to impact the system in terms of funding? There will need to be some pilot projects where
they test it out first.” Karina fears that until there is a fundamental shift in the overall perception of FSL programming in Ontario, French teachers will continue to struggle to access the resources needed in order to truly support their students in the second language learning process.

Deana posited that making French mandatory for all students is an important move in the right direction. She said, “I see no reason for them not to…anyone with an exceptionality should try. I have friends who teach French Immersion to mute students, so you really just have to think about making the right accommodations for them.” At the same time, however, she shared Karina’s idea that extra support for teachers would be necessary, likely in the form of an educational assistant (EA) who could assist the French teacher with monitoring and responding to the individual needs of students in their classrooms. Similarly, Haley was curious about the feasibility of this inclusive framework, but she felt strongly that teachers should not necessarily be making these decisions regarding exemptions. She noted, “…there are so many things available to help students be successful in all different kinds of programs so I do think that more students can be more successful in a French program today…” Both Deana and Haley shared the belief that the framework for inclusivity in Ontario’s FSL programs exists, but there continue to be slight discrepancies between the province’s goals, and the availability of resources that would aid teachers in producing the desired results.

4.4.3 The need for professional development (PD) opportunities

Opportunities for PD will play an integral role in ensuring a successful and meaningful transition toward more cohesive and inclusive province-wide FSL programs. Deana noted that she would require PD in order to enhance her use of technology in the classroom. While this PD is not geared directly toward inclusive practices in FSL, it would allow Deana to feel more confident in her ability to introduce different methods of technological learning to her students.
Karina also sees the value in opportunities for PD for FSL teachers, citing “funding and training” as the two most important adjustments needed in the FSL program. She argued that the FSL classroom needs to be viewed as “…just as important as the homeroom classes…” She has been to several workshops geared toward FSL instruction, and feels that these workshops provided her with an opportunity to interact with like-minded FSL educators who often encounter similar challenges in their classrooms on an everyday basis. It is at these workshops that educators, like Karina, find a platform upon which they can voice their opinions and gain insight regarding the lack of classrooms for French instruction, insufficient administrative support, and what she believes to be an overall lack of investment in the future of FSL.

While school boards currently offer PD opportunities for FSL educators, Karina believes that there is now a need for a renewed focus on PD geared towards special education within the context of the FSL classroom. She noted, “If they’re going to implement something where there’s special education, there needs to be a whole change…it can’t just be that [they’re] going to give [us] the students with special education needs and [we] figure it out; that won’t work.” She questioned the immediate success of inclusive programming in FSL if the teachers did not receive ample training beforehand that would enable them to identify and specifically cater to the different abilities in their classrooms specifically in the context of SLT. In order to ensure uniformity, training of this nature would likely have to be mandatory, which would again raise important questions regarding the overall feasibility and potential success of inclusivity in FSL.

All three participants agreed that the time restraint had a direct impact upon the extent to which they were able to effectively incorporate inclusive practices, such as Assistive Speech Recognition (ASR) software in their classrooms. However, there was also reference to the lack of professional development available to support them in these endeavours. This was an issue to
which Joy and Murphy (2012) alluded in their study on students with SEN in an Intensive French (IF) program. They noted that teachers would require the encouragement and support of their administration in order to successfully integrate inclusionary practices in the classroom. Joy and Murphy (2012) further explained that “…support comes also from District and Department of Education levels in terms of opportunities for professional development and consultation with other teachers” (p. 112). Given the concerns expressed by the participants regarding their overall preparedness for including students with SEN, there likely needs to be a greater focus on behalf of the school boards and the province’s Ministry of Education on providing additional resources and professional development opportunities to support current FSL teachers.

4.5 Conclusion

The research findings presented throughout this chapter suggest that while opportunities for inclusivity in FSL exist, there are still extensive gaps in the programs that impede teachers and students’ success. While the research findings generally support the literature explored in Chapter 2, the teachers’ anecdotal accounts of occurrences in their respective classrooms suggest that there continue to be discrepancies in the existing relationship between the goals and values of the Ministry of Education, and the lived experiences and beliefs held by the FSL teachers interviewed for the purposes of this study.

In some ways, the relationship between these teachers and their respective school administrations are flawed. Of the three interview participants, all reported having not been informed about students’ SEN in advance of the school year, an obstacle which has hindered preemptive action in support of these students. In addition, the importance of oral proficiency and participation in Ontario’s FSL classrooms has continued to grow, and the teachers interviewed for the purposes of this study continue to adjust their classroom strategies to satisfy new
requirements. However, the challenge now exists as educators must grapple with determining fair assessment strategies for students with communicative challenges and other SEN. Along with assessment strategies, educators must also consider diversified instructional practices, some of which may conveniently align with other conventional methods of SLT. Possibilities for diversification of instructional and assessment practices appear to be common, but not always applicable or effective. As is the case with technology in the classroom, the research participants in this study integrated technology in various ways, but still found themselves wanting further PD in this area. This raises questions regarding the overall practicality of the inclusive environment, and the steps that must be taken in order to ensure the effective transition toward inclusivity in all three FSL programs.

In the following chapter, I expand upon and explain the implications of these research findings for the educational research community as well as for the development of my own professional identity and practice. I also present several opportunities for exploratory practice within the context of the FSL classroom. I investigate some areas for further pedagogical research based on the observed outcomes of the three research participants’ lived experiences in the CF, EF, and FI classrooms. In so doing, I offer recommendations to educators and administrators alike for future pedagogical development based on the intersection of the research findings and the existing literature.
Chapter 5: Implications

5.0 Introduction

The initial purpose of this study was to explore educators’ experiences with teaching students with language learning difficulties and other special education needs (SEN) in French as a Second Language (FSL) programs in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Throughout this paper, I have assessed the feasibility of including students with special education needs (SEN) in FSL programs, based on the existing challenges, available resources, and professional development opportunities for FSL teachers. I asked: “What methods, if any, are currently practiced in junior and intermediate FSL classrooms to address the diverse learning needs of students with communication, speech, or language-based challenges and other SEN?” The findings suggest that while the existing framework for FSL programs offers many opportunities for inclusion, FSL educators are not equipped with the necessary tools with which they may facilitate effective and meaningful second language teaching (SLT) for students learning with communicative difficulties. Throughout this final chapter, I present an overview of the key research findings. I then explain the implications of these findings for the educational community, as well as for myself as both a future teacher and researcher. Based on these findings, I offer answers to my initial research questions, provide recommendations for stakeholders in the field of teacher education, and identify important areas for future research on inclusive FSL instruction.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings

Some of the challenges explored in the previous chapter include a lack of teacher training and support in accommodating students with learning difficulties, as well as a lack of flexibility in assessment and evaluation practices as outlined in Ontario’s FSL curricula. In this section, I draw upon the research findings as I formulate answers to my original research questions.
5.1.1 Communication with the school’s administration

Findings from interviews with the three research participants suggest that FSL teachers are not typically made aware of all students’ learning difficulties beforehand. Rather, they are expected to determine these difficulties themselves over the course of the academic year. Currently, it is not explicitly mandated that FSL teachers must be made aware of students’ SEN. They are, however, expected to offer differentiated learning opportunities for these students and use methods of alternative assessment where applicable (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).

Two of the participants interviewed for the purposes of this study expressed concern over the lack of communication between the administration and FSL teachers. They explained that they are unable to proactively implement diversified instruction as they are often uninformed, and must react to difficulties only as they arise in the classroom. One of the participants explained that if she had noticed markers of a learning difficulty, she would enquire with the student’s homeroom teacher so as to gather more details about this student’s learning needs. Another felt that she was often able to recognize signs of learning difficulties early on, as she, herself, has a son with a learning difficulty. Upon learning of students’ impediments to success, all three participants explained that they would attempt to support these students in different ways depending upon the nature of the learner’s challenges. By contrast, if FSL teachers were to be informed of existing learning difficulties by the school’s administration beforehand, there would likely be a greater effort to design units that effectively incorporate individualized growth plans for students learning with SEN for the upcoming academic year.

5.1.2 Strategies for minimizing communicative anxiety

When considering opportunities for differentiated instruction for students with language learning difficulties, all research participants agreed that there were numerous ways in which
they can aid differently-abled students in FSL by addressing high levels of communicative anxiety. Haley argued that many SLT methodologies often coincide with special education teaching practices, and as a result, FSL education should not be viewed as being at odds with special education. The participants saw opportunities for alleviating communicative anxiety by implementing modified assessment practices, and integrating technology as a means of allowing students to use a variety of platforms to communicate meaning in the target language. Forum discussions in the target language using online multiplayer video games would be one example of an effective alternative platform. In this case, the pressures often associated with communication tend to be alleviated, and students are likely to feel more comfortable to communicate openly. The consensus among the participants was that levels of testing anxiety were high among many junior and intermediate students. Further, students learning with SEN do not often benefit from assessment and evaluation in the form of written tests, and so, the participants often refrained from relying on these as methods of evaluation.

5.1.3 Diversifying assessment and evaluation practices

When making decisions about differentiation and modification, the participants agreed that differentiated programming in their FSL classrooms often assumes different forms, and serves to benefit each student in very different ways. With regards to modifications for students with oral language difficulties, for example, one participant spoke of allowing students to do oral presentations using puppets as an aid. Another spoke of having students present individually to the teacher, rather than having to endure the anxiety of presenting before the class. Ultimately, findings suggest that methods of differentiation and modification depend upon the consideration and discretion of the FSL teacher. In as far as FSL educators are required to respond to individual learning needs, they are also expected to consider instructional, environmental, and
assessment modifications and accommodations so as to create as many opportunities as possible for student success; this also includes providing maximal opportunities for communication in the target language. However, the participants also expressed uncertainty regarding accurate assessment practices for students whose challenges significantly jeopardized their ability to process information and to express themselves in the target language. Two of the participants explained that when students are unable or unwilling to speak or write, traditional environmental or assessment modifications and accommodations fail to cater to their needs. The teachers felt that they must allow these students to discover and demonstrate their respective language competencies in the classroom, rather than focusing on their existing challenges. Unfortunately, they explained that the majority of difficulties arise when they are expected to assess students based on rigid and narrow curricular expectations.

5.1.4 Opportunities for differentiated instruction

While there still exist some uncertainties among the participants regarding the reality of totally inclusive FSL education, they generally agree that all students should be given the opportunity to pursue FSL if they choose to do so. The parameters of students’ success will ultimately depend upon several factors, including the views held by FSL educators themselves of students with SEN, both the educator and student’s ability to approach these needs with a growth mindset, and the provision of adequate support for teachers and availability of resources offered by the school boards and administration. One of the main concerns expressed by the Core French (CF) teachers, however, was the fact that the lack of available resources and opportunities for professional development implicitly deteriorates the value of FSL education. They believe that this ultimately diminishes opportunities for educators to invest in long-term inclusive practices as they lack the appropriate training needed to truly support students with SEN. In the absence of
adequate resources, inclusion in FSL classrooms would be altogether unsuccessful, as teachers would be ill-equipped to effectively meet the many needs of students with SEN.

5.2 Broad Implications

The research findings have important implications for the future of FSL educational policy in Ontario, the Second Language Teaching (SLT) research community, and FSL educators alike. Interpreting these findings in tandem with the existing research literature has helped to decipher the prevailing challenges to achieving inclusivity in FSL education across the province.

5.2.1 Educational policy

The implications from this study suggest that if the Ontario’s Ministry of Education wishes to achieve its goal of increasing the number of students with SEN enrolled in FSL programs by 2018 (CMEC, 2014, p. 37), there needs to be a greater emphasis on both professional development opportunities for teachers, and the provision of adequate resources to aid their transition toward inclusivity. As noted by the participants, there needs to be a reinvestment in FSL education, which ensures that FSL is not viewed as being secondary to literacy, science, or mathematics. When students observe that their French teacher is the only teacher without their own classroom, this negatively impacts students’ attitudes toward the subject. Further, when teachers are travelling between classrooms on a cart, which is often the case for CF teachers, the opportunities for differentiation are significantly diminished. In their own classrooms, FSL teachers could establish centres at which students with language learning challenges might use assistive technology to develop oral confidence. This practice is impossible for teachers travelling on a cart, who typically have forty minutes of instruction time in a classroom that is not their own. Similarly, while the availability of technological resources is certainly an important component of fostering inclusivity for students with SEN, it offers few
opportunities for the teacher who has had limited experience with using this technology in meaningful and effective ways.

The findings reveal that the availability of technological resources was notably different for the CF teachers and French Immersion (FI) teacher. While all three educators used assistive technology to achieve different ends, the CF teachers commented on a lack of available resources, and a lack of PD to support their effective use of technology. This sentiment was not shared by the FI teacher. As previously noted, one of the limitations to this study is the time restraint, which restricted the number of research participants to three. As a result of this restraint, only one FI teacher was interviewed. It is therefore impossible to ascertain based solely on these findings whether the frequency of technology use varies significantly among CF, Extended French (EF), and FI classroom teachers. It is also difficult to determine if the disparity in availability of resources was attributable to the fact that the teachers taught with different school boards. It is likely that the results of this study are merely representative of the participants’ individual experiences, and not so of each of the province’s three FSL programs themselves. However, one must also consider the support (both financial and otherwise) afforded to educators in each of these programs with regards to the boards’ willingness to invest in technology-centered professional development (PD) opportunities and the provision of adequate funding for technological resources. Students learning with SEN should have access to resources and equal opportunities for success, regardless of whether they are enrolled in either a CF, EF, or FI program.

5.2.2 The educational research community

Current scholarship suggests that students with SEN benefit from learning a second language, and so educators should develop inclusive practices that allow for their students with
SEN to succeed in FSL (Arnott & Mady, 2013; Arnett, Mady & Muilenberg, 2014). Whether inclusive practices take the form of assistive technology as an aid to differentiated instruction, accommodations, or methods of modified assessment, teachers’ experiences show that different strategies need to be used with different students at different stages of the learning process in order to ensure that inclusion in the FSL program is both equitable and effectively managed.

The findings suggest that if students with communicative difficulties and other SEN are to be successfully incorporated in the FSL classroom, the FSL educator should be given the flexibility to accommodate these students’ needs. This flexibility may sometimes involve going beyond the capacity of accommodation and modification practices identified in the FSL curricula. For example, some students with language learning difficulties may require modifications that extend beyond the scope of additional time or more detailed instructions, neither of which will necessarily allow them to improve upon the quality of their spoken or written French. In the case of students with selective mutism, for example, while they may be unable to communicate their ideas orally in front of the class, they may still be able to fulfill this communication requirement by recording themselves speaking, using massive multiplayer online gaming forums, or perhaps by using assistive speech-to-text software. Future research should reflect opportunities for inclusive practices not only in the form of differentiated instruction, but also with regards to opportunities for modified assessment and evaluation.

5.3 Narrow Implications

The findings from this study have altered the manner in which I have come to view my own role as a future FSL educator. The expectations and responsibilities of the teacher in the classroom have never been static, but rather, constantly changing. FSL educators are no exception to this. Arnett (2013) noted that FSL educators need to reject this perspective of
“ideal” FSL education, which often does not align with inclusive pedagogy. Instead, she suggests that each FSL educator consider the many ways in which their students’ differences inform their teaching practice. Arnett’s proposal encompasses many of the implications of this research, which suggest that FSL education is not meant to be universal, but rather, responsive to the needs and abilities that exist in each respective classroom.

5.3.1 My professional identity and practice

In my opinion, one of the main goals of FSL education is to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to express themselves in the target language as frequently as possible. I recognize that some students will be more confident in their ability to do this orally, while others may be more comfortable writing down their thoughts. At the same time, a student may not truly benefit from doing one or the other exclusively, but certain accommodations or modifications can be made so as to ensure that students are given ample opportunities to demonstrate their respective competencies, while also receiving the necessary support to improve upon areas of difficulty. At the same time, I understand that some students may not be comfortable with either oral or written communication in the target language. In which case, the teacher must then work with these students to determine a different communication medium that would be best suited to their abilities. Perhaps students with dyslexia require as many opportunities as possible to express themselves orally, while students with a stutter or selective mutism may choose to write or create multimedia presentations to demonstrate their language proficiency otherwise. There needs to be as many opportunities as possible for the educator to differentiate the communication medium so as to ensure that all students feel that success is within their reach.

While I believe that support in FSL classrooms will certainly look different for all students, educators should also consider the many ways in which SLT methods align with special
education instructional practices. FSL education needs to be revised so that including students with special education needs is not viewed as an additional responsibility for the classroom teacher, but rather, an opportunity for them to integrate the specific SLT methods that coincide with special education practices so as to achieve more effective FSL acquisition for all students. To this end, as an FSL teacher myself, I will be more mindful of how frequently I incorporate gestures, and different forms of multimedia in order to achieve different ends in the FSL classroom. Multimedia in the classroom may come in the form of videos, videogames, songs, or virtual reality field trips, all of which would allow students to indulge in as many authentic French language opportunities as possible. As a future FSL teacher, I hope that this practice will assist me in creating a truly inclusive environment, in which all students, regardless of ability, will be able to engage actively and effectively with myself and their peers. I have had the opportunity to witness a CF classroom in which the Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM) was used as the primary method of instruction. Students, regardless of their identified learning difficulties, used gestures accompanied by oral interaction to communicate in the target language. In my experience, the AIM program is one which serves to benefit all students, allowing the teacher to facilitate instruction without having to isolate some students based solely on their learning difficulties. Ultimately, I believe that FSL educators need to employ the methods of SLT which coincide with special education practices, and use these approaches as a means of making FSL education more holistically inclusive.

5.4 Recommendations

The Ontario Ministry of Education (2013) explains that in planning FSL instruction for students with SEN, educators should determine whether students require no accommodations, a combination of accommodations and modifications, or should be held to alternative expectations
altogether. The challenge for educators is to identify, assess, and respond to these needs in a timely manner so as to ensure that students with SEN are receiving the appropriate accommodations or modifications as early as possible in their academic careers. Furthermore, the FSL curriculum document explains that “a student’s IEP is likely to reflect the same accommodations for many, or all, subject areas” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 36). To this end, FSL educators would benefit from not only having access to the information in the IEP, but also, they should be involved in the process of developing and maintaining the information in the IEP, alongside the student’s homeroom teacher.

In addition, while it is mandated that students learning with SEN in FSL reserve the right to have access to additional support staff in the classroom, this is rarely the case. Pending the availability of support staff, there would first need to be an identified need for such aid in the classroom. While recognizing that the curriculum document assigns the FSL teacher the responsibility to “work collaboratively with special education teachers… [to help all students learn]” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 35), the FSL teacher must first be taught to accurately identify and assess these learning difficulties before seeking the advice of the school’s special education teacher(s). If FSL teachers are not sufficiently trained in this regard, students’ needs are more likely to be neglected in the FSL classroom.

5.5 Future Research

I feel strongly that this research offers several opportunities for expansion. In 2018, which is the Ministry’s forecasted year for improvements in inclusive FSL, it will be interesting to determine whether the rate of enrolment of students with SEN in FSL programs in Ontario has risen, given the province’s commitment to implementing inclusive practices over the past four years. Results from such a study will inform decisions regarding the future of inclusive FSL
education, and assist teachers and administrators alike in determining the gaps that continue to exist, as well as the practices that have affected the most significant change. In an attempt to address inconsistencies across the province’s FSL programs, it would also be interesting to conduct a comprehensive quantitative analysis of the experiences and performance of students with SEN across the three programs in different school boards. This would allow researchers to determine whether students with SEN are more or less likely to be successful in CF, EF, or FI programs, and whether or not their experiences are similar across the province’s many school boards. This line of research would certainly be of great value to policymakers considering the different methods of SLT that best coincide with different tenets of special education.

5.6 Concluding Remarks

Ontario’s Ministry of Education has made an important move in the right direction in its pursuit of inclusive FSL programming. This move has renewed the Ministry’s commitment to Bill 82, assuming responsibility once again for educating all students, including those learning with SEN. This focus on inclusive pedagogy in FSL will inform pedagogical practices that serve to benefit students who have formerly been considered unfit for FSL education. I acknowledge and respect the concerns and opinions of my research participants expressed throughout their interviews. It is my belief that their observations and insights can inform important advances in policy that will eventually serve to develop a more positive outlook on the importance of ensuring a commitment to inclusive FSL instruction.

Equitable access to FSL education should be prioritized, and all stakeholders need to commit to ensuring that the province’s FSL programs constitute effective and innovative policies that cater to the multiple exceptionalities in classrooms across the province. The promotion of inclusive pedagogy will involve a combination of an increase in funding of assistive technology,
a revision of modified assessment and evaluation practices, and a commitment to the provision of professional development opportunities to support FSL educators in these pursuits. The effective implementation of these practices will serve to ensure that all students learning with communicative challenges and other SEN are not left behind in the FSL classroom, but rather, are given ample opportunities to participate and succeed.
References


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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter of Consent Template

My Name is Reshara Alviarez 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 opportunities for including for students with speech and communicative challenges in the Core French as a Second Language (FSL) classroom. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have had experience in the capacity as an FSL educator, and who have worked with students in the FSL setting who are learning with special education needs. 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. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through 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. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor, Dr. Rose Fine-Meyer. 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 during the interview. 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 to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview 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,
Reshara Alviarez
10-884-7273
reshara.alviarez@mail.utoronto.ca

Course Instructor’s Name: Dr. Rose Fine-Meyer
Contact Info: rose.fine.meyer@utoronto.ca

Consent Form
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 _______________ 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 agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn about your experience as an FSL educator, and the opportunities and challenges faced when working toward including students with speech difficulties in the FSL classroom for the purpose of understanding the chances for integrated differentiated learning and alternative assessment. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on your experience with instructing students with various special education needs in FSL. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

**Background Information**

1. Tell me about your experience in the Core FSL classroom. For how many years have you taught in the capacity as an FSL teacher?
2. Could you describe a typical day in the junior/intermediate Core FSL classroom?
3. What is your experience working with students requiring special education needs in the FSL setting?
4. In the past, have you been informed beforehand by the school’s administration of students who have been identified with specified or non-specified speech disorders before the start of the academic term?

**Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs**

5. What are your thoughts on incorporating students with special education needs in the regular Core FSL program?
6. What beliefs or values do you hold regarding exemptions from the Core FSL curriculum for students who require special education needs?
7. Have you previously had to make accommodations (either in the form of differentiated instruction or alternative assessment) for students with speech disorders? Tell me about your experiences with either of these.
8. Could you take the most recent issue you’ve dealt with in your classroom regarding differentiated instruction and elaborate on what you might have been trying to accomplish, and what type of action you were taking to achieve the intended goal?
**Teacher Practices**

9. In what ways have you incorporated technology in the classroom for the purposes of FSL instruction?
10. What are some examples of technological software/devices that you currently use in the classroom, or would like to use in the classroom?
11. What is the extent of communicative anxiety on behalf of your students? What are some methods you frequently use to address these challenges faced by students?
12. What are some examples of alternative assessment you use for students requiring special education needs?

**Supports and Challenges**

13. Do you believe that you are frequently offered access to professional development programs aimed at improving your ability to differentiate learning opportunities for students with special education needs in your classroom?
14. Regarding technology in the classroom, are there available funds for you to purchase apps or assistive technology to reinforce learning opportunities for students with special education needs?

**Next Steps**

15. What are some changes that you believe may be possible in the foreseeable future for second language teachers in the area of ensuring maximum inclusivity in the Core FSL classroom?
16. What are some changes that you believe to be necessary on the part of the school board’s administration in order to ensure that students with speech disorders and other special education needs are not left behind?

Thank you for your participation in this research study.