Teachers’ Experiences of Including Gender and Sexual Diversity Topics in French as a Second Language Classrooms in Ontario

By

Daniel Couture

A research paper submitted in conformity with the requirements
For the degree of Master of Teaching
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

Copyright by Daniel Couture, April 2017
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of French as a second language (FSL) teachers in Ontario who are including topics related to gender and sexual diversity in their classrooms. Semi-structured interviews with two Ontario FSL teachers who reported including these topics in their lessons provided significant insights into this unique teaching experience. First, the normalization of queer people and queer issues was the primary objective of teachers when including these topics in their French as a second language classrooms. Moreover, teachers perceived that the introduction of these topics in their classrooms presented a benefit to their students’ language learning. Nevertheless, teachers reported it to be difficult to locate French language resources to support their inclusion of these topics in their lessons and reported both negative and positive responses to their work from various stakeholders in their school communities. Findings suggest that the normalization of queer people in Ontario schools has still not been achieved and that the work of teachers who include gender and sexual diversity topics in their classrooms is still necessary. Recommendations are offered for teachers and administrators regarding equity in extracurricular activities, professional development and accountability with respect to existing policy.

**Key Words:** French as a second language, schools, gender and sexual diversity, LGBTQ, Ontario, teacher experience
Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge and thank Lee Airton and Austen Koecher for their patience, support and guidance throughout the different stages of this research project. I would also like to thank my peers Stephany Doucette, Jenna Goldberg and Alistair Eggo who provided me with feedback throughout this entire process. Finally, I would like to thank my participants who volunteered their time and insight without which this paper would not exist.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.0 Introduction – Research Context</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Research Problem</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Research Questions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Background of the Researcher</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Overview</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Literature Review</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0 Introduction to the Chapter</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 The Inclusion of Gender and Sexual Diversity Topics in the Classroom</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.1 Ignoring gender and sexual diversity in the classroom</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.2 Teacher attitudes</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Gender and Sexual Diversity in the Second Language Classroom</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1 The case of French as a second language</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Conclusion</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Methodology</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0 Introduction to the Chapter</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Research Approach and Procedures</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Instruments of Data Collection</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3 Participants 17
  3.3.1 Sampling criteria 17
  3.3.2 Sampling procedures 18
  3.3.3 Participant bios 19
3.4 Data Analysis 19
3.5 Ethical Review Procedures 20
3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths 21
3.7 Conclusion 21

Chapter 4: Research Findings 23
  4.0 Introduction to the Chapter 23
  4.1 Normalization as the Primary Objective 23
  4.2 Benefits to Language Learning 27
  4.3 “We Lag Behind”: The Difficulty in Finding French-Language Resources 28
  4.4 “Hot and Cold”: Response from the School Community 30
  4.5 Conclusion 34

Chapter 5: Conclusion 36
  5.0 Introduction to the Chapter 36
  5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance 36
  5.2 Implications 38
    5.2.1 Broad implications: The educational research community 38
    5.2.2 Narrow implications: Professional identity and practice 40
  5.3 Recommendations 41
  5.4 Areas for Further Research 42
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction – Research Context

There is a growing diversity of people in Canada, and they vary by many different factors including race, ethnicity, religion, ability, gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Under Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (the Charter), the federal government of Canada has explicitly offered legal protection to its citizens against discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religions sex, age or mental or physical disability. In the 1992 case Haig v. Canada, the Ontario Court of Appeals found that the Canadian Human Rights Act was in violation of section 15 of the Charter by omitting sexual orientation as a prohibited ground of discrimination, and ordered that it be read in to the Charter (Hurley, 2005). In 2001, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruled that discrimination based on “transsexualism” was included in discrimination on the basis of sex or disability (EGALE, 2015). Despite the federal government having only implicitly mentioned these prohibited grounds for discrimination, the government of Ontario, along with many other provinces, has explicitly stated that gender identity and sexual orientation are prohibited grounds for discrimination in its human rights code (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2014).

The Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) has created policies and documents that reflect the protections for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ) communities through the promotion of equity- and inclusion-based education in the classroom. In 2012, the Education Act was amended by the Accepting Schools Act which, in sum, requires all board to provide a safe, accepting and inclusive environment which allows all students to succeed (OME, 2014). According to the OME’s (2014) Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119 titled “Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools”, all school boards in Ontario
are required to create and implement a policy on equity and inclusive education. More specifically, documents such as *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (OME, 2009) and *Equity and inclusive education in Ontario schools: Guidelines for policy development and implementation* (OME, 2014) have been created by the OME to help school boards and administrators understand, develop and implement equity and inclusive education policies. The latter provides explicit steps for the developing, implementing and reporting on policy in relation to equity and inclusive education. The former focuses more on the importance and the meaning of equity and inclusive education in the context of Ontario. This document emphasizes that, for all students to succeed, not only should the school board’s policy reflect equity and inclusivity, so should the curriculum, so that all students can see themselves reflected in their learning. Though the document does not specifically address queer students certain school boards have created equity policy documents that do. For example, the Toronto District School Board’s (TDSB) (2000) policy explicitly states that it “is committed to enabling all lesbian and gay students, and students who identify themselves on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, to see themselves reflected in the curriculum” (pp. 23-24).

It is particularly important to include social justice and equity topics including topics of gender and sexual diversity in the French as a second language classroom. In the context of second language classrooms, the purpose of including of these topics is two-fold. As it does in all subjects, the inclusion of these topics helps LGBTQ students be more engaged in the content and helps all students understand and be more accepting of diversity. However, in the second language classroom, the inclusion of any social topic can benefit the student in their learning of the language. This is called the action-oriented approach to second language learning, the focus of which is on real-life uses of the target language and seeing the learner as a social agent by
teaching about social topics (Piccardo, 2014). Through these social topics, including gender and sexual diversity topics, the language learner can learn how to express their opinion in the target language and better understand the culture associated with this language.

1.1 Research Problem

Although federal and provincial laws, policies and documents have been created to offer protections against discrimination towards LGBTQ people and to promote equity and inclusivity in schools, these protections are not always reflected in practice. Schools are one of the slowest progressing environments when it comes to safety and acceptance for LGBTQ youth (Ryan, 2003). In the final report from EGALE Canada titled *Every Class in Every School: The First National Climate Survey on Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia in Canadian Schools* (Taylor et al., 2011), which surveyed Canadian students about their experiences with queerphobia, hardly any students reported never having heard queerphobic comments from other students. The report also found that most Canadian LGBTQ students reported having been verbally harassed for their sexual orientation. Teachers have a responsibility to create a safe and accepting environment for students. This can be done by directly addressing harassment and discrimination when it is seen, but teachers “can also contribute to the development of an LGBTQ-positive climate within their school by providing LGBTQ-positive curriculum” (Schneider & Dimito, 2008, p. 50). However, according to a Canadian study (Grace, 2007) examining school administrators’ responsibility towards sexual minority students, a large portion of school staff, administrators and teachers does not understand the importance of addressing LGBTQ issues. When school staff, especially LGBTQ educators, do attempt to address these issues, they are sometimes met with resistance from parents, administration, students and other teachers (Taylor et al., 2015).
For the members of the school community that do understand the importance of addressing these issues there are difficulties to overcome, especially for the French as a second language teacher. For example, French, like many other languages, is a gendered language and there are no gender-neutral third-person pronouns; thus, the teacher cannot properly address their students who do not adhere to the gender binary. Furthermore, the word queer, which is often used as an all-encompassing term for the LGTBQ+ umbrella, does not have an exact equivalent in French. Quebec’s Office québécois de la langue française has suggested the use of allosexuel(le) as a translation for the word queer; this translation could be problematic as it only addresses sexuality, and it could be perceived as being too scientific, as homosexual has been in the past. Often the word queer is borrowed from English to be used by French speakers, however, in the French language, the word does not have the same history of having been used a derogatory term which was reclaimed. Furthermore, despite it being beneficial to learn social topics in a foreign language, Norton and Toohey (2011) have shown that it is more difficult to speak of complex subjects, like identity, in a second language than it is in one’s first language.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

In view of these problems, the goal of this current study was to explore how a small sample of Canadian French as a second language educators integrate topics of gender and sexual diversity in their classrooms. For the purpose of this study, the inclusion of gender and sexual diversity topics in the FSL classroom will be generally defined as teacher reports of lesson design, their efforts to address student diversity, perceived outcomes and the barriers and supports they experience. I hope this study will bring light to the importance of this issues and help French as a second language educators to better understand how to create more equitable and inclusive classrooms for LGBTQ students.
1.3 Research Questions

The central research question driving this study was: what are Ontario French as a second language teachers’ experiences of integrating topics related to gender and sexual diversity in their classrooms? The sub-questions that will be helping to guide the study are:

- What are the barriers and supports experienced by these teachers when they incorporate gender and sexual diversity topics in their lessons?
- Why do these teachers find it important to include such topics in their classrooms? Do teachers believe that students value these topics? If so to what extent? If not, why not?
- Do these teachers believe they achieve their intended goals for including these topics in their lessons?
- How often do these teachers include gender and sexual diversity topics in their lessons and to what extent?

Through these questions, I hope to uncover the practices used by these teachers and their effectiveness in creating LGBTQ-positive classroom environments in FSL education.

1.4 Background of the Researcher

As a French Canadian who has always lived in southern Ontario, a primarily Anglophone region, I have not had many opportunities to use my French in a context outside of my schooling and with my family. For this reason, I now primarily use English in most aspects of my life, even in my thoughts. Despite having French as my first language, and having been in a francophone school system from kindergarten to grade 12, I still do not know how to properly address gender and sexual diversity topics in my mother tongue. This is of particular concern for me as gay man, with a passion for social justice and equity, who does not know how to properly speak of my sexuality or LGBTQ issues in my first language. It is my personal belief that this is due in part to
the fact that gender and sexual diversity topics are not addressed enough in the context of French language classrooms where French is not the language of the majority. As such, this subject is of particular interest to me; I have a personal connection to it as it combines my passions for teaching, the French language and LGBTQ issues.

1.5 Overview

In order to gain information on this topic and to find answers to my research questions, I have conducted interviews with a purposeful sample of FSL educators to ask them about their experiences with the inclusion of gender and sexual diversity topics in their classrooms. I have asked them about their purpose for including these topics, the extent to which they do so, the barriers and supports they face in doing this work and the perceived impact on their students. In Chapter 2, I will review the scholarly literature associated with my subject in the fields of inclusive education and second language education, with a focus on the French language. In Chapter 3, I will outline and justify my methodology. In Chapter 4, I will lay out the results of my interviews and Chapter 5 will outline the implications of these results for myself as a French as a second language educator and for the greater teaching community.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction to the Chapter

In this chapter I review the literature in the areas of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ)-inclusive education and second language education. More specifically, I explore some of the benefits of an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, the consequences of not including LGBTQ topics in the classroom and I focus my attention specifically on teacher attitudes and what they can teach us about the problem. Next, I review research on second language learning in order to discover how topics of gender and sexual diversity currently fit into this particular educational context, with a specific focus on the French as a second language classroom.

2.1 The Inclusion of Gender and Sexual Diversity Topics in the Classroom

As I briefly pointed out in the previous chapter, the elimination of anti-LGBTQ discrimination in schools is a slow process (Ryan, 2003). A Canadian study on the social experiences of sexual minority adolescents (Williams, Connolly, Pepler & Craig, 2005) found that LGBTQ youth are at a higher risk of physical and psychological harm than their non-LGBTQ counterparts and that many keep their sexuality or gender identity hidden out of fear. Some of the struggles faced by LGBTQ youth because of this discrimination include “verbal and physical harassment and violence, low self-esteem, high suicide rates, substance abuse, eating disorders, homelessness, HIV, and pregnancy” (Birden, 2002, p. 53). In their review of literature titled *Come Out, Come Out, Wherever You are: A Synthesis of Queer Research in Education*, Jackson (2001) demonstrates that studies conducted after 1997 highlight a hidden curriculum of schools that transmit heterosexuality as a presumed norm. For teachers to be able to address this heteronormativity properly and effectively, there needs to be an overall change of attitude in school communities. This change of attitude can start with an LGBTQ-positive curriculum, in
other words, with the inclusion of gender and sexual diversity topics in classroom content. As Goldstein, Russell and Daley (2007) frame it in their conceptual framework on queering schools, teachers can create “queer moments” in schools that “disrupt heteronormativity and promote an understanding of oppression as multiple, interconnected, and ever changing” (p. 187). Through the inclusion of these moments and the inclusion of gender and sexual diversity topics in the classroom, LGBTQ students could see themselves reflected in their learning and therefore may be more engaged (OME, 2009). However, an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum is not only beneficial for LGBTQ students, as it could help eliminate harassment towards them, but also for non-LGBTQ students as well who also suffer from queerphobic harassment (Taylor et al., 2011). By learning about diversity and being introduced to models of acceptance, all students may become more aware of themselves and the ignorance that leads to discrimination against sexual minorities could largely be reduced (Vandrick 2001; Wadell, Frei & Martin, 2012).

2.1.1 Ignoring gender and sexual diversity in the classroom

Now that I have explored some of the literature on the inclusion of topics of gender and sexual diversity in curriculum, I will move on to a review the literature that addresses the potential consequences of ignoring these topics in the classroom. In Canada, societal changes regarding the acceptance of LGBTQ people has led to changes in law and politics, which itself has led to policy changes on many levels (Rayside, 2014). As early as 1990, the Toronto public school board had approved an instructional unit on sexual diversity followed by LGBTQ-inclusive policy; other school boards followed the example in the years that followed (Rayside, 2014). Despite the major policy changes from the provincial government and school boards in Ontario that aim to eliminate discrimination and violence based on gender orientation and sexuality, implementation has proven to be difficult (Rayside, 2014). The failure to appropriately
implement these policies could lead to an unchanging school culture and leave LGBTQ issues unaddressed in the classroom. When this is not done, the problems faced by LGBTQ youth continue and these students are less likely to participate (or show up) in class for fear of harassment (Birden, 2002). Birden (2002) used John Dewey’s ideas about the link between education and experience to claim that a classroom experience that is not LGBTQ-positive will limit the future learning experiences of LGBTQ students. This is what Dewey called a ‘mis-educative’ experience because, instead of creating genuine education, it leads to boredom and hinders future desire to learn (Birden, 2002). Birden claims it is worse for LGBTQ students because beyond the boredom, there is fear.

2.1.2 Teacher attitudes

As stated above, in order to see a positive change in a school community regarding the treatment of LGBTQ youth in schools, teachers need to include topics of gender and sexual diversity into what they teach their students (Schneider & Dimito, 2007). Policies have been developed but implementation has been difficult and part of the problem could be teacher willingness and preparedness to address these issues. In order to better understand why these topics are often not being addressed, I will examine some of what has been written on teacher attitudes towards talking about LGBTQ issues with their students. Despite an overarching change in view to see education as student-centered, the role of the educator and their attitudes about the world still holds a great influence on the learning that happens in the classroom (Evripidou & Çavuşoğlu, 2014). Studies (Evripidou & Çavuşoğlu, 2014; Schneider & Dimito, 2008) have found that many teachers have a positive attitude to incorporating LGBTQ-related topics in the classroom but they also have hesitations. Furthermore, Meyer, Taylor and Peter (2015), in a study on teacher perspectives on LGBTQ-inclusive education, found that more
teachers support the idea of LGBTQ-inclusive education in principle than teachers who support it in practice. These findings are echoed in the final report of the *Every Teacher Project* which explored LGBTQ-inclusive education in Canada (Taylor et al., 2015). The report also found a correlation between this disparity and teacher’s comfort levels in addressing these issues. The percentage of teachers who reported not feeling prepared to address topics of gender and sexual diversity was higher than the percentage of teachers who did not support LGBTQ-inclusive education. Interestingly, the Meyer, Taylor and Peter (2015) study on teacher perspectives also found that queer identified teachers reported themselves to be more comfortable and much more likely to include topics of gender and sexual diversity in their lessons than non-queer teachers.

Evrīpīdou and Çavuşoğlu (2014) asked Greek Cypriot foreign language educators about their attitudes towards incorporating gay- and lesbian-related topics in their classroom. They found that most of these educators believed their students would enjoy such subject matter. These educators did, however, hesitate to include these topics for multiple reasons. One of these main reasons is that, even though teachers are responsible for the content, they do not want to stray too far from the course books, and these course books do not address LGBTQ-related topics. Another two notable reasons that these educators hesitated to include these topics in their course content is that they fear that they could lose credibility over it and that they feel underprepared (Evrīpīdou & Çavuşoğlu, 2014). Though this study is fairly recent, it was conducted in Greece and may not be indicative of the situation in Canada, let alone Ontario specifically.

Nevertheless, in 2003, Schneider and Dimito (2008) conducted a similar study, asking Ontarian educators about their beliefs regarding raising LGBTQ issues in schools. The 132 teachers, including LGBTQ and heterosexual teachers, were recruited from LGBTQ events such
as Pride Day or professional development opportunities pertaining to LGBTQ issues and were asked questions regarding their school’s environment and attitude towards LGBTQ issues, their comfort in addressing these issues and their perceptions of barriers. The results of these surveys found that “a considerable number of respondents seem at ease discussing LGBTQ issues in the school setting” (p. 61). However, many participants claimed they felt more at ease discussing these topics with colleagues rather than students, though some of them felt that doing so could jeopardize their jobs; even more participants felt their jobs would be at risk if they did so with students. The participants of the study identified barriers that could prevent them from addressing LGBTQ issues in their schools, with the most cited one being parent backlash. Another significant barrier that was cited by the participants was lack of resources and support. Participants who worked in school boards which included sexual orientation in their antiharassment policy stated that they felt more support than those working in school boards that did not have it included. Despite the fact that this is an Ontarian study, which makes it quite relevant to my own research, it was conducted over a decade ago, before the Canadian government had legalized same-sex marriage, and therefore the social attitude towards LGBTQ issues has greatly progressed since then. Furthermore, all the participants were recruited from LGBTQ-positive events which could mean that these results are not indicative of all teachers in Ontario.

In this section, we have explored the research on LGBTQ-inclusive education that has shown that addressing queer issues in schools can have a positive impact for LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ students as it can reduce queerphobic harassment (Goldstein et al., 2007; Vandrick 2001; Wadell, Frei & Martin, 2012). Furthermore, Birden (2002) shows that ignoring these issues in schools can lead to continued violence and sense of boredom and fear among LGBTQ
students. Finally, studies on teacher perceptions of the inclusion of gender and sexual diversity topics in schools show that many teachers believe students would enjoy such topics (Evripidou & Çavuşoğlu, 2014; Schneider & Dimito, 2008). Many teachers did not however feel at ease discussing these issues with their students (Schneider & Dimito, 2008, Taylor et al., 2015).

2.2 Gender and Sexual Diversity in the Second Language Classroom

As we have seen, the inclusion of gender and sexual diversity topics is important in any classroom, but it is particularly important in second language classrooms as it can directly benefit language learning. Teaching, and language teaching in particular, is political because of the importance of language in the formation of identities (Evripidou & Çavuşoğlu, 2014). Language is so directly related to identity that suppressing one’s identity can hinder one’s success in learning and using that language (Vetter, 2010). Second and foreign language teaching “used to involve the teaching of grammar in order to access literature, today there seems to be a stronger emphasis on teaching a foreign language for communicative reasons (De Vincenti, Giovanangeli & Ward, 2007, p. 59). Thus, social topics have become central to language learning. The existence of LGBTQ people and LGBTQ issues around equality is a reality of the Western world, and it is important to learn about these topics in the languages in which they exist; this is particularly important when the target language is the primary language used where the language learner lives (Wadell et al., 2012). Therefore, in this context, and any language learning context, it is important for the teacher to address LGBTQ topics as it could lead to a language-enhancing discussion. Vandrick (2001) suggests that it is particularly important for heterosexual teachers to incorporate these topics into their classrooms because they can serve as models for the majority of heterosexual students, who, as we have seen, also benefit from learning about these topics and how to speak of them.
In language classrooms, LGBTQ topics are “most often introduced by students, and many teachers feel underprepared to navigate the ensuing discussions” (Wadell et al., 2012, p. 106). In language classrooms, these topics can come up in very simple ways such as, asking a peer about themselves, or discussing family structures, and it is important for the teacher to be prepared to address them, because they are part of the students’ and teacher’s reality (Wadell et al., 2012). However, the topic of gender and sexual diversity is virtually absent from some preservice and in-service teacher training programs (Evripidou & Çavuşoğlu, 2014; Schneider & Dimito, 2008; Wadell et al., 2012).

2.2.1 The case of French as a second language

In a study on Canadian teachers’ perspectives and experiences with LGBTQ-inclusive education, Taylor et al. (2015) found that 53% of teachers believe that topics of gender and sexual diversity are relevant in the French language arts classroom. As we have seen above, language is incredibly tied to culture and identity. Through the lens of LGBTQ topics, a French classroom could come to understand certain differences among French-speaking regions. For example, in France, some of the culture likes to avoid language that emphasizes difference and therefore queer theory is not always embraced (De Vincenti et al., 2007). Conversely, in Montreal, differences are embraced and queer language is more freely used and accepted (De Vincenti et al., 2007). De Vincenti et al. (2007) suggest choosing discussion materials that include topics of sexual identity in order to “further develop oral, written and reading skills and to invite students to reflect upon issues associated with the French speaking world (pp. 62-63).

There are however difficulties that arise when attempting to address LGBTQ topics that are particular to the French as a second language classroom. For example, some French textbooks are attempting to include different examples of relationships to address changing
social realities, but some have stopped mentioning families and relationships at all, while others perpetuated negative stereotypes (De Vincenti et al., 2007). Another barrier that is specific to the FSL classroom is that the language is gendered. On top of being unable to address people using gender-neutral terms and pronouns, this also means that students have to make decisions about which gender to use when talking about partners or relationships.

2.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I reviewed research on the inclusion of gender and sexual diversity topics in schools and classrooms and on what has been found to be beneficial regarding these topics in the second language classroom with specific attention on the French language. The review demonstrates the extent to which the literature has focused on the benefits and the necessity to include these topics in schools in general. It also raises questions about the extent to which it is actually done in real-life classrooms. Furthermore, none of the literature that I have found addressed the very particular case of French as a second language classrooms in Ontario, where the target language is an official language, and there the culture surrounding the language is not different from that of the primary language. In light of these realizations, the purpose of my study was to learn how FSL teachers in Ontario are incorporating LGBTQ issues in their classrooms and how these teachers perceive the benefits.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction to the Chapter

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the purpose of this study was to explore how a sample of Ontario French as a second language teachers include topics of gender and sexual diversity in their teaching. In this chapter I review the methodological approach I adopted for this study. I start by explaining the general research approach and procedures followed by a justification for the instruments of data collection. Following this, I discuss the participants, including my sampling criteria, the recruitment process and participant bios. Then, I discuss my chosen methods of data analysis followed by an overview of the ethical considerations that have arisen from this study. Finally, before concluding the chapter, I examine the limitations of the chosen research method while also acknowledging its strengths.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

This research study was conducted using a qualitative approach including a review of pertinent literature about gender and sexual diversity in the classroom and French language learning, as well as semi-structured interviews with teachers. Qualitative research has often been put in contrast with quantitative research, but Jones (1995) argues that these approaches should be seen as complimentary to each other as they can each uncover different types of information about a same subject. Marshall (1996) supports this idea when they state that the “choice between quantitative and qualitative research methods should be determined by the research question, not by the preference of the researcher” (p. 522). Essentially, qualitative research produces descriptive data – people’s own words or behaviours (Taylor, Bogden & DeVault, 2015) – that can answer the questions ‘how?’ and ‘why?’ (Marshall, 2006). Moreover, Jones (1995) highlights the fact that qualitative research studies focus on the participants’ perspectives.
rather than the researcher’s. For this reason, a qualitative approach is most appropriate for this
study, which aimed to gather information about teacher practices and perceptions. Taylor,
Bogden and DeVault (2015) corroborate this same idea by stating that “qualitative researchers
are concerned with the meaning people attach to things in their lives” (p. 7). This means that
researchers must attempt to set their own perspectives aside and try to view things from an
entirely new perspective (Taylor et al., 2015). Furthermore, Taylor, Bogden and Devault (2015)
argue that qualitative research is inductive in that researchers develop their understanding from
themes and patterns in the data rather than collecting data to prove or disprove prior knowledge
or hypotheses. This understanding of qualitative research is consistent with the exploratory
nature of the study as its purpose is to examine the experiences of Ontario French as a second
language teachers that include topics related to gender and sexual diversity rather than
attempting to prove or disprove prior knowledge about these experiences.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The primary instrument of data collection used for this research study was the semi-
structured interview protocol (see Appendix B). With semi-structured interviews, as opposed to
highly-structured interviews, the interviewee is “more a participant in meaning making than a
conduit from which information is retrieved.” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 314). The
openness permitted with semi-structured interviews allows for more unexpected and yet
pertinent information about the participant and their experiences to emerge. However, there is
still a structure in place which allows the researcher to make sure that the participant’s responses
are still providing data in relation to the research questions. Researchers conducting semi-
structured interviews should “have a number of interviewer questions prepared in advance but
such prepared questions are designed to be sufficiently open that the subsequent questions of the
interview cannot be planned in advance” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 5). Because of its less structured nature, the semi-structured interview is often mistakenly perceived as ‘easier’ than highly-structured ones because there is an assumption that less preparation is needed; however, often it requires just as much preparation before the interview, more discipline and creativity during the interview and more time for data analysis (Wengraf, 2001).

Semi-structured interviews perfectly served the purpose of the present study as they place more emphasis on exploring participant experiences than on trying to get definitive answers (Horton, Macve & Struyven, 2004). Furthermore, similarly to qualitative research in general, semi-structured interviews seek to gain a better understanding in order to create a hypothesis rather than trying to test one, as is the case with highly structured interviews (DiCicco & Crabtree, 2006). This form of interview was therefore ideal for this study as its purpose was to explore how French language teachers are incorporating topics of gender and sexual diversity in their classrooms as opposed to whether they were doing so or not.

[describe your interview guide and share/discuss a few sample questions]

3.3 Participants

In this section I outline the sampling criteria that I have created for the purpose of participant recruitment. Then, I explain the variety of teacher recruitment practices explored in order to find my participants. This is followed by a section in which I have provided a brief introduction to each of the participants.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

In order to find educators who could provide me with data to answer my research questions, I have created purposeful sampling criteria. Firstly, selected teachers had to have been French as a second language educators as their classrooms provided the context to my inquiry.
Next, these teachers had to have been making, or had to have made, a conscious effort to include topics of gender and sexual diversity within their teaching (whether whole lessons, units, or through their use curriculum resources and learning materials, etc.). Furthermore, in order to geographically focus my study, the participants had to have been from Ontario.

3.3.2 Sampling procedures

As we have seen throughout this chapter, qualitative research methods differ greatly from quantitative ones in many ways. One of the biggest differences is that qualitative studies focus on exploring the complexities of specific contexts while quantitative studies aim to make generalizations to many other (albeit similar) contexts (Byrne, 2001). Therefore, quantitative research generally studies broader phenomena, which normally call for larger samples that are often random (Marshall, 1996). Realistically, qualitative studies go much more in depth than quantitative studies do and a large sample would be unfeasible for the researcher to cover in one study (Byrne, 2001). Consequently, a qualitative study should be narrow in its focus in order to justify a smaller sample. This is precisely what I did for this study as my research topic is specific and geographically-focused.

Within qualitative research there are three broad sampling methods: convenience sample, judgment – or purposeful – sample and theoretical sample (Marshall, 1996). The convenience sample is generally the easiest as it involves recruiting the most accessible participants (Marshall, 1996). The purposeful sample is selected by the researcher as “the most productive sample to answer the research question (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). Finally, the theoretical sampling is used while a study is in progress and emerging data requires a specific sample (Marshall, 1996). For this study, I used convenience and purposeful sampling methods. Because, I am in a setting surrounded by teachers and people who may know teachers I used my current
network to speak of my research as often as possible and to try to get interested participants to approach me. Furthermore, I attended conferences and professional development such as the Implementing the Accepting Schools Act Conference put on by the Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity in April 2016.

3.3.3 Participant bios

My first participant, **Tara**, is a French teacher and associate curriculum lead at a high school in the Toronto District School Board. She has been with the board for around almost ten years and has also previously worked in Catholic school boards outside of the city. She has been teaching for almost thirty years and at the time of her interview was soon to retire. She is a cisgender woman who describes her sexuality as fluid. Within her school, she works with the social justice committee and has helped with similar clubs in her past schools.

My second participant, **Victoria**, is a teacher in the Durham District School Board teaching the French Immersion program in grade 7. She has been teaching for several years in the elementary panel. She is a cisgender woman who prefers not to label her sexual orientation. She helps organize her school’s ally week to celebrate queer allyship and has started an elementary gay-straight alliance for the students.

3.4 Data Analysis

At its core, qualitative data analysis is inductive in that it uses the data to generate ideas and/or new knowledge (Thorne, 2000). Data analysis in a qualitative research project is often seen as the most complex phases of the study in that transforming the data into new knowledge is not as simple as creating a database (Thorne, 2000). Instead, it involves a lot of reading, understanding and interpreting of the data.

Burnard (1991) outlines what they call a method of thematic analysis to help researchers
analyze qualitative interview transcripts. This fourteen-step method is very thorough and includes everything from post-interview notes, to multiple readings of the transcripts throughout, to peer editing selected categories and headings, to colour coding (Burnard, 1991). During my own analysis, I have adopted this method as I believe it is appropriate for the study. I have transcribed the interviews and coded the transcripts through the lens of my research questions in order to uncover the themes from the data. I have also looked at the null data, meaning I have examined what was not said by participants.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

With any type of research there are many ethical factors to consider. Within qualitative research, especially that using interviews, one of the biggest ethical concerns is confidentiality (Bresler, 1995). Often, it is assumed that anonymity to the larger world can achieve confidentiality for the participants, but there also needs to be anonymity to members of the research setting (Bresler, 1995). This means that no one should know the identity of the participants other than the researcher. This is the case for my study. Not only will the participants be given pseudonyms, all identifying markers will be excluded – school or student information, for example. Also, all data from the interviews will be stored on a password protected computer that I only I will have access to; this data will be destroyed within 5 years. Participants will be notified of their right to withdraw from the study at any point. Participants will also be asked to sign a letter of consent (Appendix A) that will give their consent to be interviewed and recorded (audio). The letter also provides an overview of the study, along with my research topic and purpose, addresses the ethical implications of the study and describes the expectations of participation. Informed consent is an essential part of qualitative research studies, even if it can sometimes deter participation from respondents (Shaw 2003). Another known risk of qualitative
data is bias – in questions and data analysis – and the representation of the truth. When it comes to qualitative research, the truth is constructed using many people’s different stories and are analyzed by researchers that come to the topic with preconceptions and expectation (Bresler, 1995). Thus, when findings are presented in qualitative research, readers and researchers must ask “whose truth is being presented?”

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Throughout this study, certain methodological limitations of this study have come to light. Based on what has been approved as the ethical parameters of this study by the University of Toronto’s ethics clearance board, this study, and all the ones conducted by my colleagues in the Master of Teaching program, must be a qualitative study that uses semi-structured interviews to interview a small sample of educators. This is logical given the fact that it is the clearance given to an entire program worth of graduate students each doing their own research. However, for the purpose of my study specifically, it would have been beneficial to be able to interview students about how their French teachers include gender and sexual diversity in the classroom. Furthermore, I believe a broader approach to this topic would be interesting, yet impossible in this current setting. I am interested in seeing a larger more quantitative investigation into whether French as a second language teachers in Ontario are including these topics in their teaching at all. Small sample sizes is has been identified as one of the primary limitations of qualitative research (Jackson II, Drummond, Camara, 2007). As we have seen above, a quantitative study can give us a broader view of a research topic, while qualitative research is seen to be too focused on the generalizability of the data from a small sample (Marshall, 1996).

There are however many strengths to the chosen methodology. Qualitative research allows for a more in-depth view on a topic. The semi-structured interviews with teachers will
allow me to better understand their personal experience, the choices they make, the reasons behind those choices, and so much more. Furthermore, as I am a teacher candidate I can learn from participant responses to inform my own teaching practice.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the methodological choices taken for the purpose of this study. I spoke of the benefits of a qualitative approach for this specific research question as well as the importance of semi-structured interviews as a tool for data collection. I then spoke about the participants, my sampling criteria and recruitment procedures I plan to undertake. Following this, I discussed my anticipated methods of data analysis, ethical considerations for this study and the limitations and strengths of a qualitative research methodology in regards to my topic. In Chapter 4, I report on the findings of my interviews.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction to the Chapter

In my first chapter I outlined my research question and the context surrounding it: what are Ontario French as a second language teachers’ experiences of integrating topics related to gender and sexual diversity in their classrooms? In view of this question, I reviewed current research related to this topic in my second chapter. My third chapter outlined and justified my choice of the qualitative research method and semi-structured interviews and explained the benefits and drawbacks of qualitative interview research in relation to my research question. This chapter outlines the themes that emerged from the interviews I have conducted with two Ontario French as a second language teachers who work to include gender and sexual diversity topics in their classrooms. The themes were organized in the following sections: 1) normalization as the primary objective, 2) the benefits to language learning, 3) the lack of resources and 4) community response. Each theme will be elaborated upon below by examining participant responses and their relationship to the current literature on the topic. In the conclusion to this chapter, I will briefly highlight these findings and introduce the next chapter.

4.1 Normalization as the Primary Objective

Teachers state that the normalization of queer people and queer issues is the primary objective of their inclusion of gender and sexual diversity topics in their classrooms. When asked why they believed it was important to include these subjects in their classrooms, both Tara and Victoria pointed to fact that it is important for students in a classroom who may be queer or questioning, to see themselves reflected in the curriculum that they are taught. When each of these teachers taught students whom they knew were queer, trans or questioning, they noticed a positive impact on these students’ engagement with the content when addressing these topics in a
normalizing way. This perception is consistent with Birden’s (2002) conclusion that education that is not lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ)-positive will create boredom for LGBTQ students and therefore, a LGBTQ-positive education system will be more engaging for them. Beyond this, however, both participants stated that it was just as important for non-queer students to be exposed to this content in a normalizing way. As Tara stated in her response, “we’re teaching a broad range of students. Even if I had zero kids in my class that were LGBTQ, really we have a responsibility to say it like it is and to represent many perspectives.” Victoria also spoke to the important of this content for non-queer students, especially in regards to the language they use that these students may not realize could be harmful. This is consistent with Wadell, Frei and Martin’s (2012) findings on addressing sexual identity in TESOL (teaching of English to speakers of other languages): “open discussion of LGBT issues and identities can benefit all students, not only those with minority gender and sexual identities” (p. 102). Vandrick (2001) provides support for this claim, in their examination of the addressing of sexual identity issues in the English as a second language classroom, by arguing that when non-LGBTQ students are exposed to these topics, they are less likely to exhibit the ignorance that leads to queerphobic discrimination.

These teachers aim for their goal of normalization using different strategies. One strategy that came up frequently in the interviews was to implicitly rather than explicitly address topics of gender and sexual diversity. The participants of this study strive to do this by simply representing queer people and queer topics, alongside racially diverse people and topics, while addressing other curriculum subjects. For example, when asked about the type of resources she would like to see in use to support her teaching, Victoria mentions looking for diverse representation when it comes to any subject:
[I]f I’m going to be showing a clip of something, often I try to find a clip that has a Black woman, if I can find it, rather than a White male. I find it pretty difficult to pull examples of trans people […]. I guess what I’m looking for is when they’re talking about other subjects, making sure I’ve got that representation. But I think I would like to do a better job of finding resources that represent those groups as well as racial groups. I think that would go a long way to that normalization goal that I was heading towards.

Here, Victoria states that for her to achieve her goal of normalization, she must frame gender and sexual diversity topics within a larger discussion of equity in general. This understanding is consistent with the description of ‘positive moments’ – moments in schools that affirm queer identities within existing structures – laid out in Goldstein, Russell and Daley’s (2007) conceptual framework on queering schools. Similarly, Tara reportedly tries to use queer issues as a theme or framework within her explicit teaching of other subjects. For example, when discussing her most recent experience addressing gender and sexual diversity topics in the classroom, she described an assessment task for her French Immersion Civics class in which the students had to discuss pluralism and the competing rights brought up in a French-language news article about Black Lives Matter Toronto’s sit-in protest at the Toronto Pride Parade in 2016. The purpose of the assessment itself was to begin discussion about “pluralism and the intersectionality of rights,” but this was done in a queer context, therefore implicitly teaching topics of race and gender and sexual diversity. Tara says that her goal in any subject she is teaching is “to look at something concrete and contextualize within these issues for students.” Both participants’ examples mirror what Vandrick (2001) found to be an effective way to promote “acceptance and tolerance,” as they “matter-of-factly include references to lesbians and
gays in the course of giving examples or doing grammar or vocabulary exercises, as well as on tests” (p. 12).

Another strategy reportedly used by these teachers to promote the normalization of queer topics is to embrace discussion when these topics come up naturally in conversation with students. For example, Tara’s class had her school’s Young Women’s Empowerment club come in to try and recruit boys to understand their points of view. Students in Tara’s class reportedly started asking themselves questions later about whether boys should be allowed in the group. Tara embraced this conversation and took some time out of her scheduled lesson to allow for this discussion to happen. Likewise, Victoria described a similar experience. When she taught a grade 7 Health course in French, her class was exploring body dysmorphia related to physical size but she “had a student [in the class] who was experiencing some body dysmorphia from a gender-related lens. So that kind of conversation [sprung] out and then [they could] have that conversation as a class.” In both of these reported cases, the teachers were prepared to embrace a conversation that came up naturally from student interest and turn it into a learning experience.

In a study of American TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages) teachers and their addressing of sexual identity topics, Wadell, Frei and Martin (2012) found that teachers often feel underprepared when these topics are brought up by their students. However, both participants of the present study are examples of how being prepared to address these topics spontaneously can benefit the learning of students. When asked about advice for beginning teachers looking to include these topics in their French as a second language classrooms, Victoria suggested “building up a library [of resources] that you can then pull from and be ready to pull from. When something comes up in your class, you’re ready […], you’ve got this thing to go to that’s going to support that.” As such, both participants believe that preparedness is
essential in order to achieve the goal of normalization, and resources could be of use to teachers with this goal. However, Victoria’s confidence in the building of a library of resources could potentially be a difficult process, as we will see in the next section.

Both participants reported wanting to normalize queer people and queer issues for LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ students through their inclusion of topics related to gender and sexual diversity in their classrooms. These teachers do this by implicitly bringing up queer themes within their teaching of curriculum expectations. Further, they both emphasized the importance of being prepared to address queer topics when their students brought them up naturally.

4.2 Benefits to Language Learning

Teachers perceive there to be a language-learning benefit to the inclusion of gender and sexual diversity topics in French as a second language classrooms. Both participants of this study believe that, beyond being beneficial for their students’ social learning by means of normalizing queer presence, the inclusion of gender and sexual diversity topics in their French language classrooms is also beneficial to the language learning of their students. Both Tara and Victoria articulated the belief that social topics, such as gender and sexual diversity, are quite engaging for students, which leads them to be more active with the French language. When asked about her beliefs about the impact of gender and sexual diversity topics on her students’ language learning, Tara stated that,

Anything that opens students to an inquiry process or anything that challenges ways of thinking benefits them […]. I just know that they’re more engaged, and with a bunch of students that are more engaged, it may matter to them to be able to communicate something that’s important to them.
In other words, Tara perceives her students to be more engaged when addressing social topics that require critical thinking. Victoria expressed a very similar belief that students are “going to do better if [they]’re talking about something that [they]’re interested in. [They’re] going to have that desire to communicate and so [they]’re not getting so hung up on [the specifics of the language].” She believes that this is particularly relevant in the French immersion context, in which there is a strong emphasis on communicative ability. These beliefs are supported by De Vincenti, Giovangeli and Ward’s study that examines the queering of foreign language classrooms (2007). They argue that activities that address sexual and gender identities “further develop oral, written and reading skills and […] invite students to reflect upon issues associated with the French speaking world” (p. 63). The second part of that claim is echoed by Tara who believes that “language opens up a window where we can understand how a culture thinks.” Furthermore, the reality is that LGBTQ people and topics are present in French-speaking culture. Wadell, Frei and Martin (2012) argue, based on their findings in study of American TESOL teachers, that it is important to be able to discuss these sorts of topics because they are a reality of the target language’s surrounding culture.

4.3 “We Lag Behind”: The Difficulty of Finding French-Language Resources

Despite their willingness and preparedness to address topics of gender and sexual diversity in their classrooms, both participants perceived that French-language resources that could support them were difficult to find or simply did not exist. Both Tara and Victoria believed that French resources were not developing as quickly as English ones in Ontario, not only resources related to topics of gender and sexual diversity but all French language resources in general. As Tara highlights, “we lag behind. I mean, our only options are to find materials from Quebec, which don’t necessarily help our students that are not francophone. They’re just not
appropriate for the kind of language learning”. This is an interesting remark, because as Norton and Toohey (2011) have highlighted in their examination of the links between race, gender and sexuality with language, that discussing social topics in a second language is more difficult than in one’s native tongue. From Tara’s point of view, the resources that exist are often too difficult for a language learner as they are media that is aimed at first-language French speakers.

Moreover, Schneider and Dimito (2008), in a survey of Ontario teachers about raising LGBTQ issues in school, found that lack of resources and support is one of the biggest barriers to teachers doing this work. Thus, the difficulty in finding French language resources appropriate for the level of language learning reported by Tara can be understood as a barrier to her inclusion of gender and sexual diversity topics in her classrooms.

When these teachers do find resources that address topics of gender and sexual diversity, they often find that it is not done in a way that could support their goals of normalization. When asked about available resources, Victoria found that a lot of the French-language resources on these topics too often revolve around issues of bullying and suicide. She went on to say,

it’s two things. […] I don’t want people to have this link in their mind that’s like: sexual and gender diversity [means] feeling super horrible about yourself, like those go hand-in-hand. So you don’t want it to be linked like that. And also, sometimes you just want to have a more casual conversation. I find one of the problems that our school has when dealing with these subjects, is that it’s treated like it can’t be a conversation like anything else. And that’s kind of the tone that I want in a resource, and that’s what’s really hard to find.

Thus, teachers find that French language resources that address topics of gender and sexual diversity tend to frame them in a way that highlights harassment, discrimination and suicide,
which works against their goal of normalizing queer people. In regards to French textbooks, De Vincenti, Giovangeli and Ward (2007), in an inquiry into the challenges of introducing queer theory into foreign language classrooms, found that, while some of them are reflecting changing social reality by diversifying the families they represent, many are avoiding mentioning relationships or are perpetuating negative stereotypes. This example would also work against teachers’ goal of normalization as some of these textbooks are perpetuating negative stereotypes about queer people.

4.4 “Hot and Cold”: Response from the School Community

Teachers experience both positive and negative reactions to their inclusion of gender and sexual diversity topics in their lessons from various members of the school community. While Tara’s experience with community response seemed to be generally more positive than Victoria’s, both participants spoke of times where they experienced support and backlash to their inclusion of gender and sexual diversity topics in their classrooms. Differences also existed between the responses from different members of the school community. Student response to these teachers’ practices was generally more positive, while administration and staff response varied and the response from the parents of their students was very different for both participants.

When asked about students’ response to her inclusion of topics of gender and sexual diversity in her classroom, Tara simply stated that backlash had never once come from students. Regarding the assessment activity about the article on the Black Lives Matter Toronto sit-in at the 2016 Toronto Pride Parade mentioned above, she stated that most students were very aware of these events and the power relationships surrounding them. She perceived no negative response to this activity but she claimed that there was indifference on the part of some students
which she believes is due to their ignorance of the topics. Victoria on the other hand did not have an entirely positive experience when it came to student response. When asked about student response to her practices, she claimed that it varied greatly. Although her grade 7 class from the previous school year embraced these topics and were even heavily involved in bringing them outside of the classroom, she perceived the class that she was teaching at the time of the interview as more divided. While she perceived some students were more receptive to this type of content, others seemed “not aggressively homophobic, but more casually homophobic.” She also stated that this was the first class in which she had to address the use of the term “faggot” by a student. Overall however, she reported a generally positive response from her students.

Tara and Victoria’s generally positive account of student response to LGBTQ content in their classrooms are reflected in the research done on this topic. In study of teacher perceptions about gender and sexual diversity topics among Greek Cypriot TESOL educators, Evripidou and Çavuşoğlu (2014) found that most foreign language teachers believe their students would be interested in addressing issues of gender and sexual identities in their language classrooms. Furthermore, in the Schneider and Dimito study of Ontario teachers and their comfort and perceived safety in addressing LGBTQ issues in their classrooms (2008), negative response from students was not mentioned as a barrier as to why some educators may not raise LGBTQ issues in their schools.

The most variation between participants was found when it came to discussing support from administration and other staff members. One point of similarity between both participants is that they reported a casual opposition to gender and sexual diversity topics among some of their staff members at their respective schools. For example, Tara recalled a staff meeting in which her coworkers were unpacking heterosexual and male privilege and she reported “there was
some hemming and hawing of what a waste of time that was” among the staff. When talking about administration within her current school board however, Tara had nothing but positive things to report. One example of this was when she found out about a play called *Hosanna* that addresses many issues of identity. She reported that after having gotten approval from her co-curriculum lead, she went to her administration to get approval to teach it:

> We sent our request to the principal. It’s going to cost about a thousand bucks for ninety students and low and behold. Because we now have this push for equity in our school boards, even if we didn’t have enough money in our budget, we would get that money because of this support that we have. So, I can’t wait! We’re going to really explore issues of identity with this grade 10 immersion class. I can’t wait.

Here, Tara reports a positive experience with an administrator that supported her use of a text that she believes would introduce topics of gender and sexual diversity in her school’s French classes in a positive way. Her experience in Catholic school boards in the province was not always so positive however. When discussing a diversity club she was running at a previous school, she mentioned how she constantly had people that acted as “watch dogs” for the posters they would put up. Schneider and Dimito (2008) point to this difference between administrations in their study of Ontario teachers’ comfort in addressing LGBTQ issues in their schools. They found that support from administration is more commonly found in school board in which there is an anti-harassment policy, which is a difference between these school boards that Tara noted herself.

> When Victoria spoke about her experience with administration she stated that hers was “very hot and cold on this topic, *very* hot and cold.” She elaborated by stating that she “feel[s] supported sometimes and then sometimes it’s like [they]’re just trying to shut down everything
that [she is] doing [in relation to gender and sexual diversity].” She reported that her vice principal frequently attends “anti-oppression training sessions” but believes that the vice principal is often too concerned about “optics” and how the community would respond to what is being done in the school:

So, one example would be last year, we were going to do our ally week in September, a letter was going to go home to explain what it is to the parents. First of all we don’t send a letter home about Islamic History Month, for example […] Then at the bottom of the letter was a little “Do you give your permission for your child to participate in these activities?” […] So we ran down to the office and were like “You cannot put this permission thing on here. […] It’s against our equity and inclusion practices.

Victoria stated that she feared that this permission form would lead parents to think that this content was taboo. Victoria reported that administration eventually removed the permission form aspect of the letter. Similarly, Victoria stated that in a staff meeting, when talking about the gender and sexual diversity aspects of the Ontario Health curriculum, the administration insinuated that teachers should ensure they have parental consent before addressing these issues. On the other hand, however, Victoria reinforced the fact that her administration was fully supportive of the elementary GSA she was starting at the school. Victoria’s negative experience with her administration is consistent with Schneider and Dimito’s 2008 study of the comfort of Ontario teacher’s in addressing LGBTQ issues in their schools that found that 37% of surveyed teachers believed the fact that administrators and trustees did not want to deal with LGBTQ issues was barrier for educators addressing LGBTQ issues in school. Her positive experiences are consistent with the remaining 63% and align with Tara’s positive experiences. The inconsistency in response from administrators is common to both participants and seems to rely
on individual administrators. The variation in response can also be seen in the participants’ reports of interactions with parents.

Neither respondent reported any direct backlash from parents about their own inclusion of these topics in their lessons. In fact, when Tara was asked about parent response she recalled a few positive instances where parents who identified as LGBTQ contacted her to thank her. Victoria on the other hand described an instance where the mother of a child who was in the process of coming out was reportedly hesitant about having these issues discussed in the classroom because she felt that it might bring up some homophobic comments from other students and bring negative attention to her child. Despite not getting any direct opposition to her classroom practices from parents, Victoria did describe a few instances within the school that pointed to a culture in which the parents seemingly do not fully embrace topics of gender and sexual diversity addressed in schools. One example of this is when she had organized an ally march after a pride flag raising at her school. She reported that she had heard “some parents were standing on the sidelines horrified and making comments”. Another example of this type of parent culture was brought up when Victoria was talking about the experience of another teacher at her school that was accused of getting students to simulate gay sex acts. These “parents believed it and came storming into the school to demand answers about why that was happening.” Victoria stated that she believed this was a pretty good indicator to the type of parents associated with her school. This is made apparent by her reports on her administration’s response to her discussion of these topics in the school and their concern with how parents will perceive this discussion. Studies show that homophobic parent culture of this type can make teachers hesitant to include these topics in their classroom (Evripidou & Çavuşoğlu, 2014; Schneider & Dimito, 2008).
4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the themes that emerged from interviews with teachers that include gender and sexual diversity topics in their French as a second language classrooms and explored how they relate to relevant literature. I found that teachers’ goal for including these topics in the classroom is one of normalization. Their understanding of the inclusion of gender and sexual diversity topics as an agent for normalization is consistent with literature on the topic. There are also perceived language learning benefits to the discussion of these topics that are specific to language classrooms. Their perception is supported by studies that have shown the language-learning benefit of address social issues in a second language. Moreover, teachers doing this work feel as though the resources to support them do not exist in the French language which, according to certain studies, is a significant barrier for teachers who wish to address LGBTQ issues in their schools. Furthermore, these teachers faced varying responses and supports from all aspects of the school community in different ways. Similarly to what many studies have found, teachers perceived student response to be mostly positive while response from other teachers, administrators and parents seemed to be more inconsistent. In the next chapter, I will discuss the implications of these findings for French language educators and for my own practice.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

5.0 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter of the study will start off with an overview of the key findings from the previous chapter and their significance. The following section will outline the implications these findings have for the broader education community and for my own teaching practice. The chapter will go on to provide some recommendations for various stakeholders that have an impact on the inclusion of gender and sexual diversity topics in the French as a second language classroom. The chapter will then propose some areas for further research on this subject that may not have been addressed in this study. The concluding comments to the chapter will include my reflections on the conducted study and its findings.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

The research question that guided this study was: what are Ontario French as a second language teachers’ experiences of integrating topics related to gender and sexual diversity in their classrooms? In order to explore this question, two Ontario French as a second language teachers were interviewed using semi-structured qualitative interviews. Four major themes emerged from the data collected in those interviews.

The first theme that emerged is that for Ontario French as a second language teachers who purposefully include gender and sexual diversity topics in their lessons, the normalization of queer people and their experiences is a primary objective. Participants of this study believed that addressing queer issues in their classrooms can have a positive impact on their students’ social development as it can normalize these issues that they perceive to be marginalized in mainstream society. This belief is the driving force behind their decision to include these topics in their lessons. They believe that these discussions can be beneficial to both
queer and non-queer students. For these teachers, the best approach to achieve this goal of normalization is to implicitly, rather than explicitly, bring queer perspectives into their lessons.

This study also found that teachers perceive there to be a benefit to their students’ language learning when gender and sexual diversity are discussed in their French language classrooms. The interviewed teachers noticed that their students were engaged and willing to use the French language whenever social issues were brought up for discussion in their classrooms.

Furthermore, the study found that teachers notice a lack of support resources in French when it comes to addressing topics of gender and sexual diversity in their classrooms. When these teachers find resources that do address these issues, they believe that they are often too difficult for the targeted level of language learning or they approach the issues in a very marginalizing way. Beyond the topic of gender and sexual diversity, the participants of this study stated that they have difficulties finding French-language resources in general.

Finally, the study brought to light the fact that teachers who are including topics of gender and sexual diversity in their lessons are faced with varying responses, both negative and positive, from different stakeholders in their school community. In regards to student response, both participants reported some fairly positive response from students, as they seemed interested in the discussions around gender and sexual diversity topics. When it came to administration and school staff, these teachers reported having both positive and negative experiences with different individuals. Neither participant reported any direct negative feedback from parents in regards to their practice of including gender and sexual diversity topics in their lessons but one participant pointed to events that she perceived to be hints of a queerphobic parent community at her school.

In the context of the existing research literature on the topic of addressing gender and sexual diversity topics in the second language classroom, these findings shed light on the specific
context of Ontario French as a second language classrooms. Schools in Ontario, and in most of English-speaking Canada, have a unique context in regards to French language learning. French as a second language courses are mandatory from grade 4 up to grade 9 in all English language school boards and therefore, students’ attitude towards the language could be different from students that are voluntarily taking the course. Furthermore, these findings are centered on teacher experiences and therefore could be used by other teachers wanting to address issues of gender and sexual diversity in their classrooms to inform their own practice.

5.2 Implications

This section of the study explores broad and narrow implications based on the research findings. Drawing on the reports of French language educators in Ontario that were interviewed for the purpose of this study, one could draw conclusions about the experiences of different groups within the educational community. First, this section will discuss what these findings could reveal about current state of the educational community and its various stakeholders. Next, it will discuss the implications for my own research and practice as a future French as a second language teacher in Ontario.

5.2.1 Broad implications: The educational research community

One of the most important stakeholders when it comes to education is the student. Firstly, the findings of this study could imply that students want to discuss topics of gender and sexual diversity in their classrooms and they may not be having them addressed in most cases. The participants’ reports show that they perceive that their students had a mostly positive reaction to these topics being discussed in their classrooms. However, the reports of negative reactions from students and their use of derogatory language could imply that queer people and queer issues have yet to be normalized for some students. These negative reactions could also mean that some
parents are not discussing gender and sexual diversity in a positive way at home. For some, this could mean that these discussions are absent and for others it could mean that they are addressed in a negative light. Students may therefore only be receiving negative perspectives of queer people and queer issues from their parents or the broader community, which could shape their opinions of them. Furthermore, these findings suggest that addressing topics of gender and sexual diversity, or social topics in general, in a foreign language classroom could be beneficial to the language learning of the students. When students have the opportunity to discuss relevant social topics that are of interest to them, they may be more willing to use the target language because they could want to voice their opinions. Even if their use of language may not be perfect, they may inquire into how to communicate certain ideas properly and consequently improve their language skills.

When it comes to the experience of teachers in Ontario, the findings of this study reveal a great deal. Both interviewed teachers in this study reported having both positive and negative responses from their fellow teaching staff in the schools they have worked in. This could mean that not all teachers within a school community are on the same page when it comes to addressing equity in their classrooms. Therefore, students may be receiving inconsistent messages about equity issues that impact their lives as such issues are seen as important by some teachers and less so by others.

Another finding that could have significant implications for teachers is that both participants reported having difficulties locating resources to support their pedagogical goals. If these teachers are finding it difficult to locate French-language resources that support the inclusion of themes of gender and sexual diversity in a normalizing way, it is possible that many other French language teachers have that same problem.
Finally, Victoria, a young teacher who is fairly new to the profession, reported having more negative response from administration and parents than Tara, who is in her 29th year of teaching, did. Teachers with more experience may be less likely to face backlash than new teachers when it comes to their inclusion of gender and sexual diversity topics in their classrooms. This might be due to the fact that experience is valued in the education system and that seasoned teachers may be questioned less on their pedagogy than beginner teachers.

This study’s findings also have implications for administrators. As seen by the fact that Victoria’s vice principal reportedly felt the need to send out permission slips for the school’s ally week – which celebrated allyship with the queer community –, administrators may be feeling an overwhelming amount of pressure from parent-communities to avoid addressing LGBTQ issues their schools. This may also make teachers less willing to address these topics in their classrooms if they feel pressure from their administration.

5.2.2 Narrow implications: Professional identity and practice

As a teacher candidate who hopes to teach in French as a second language classrooms, the findings of this study have implications for my own professional identity and practice. It is my belief that schooling should teach students how to think critically about their surroundings, engage them in their continuous learning, and socialize them to live in a way that promotes equity. Teachers undoubtedly play a major role in these aspects of schooling and therefore I believe it is a teacher’s role to include topics of gender and sexual diversity, and all other equity topics, into their classrooms, regardless of the subject. The experiences of these two teachers that are doing the work I wish to do as a teacher have taught me a great deal about my own practice. The findings of this study have given me a glimpse of what my experiences may be as I include gender and sexual diversity into my teaching. They have also taught me about the social and
educational benefits of doing this for my students and have reinforced my desire to promote equity in my classrooms. I have learned that this process will not always be easy and that resilience and leadership are important. I will ensure that I have the policy documents that support my practice ready for if I face backlash and I will act as a leader and role model for other teachers who may or may not be doing this work in their own classrooms.

5.3 Recommendations

In light of the findings of this study, some potential problems within the educational community have arisen such as schools’ inability to properly affirm the identities of their queer students and the ineffective implementation of policy and professional development activities. In order to address or lessen the impact of these problems, actions could be taken at different levels of the school community. School communities should be inclusive in that they affirm the various identities of students that could be in the schools and the way they intersect. This could be done by introducing extracurricular clubs such as equity clubs, queer-straight alliances, racial equity clubs, feminist clubs, etc. and having them work collaboratively to promote equity in the school. If equity issues are presented as being part of all aspects of the school community, they could then be normalized and discrimination could potentially be diminished. It is also imperative that all teachers and administration agree on how equity issues are addressed in schools to ensure consistency. Therefore administrators should plan professional development sessions to ensure that all teachers are informed on equity issues and understand how they may be able to incorporate them in their teaching. These professional development sessions should also be accompanied with a plan to hold teachers accountable, for example a follow-up session where teachers are asked to reflect on their progress. Furthermore, administrators and teachers should ensure that all staff are aware of the school board’s and the Ministry of Education’s policy
documents on promoting equity in the classroom. An awareness of these policies could help teachers feel more confident in tackling equity issues, including topics of gender and sexual diversity, in the classroom.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

The findings of this study shed light on the experiences of French as a second language teachers working to include topics of gender and sexual diversity in the specific context of Ontario public schools, however the research on the inclusion of gender and sexual diversity topics in the second language classroom in general still remains sparse. In light of these findings, it would be interesting to see a more in-depth study on the benefits of including discussions social topics in language learning. As we have seen, teachers perceive there to be a benefit to the language learning of their students but a large-scale study to validate these perceptions and to better understand the extent of these benefits could help fill some gaps in the existing literature on the topic. Furthermore, a study on how to effectively include topics of gender and sexual diversity in French as a second language classrooms could help many teachers develop their own lesson plans that address these topics in a constructive way.

5.5 Concluding Comments

I believe that this study addresses a specific issue within education that is not often discussed. There is a growing widespread acceptance of gender and sexual diversity within Ontarian schools and curriculum documents support addressing these topics in lesson design. In my experience however, it seems like these topics were often absent from French as a second language classrooms because teachers believed they were too difficult for students. It was encouraging to meet teachers who were doing this work and were resilient about it as well. As a queer teacher, I found it particularly encouraging to find that most students had a positive
response to addressing these issues. Furthermore, this study has reinforced my desire to be out in my classroom. For students who are queer, having a queer teacher could help validate their identities. I believe this would have been helpful in my high school years. For students who are not queer, having an out queer teacher could help normalize the queer experience for them.
References


Young (Eds.), *Approaches to educational leadership and practice* (pp. 16–40). Calgary, AB: Detselig Enterprises/Temeron Books.


*Qualitative Research Reports in Communication, 8*(1), 21-28.


Toronto District School Board. (2000). *Anti-homophobia, sexual orientation commitment* (Section 3 of *The Equity Foundation Statement and Commitments to Equity Policy Implementation*). Toronto, ON: Author.


Appendix A: Letter of Signed Consent

Date:

Dear ______________________________,

My Name is Daniel Couture 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 the inclusion of topics of gender and sexual diversity in the French as a second language classroom. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have included these topics in their FSL classrooms. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one roughly 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. 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.

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,

Daniel Couture
**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 Daniel Couture and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________________

Name: (printed) ________________________________________

Date: ________________________________________
Hello, my name is Daniel Couture and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. For my major research project, I am exploring the inclusion of gender and sexual diversity topics (LGBT issues) in the French as a second language classroom in Ontario. Through this interview, I hope to learn the ways in which you are including these topics in your classes and how you perceive this inclusion. For 60 minutes, I will be asking you questions about your own teaching practices, perceived student attitudes, and the barriers and supports you experience in regards to the inclusion of these topics. I would like to remind you that you are not obligated to answer any of the questions and you can withdraw your participation at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

To start, can you state your name for the recording?

SECTION 1: Background Information

1. What subject(s) and grade(s) do you teach/have you taught? Where?
2. How many years have you worked as a teacher?
3. If you are comfortable disclosing this information, how would you describe your gender identity and sexual orientation?

SECTION 2: Teacher Practices

4. When did you first start incorporating LGBT topics in your teaching?
5. Tell me about the last time you included LGBTQ topic(s) in one of your lessons.
   a. Did you use it as a theme for a lesson/unit?
b. Was it the theme for the entire lesson or was it more specifically focused in one aspect of it.

c. An example for a grammar concept?

d. To expand on vocabulary?

e. How did you get the students to engage with this content using French?

6. Is this example representative of how you generally introduce these topics in your lessons?

   a. If yes, why?

   b. If no, then how? And why?

7. What was the perceived response from students?

   a. Can you provide an example?

8. Why do you think it is important to include LGBTQ topics in your lesson planning?

SECTION 3: Beliefs and Values

9. What do you believe students can gain from learning about LGBT topics in the classroom?

   a. How about in the French as a second language classroom, specifically?

   b. Do you believe there are social benefits associated with learning about these topics?

   c. Do you believe that learning about these topics benefits the language learning of your students?

SECTION 4: Influencing Factors

10. Has student response ever been a barrier to you including these kinds of topics in your lessons?
11. How have administration or parents responded to your inclusion of LGBTQ topics in your lessons?
   a. Have you received any praise for doing this?
   b. Have you received any criticism?
   c. What do you believe are the reasons for the feedback you have received?

12. Do you feel supported by the school community (administration, other teachers, etc.) regarding your practice of using LGBTQ topics in the classroom?

13. Do you find access to resources regarding French as a second language and LGBTQ topics to be relatively easy?
   a. If yes, what kind? (prompt)
      i. Human resources (shared by teachers); articles; online (teacher websites, French language websites); lesson plans; etc.
   b. If no, why do you think that is?
   c. If no, what kinds of resources would you like to see be more easily accessible for teachers?

SECTION 5: Next Steps

14. What advice would you give to beginning French language teachers looking to include LGBTQ topics in their classroom?

15. What goals do you have for yourself in regards to the inclusion of LGBTQ topics in your classrooms?
   a. Are there things you would like to improve on?
   b. Are there things you know you want to continue doing?