How to Teach *les Êtres Humains*: An Investigation into Teachers’ Understandings of Learner Empowerment in Ontario Secondary School Core-French Classrooms

By

Oliver Drigo

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 Oliver Drigo, April 2017
Abstract

In keeping with the spirit of renewed efforts in French as a Second Language education in Ontario, it has become increasingly apparent of the need to expand upon traditional desired outcomes, namely in developing more confident, proficient and successful French learners. To better conceptualize these enhanced expectations, ideas of learner empowerment — a more expansive and inclusive form of motivation that comprises feelings of competency and self-efficacy — were applied to an investigation of reported classroom practices of French teachers. A qualitative research approach was used that combined a literature review with semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with two secondary-school Core French teachers. A theoretical framework — Ryan and Deci’s Self-Determination Theory — was applied to improve understanding of teachers’ reported learner empowerment practices. Drawing connections between the compiled data and the literature reviewed, analysis yielded four main themes: understandings of ‘empowerment’; reported efforts to empower learners; factors reportedly influencing learner empowerment; and encouragement of students’ continued interest in French. Ultimately, findings suggest that some teachers might lack the support, encouragement, or even accountability necessary in going beyond the traditional ‘disempowering’ norms of the Core French classroom, and that some teachers may not fully appreciate nor fulfill the important social role that they have on student empowerment in the Core French classroom.

Key Words: Core French, empowerment, secondary schools, Self-Determination Theory
Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge and thank everyone who helped me put together this Master of Teaching Research Paper and make it into the ‘beast’ that it has come to be. My supervisor, Lee Airton, deserves much of the credit and for that I am eternally grateful. I would also like to thank my cohort (253) in the MT program who have been along for the ride, aiming for ‘A-ness’ every step of the way.

Most of all, I would like to acknowledge my family, who have supported me throughout, and Charlene, who has saved my sanity whenever I felt like it was running low. Lots of sleep, coffee, good food and better music were necessary for completing this MTRP.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... ii

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................................ iii

Chapter 1: Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1

1.0 Research Context and Problem ............................................................................................... 1

1.1 Purpose of the Study .................................................................................................................. 5

1.2 Research Questions ................................................................................................................... 6

1.3 Self-Positioning as Researcher ................................................................................................ 6

1.4 Overview .................................................................................................................................. 9

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................... 10

2.0 Introduction to the Chapter ...................................................................................................... 10

2.1 Understandings of Motivation .................................................................................................. 10

2.1.1 Learner empowerment ......................................................................................................... 12

2.2 Overview of Self-Determination Theory .................................................................................. 13

2.3 Conclusion ............................................................................................................................... 16

Chapter 3: Literature Review ......................................................................................................... 18

3.0 Introduction to the Chapter ...................................................................................................... 18

3.1 Research on French as a Second Language in Ontario .......................................................... 18

3.1.1 Implementation of aspects of the CEFR ............................................................................. 20

3.2 Motivation and Empowerment in Second Language Education .......................................... 21

3.2.1 Teacher practices that promote motivation and empowerment ......................................... 23

3.2.2 The role of cultural contexts ............................................................................................... 25

3.2.3 Connection with Self-Determination Theory ........................................................................ 26
3.3 Barriers to Language Learning/ Instruction ................................................................. 27
  3.3.1 Barriers to language learning for students ......................................................... 28
  3.3.2 Barriers to language teaching ........................................................................... 29
3.4 Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 30

Chapter 4: Research Methodology ................................................................................ 32
  4.0 Introduction (Chapter Overview) ............................................................................ 32
  4.1 Research Approach and Procedures ..................................................................... 32
  4.2 Instruments of Data Collection ............................................................................. 33
  4.3 Participants ............................................................................................................. 35
    4.3.1 Sampling criteria .............................................................................................. 35
    4.3.2 Participant recruitment .................................................................................... 36
    4.3.3 Participant biographies .................................................................................... 37
  4.4 Data Analysis .......................................................................................................... 38
  4.5 Ethical Review Procedures ..................................................................................... 39
  4.6 Methodological limitations and Strengths .............................................................. 40
  4.7 Conclusion .............................................................................................................. 41

Chapter 5: Research Findings ....................................................................................... 43
  5.0 Introduction to the Chapter ................................................................................... 43
  5.1 Participants’ Understandings of ‘Empowerment’ ................................................... 44
    5.1.1 Engagement and empowerment ....................................................................... 44
    5.1.2 Active learning and empowerment .................................................................. 46
    5.1.3 Success and empowerment ............................................................................ 48
  5.2 Efforts to Empower Learners ............................................................................... 50
5.2.1 The ideal teacher .................................................................50
5.2.2 Engaging and empowering practices ...........................................52
5.2.3 Breaking the ‘norm’ of French teaching ...........................................54
5.3 Factors Influencing Learner Empowerment .......................................55
5.4 Encouraging Future/ Continued Interest in French .................................58
  5.4.1 Exposure to the language ............................................................58
  5.4.2 The ‘ideal’ program and student choice ...........................................59
5.5 Theoretical analysis ........................................................................63
  5.5.1 Amotivation versus motivation .......................................................64
  5.5.2 Controlled motivation versus self-determined motivation ......................66
5.6 Conclusion ....................................................................................71

Chapter 6: Conclusion .......................................................................73
  6.0 Introduction to the Chapter ............................................................73
  6.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance .................................73
  6.2 Implications ..................................................................................76
    6.2.1 Broad: The educational community ..............................................76
    6.2.2 Narrow: My professional practice ................................................78
  6.3 Recommendations ..........................................................................78
  6.4 Areas for Further Research .............................................................81
  6.5 Concluding Comments ..................................................................82

References .......................................................................................83

Appendix A: Letter of Consent ...........................................................90
Appendix B: Interview Protocol ..........................................................92
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context and Problem

English and French, Canada’s two official languages, serve foundational roles in the nation’s history and identity. With the majority of both Francophone and Anglophone Canadians, believing that knowledge of both languages improves one’s economic prospects and contributes to a better understanding of Canada (Government of Canada, 2013), it is clear that language, especially in its practice and preservation, has immense, recognized value. Reinforcing this idea, in 2013 Canada’s Department of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages under the government of then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper pledged $1.1 billion over five years to “protect, celebrate and strengthen” Canada’s official languages (Government of Canada, 2013, p. 2).

In Ontario, Canada’s largest province by population (Statistics Canada, 2015), the majority of residents are English-speakers (Statistics Canada, 2011). That being said, French language learning remains an integral part of the provincial education curriculum. French as a Second Language (or FSL) is divided into three streams: Core French, Extended French, and French Immersion. FSL is obligatory for students in English-language boards from at least Grades 4 to 8 (but the date of entry can be earlier depending on the board and the stream). As well, secondary school students must earn at least one credit in FSL in order to receive their Ontario Secondary School Diploma and complete high school (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015).

In the Core French stream, students learn French as a subject, accumulating a minimum of 600 hours of French instruction by Grade 8 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). In Extended French, French serves as both a subject and the language of instruction in at least one
other subject, accounting for at least 25 per cent of all instruction at the elementary level. Finally, in French Immersion, French serves as both a subject and the language of instruction in two or more other subjects, totalling 50 per cent of all instruction at the elementary level. In Ontario, 60 out of 72 school boards are English language, and together serve 1,900,000 students from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016a). In examining these figures, it is evident that the vast majority of elementary and secondary school students in Ontario have participated or will participate at one point in time (should they remain in Ontario) in one of the three FSL streams.

Provincial governments, in particular the Government of Ontario, have renewed efforts to improve French as a Second Language instruction in their schools through new curricula (see Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b; 2014) and supplementary documents designed to help FSL instruction for all students (see Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a, 2015). Aside from updating terminology and revising material for the second decade of the 21st century, the recent 2014 Ontario secondary school curriculum (see Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014) aims to go far further in scope than its predecessor did in 1999. Promoting active and meaningful engagement, increasing effective use of French, and fostering an interest in language learning are just some of the new curriculum’s goals and ideals on top of the ever-present aim of motivating students (Ministry of Education, 2014). Does their mention now mean, however, that the old curriculum never actually called for any of these? Not quite. The 1999/2000 curricula (see Ontario Ministry of Education, 1999; 2000) focused much more on skill and interest development, offering general guidelines towards the “use [of] the French language with greater fluency, proficiency, and accuracy” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1999, p. 3; 2000, p. 3). This
shift from ‘fluency’, ‘proficiency’ and ‘accuracy’ to ‘engagement’, ‘usage’, ‘motivation’ and ‘interest’ underscores the need to promote student interest, not only achievement, in French.

Enhancing student language abilities in a language-for-the-sake-of-language way, along with the related teaching practices, has arguably had disastrous effects on student participation and desire to learn French. Particularly in predominantly Anglophone Southern Ontario — the area most examined by the present study — less than 50% of students claimed to be happy studying Core French (Klein, 2007). Motivation to succeed and pursue French after Grade 9 can be very low (Klein, 2007; Lapkin, Mady & Arnott, 2009; Mady, 2010; Faez, Majhanovich, Taylor, Smith & Crowly, 2011 and it has been found across Canada that negative attitudes and abandonment of FSL programs may be most pronounced in male-identified students (Kissau, 2006; Kissau & Turnbull, 2008). Thus, it is no wonder that the Ontario Ministry of Education’s (2016b) three goals to support their vision of “students in English-language school boards hav[ing] the confidence and ability to use French effectively in their daily lives” (para. 11) are as follows: increase student confidence, proficiency, and achievement in FSL; increase the percentage of students studying FSL until graduation; and increase student, educator, parent, and community engagement in FSL. It is clear that effort is underway to attempt to reverse recent trends.

In discussing motivation, participation, engagement and confidence — key points of emphasis within the revised French as a Second Language programs — the idea of the ‘empowered learner’ is significant. An empowered learner is someone who is not only motivated to perform tasks, but also “finds the tasks meaningful, feels competent to perform them, and feels his/her efforts have an impact on the scheme of things” (Houser & Frymier, 2009, p. 36). Offering a more expansive and inclusive version of motivation, ‘learner empowerment’ or rather
just ‘empowerment’ (here discussed within a learning context, rather than a social justice one) can further be characterized as a conceptual "set of motivational processes that increase personal initiation, persistence to complete a task, and feelings of self-efficacy, or of having an impact on learning and choice” (Brooks & Young, 2011, p. 50). Motivation, competency (or confidence), and feelings of self-efficacy are crucial to this idea. As the direction of new curricular material diversifies and expands upon the desired outcome of FSL education in Ontario with language learners, it becomes necessary to build upon our own ideas of what constitutes a successful FSL learner. In keeping with the spirit of renewed efforts in French as a Second Language education, it is increasingly apparent the need to expand upon traditional desired outcomes so as to go even further, namely in developing more confident, proficient and successful students (see the first aim of Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015).

When considering the recent nature of the revised FSL curriculum for Ontario secondary school students, it is important to identify how teachers are adapting or how they have always applied elements of the new curriculum (as discussed above). Even with the older curricula, there is little research documenting specific examples of successful Ontario teacher practices in French as a second language. Those that have been found focus on either teacher perceptions (see Faez et al., 2011; Lapkin & Barkaoui, 2008) or specific pedagogical tools and little else (see ‘self-evaluation’ in Klein, 2007). In addition, there are few examples of what teachers have been doing to increase feelings of motivation, engagement and confidence- or simply to ‘empower’- their students. By recording successful examples of teacher practice in tandem with their perspectives and voices, a much broader picture can be painted. The hope is to contribute to the growing body of data and provoke further research or discussion on enhancing French as a Second Language teaching in Ontario.
1.1 The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore Ontario intermediate (Grades 9-10) Core French teachers’ understandings of learner empowerment, or, more specifically, their reported practices that foster it directly or indirectly in the Core French classroom, regardless of their familiarity with the term itself. Every secondary school student must take at least one credit in FSL to receive their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015), thus the decision to continue to study French becomes the student’s alone after they have received that one credit. In light of research noting low motivation and significant drop-off rates after Grade 9 FSL courses (Faez et al., 2011; Klein, 2007; Lapkin et al., 2009; Mady, 2010), the Ontario Ministry of Education (2014) has sought to reverse this with an updated curriculum that, among other things, explicitly calls for an increase in “the percentage of students studying FSL until graduation” (p. 19). I am interested in exploring how teachers are addressing this issue and, in going farther than simply ‘motivating’ students to succeed or nurturing interests, perhaps seeking to empower their learners to become more confident, proficient, and successful FSL students. This question could also be supported with further empowerment terminology, namely analyzing teachers’ efforts to help their students feel more competent to perform tasks, find them more meaningful, and feel that they have a greater impact on learning.

I have explored this topic by interviewing a sample of Grade 9 or 10 Core French teachers about their practices in support of learner empowerment in Core French. For the purpose of the study, ‘learner empowerment’ is generally defined as the teacher’s reported practices in engaging students in meaningful tasks, fostering student competence, promoting student self-efficacy, and fostering student’s feelings of having an impact on their learning and a degree of choice. It is my hope that the study findings may contribute to the emerging literature
within Ontario about the new French curriculum and the concerted efforts to improve the state of French as a Second Language education in the province. A central aim of this project is also to promote the idea of learner empowerment as a replacement for more limited ideas of motivation, and inspire further research on French as a Second Language education in Canadian secondary schools.

1.2 Research Questions

The central question guiding this study was: how is a small sample of Ontario secondary school Core French teachers working to empower their students as learners? Sub-questions to further guide this study include:

- How do teachers conceptualize and understand their role in learner empowerment?
- What are teachers’ reported practices for empowering and engaging students?
- What are the supports for and barriers to fostering learner empowerment in Core French that these teachers encounter?
- How do teachers reportedly assess their students so as to encourage them to continue studying the language?

1.3 Self-Positioning as Researcher

As someone who felt at times disempowered, disinterested or generally uninvolved in learning French as a Second Language growing up, I developed a strong interest in demystifying the subject for students with similar feelings and giving them a sense of ‘ownership’ of their language learning. I found, and still continue to find, that students fail to understand the true value of learning another language, especially within our bilingual context as a nation. Why is this? I look back largely on my own experiences as a (then) monolingual, Anglophone student in Core French and wish that my teachers brought the language to life for me. Essentially, this
means more opportunities to demonstrate my abilities in an active and authentic manner, to feel like I was improving, and, more importantly, to have teachers demonstrate the worth of the language to me through its practical application.

I only became passionate about the French language after a summer exchange in Québec through the Explore program – an intensive 5-week language-immersion program subsidized by the Government of Canada — after completing Grade 11. Having had to take the subject all through high school as part of the academically-enriched International Baccalaureate program, this was the moment that my confidence dramatically improved, as did my desire to succeed and master the language; French became real to me. This ultimately had a large influence on my choice to pursue French Studies at the University of Ottawa and trying to immerse myself in the bilingual experience. Seeing the value of French for me, as a tool for authentic communication and cultural exploration, greatly opened my mind to learning languages, yet it kept bringing me back to that sharp contrast with my earlier experiences. For years I wondered, why did it take me so long to appreciate learning French? Or, more pertinent to this study, why did it take so long for all of this to ‘click,’ despite the efforts of my teachers over quite a few years? The factors at play in these situations have come to interest me, as have teachers’ practices and their roles as facilitators of learning and motivation.

I view the application of skills and having a tangible effect on one’s learning as intrinsic to success and confidence-building; these are also important points within the idea of learner empowerment and increasing feelings of self-efficacy, competency, and task meaningfulness. I appreciated the opportunity to investigate how teachers with experience in teaching a second language view student empowerment and how they integrate it into their lessons. This is important to understand as not only can it help to improve my own abilities as a teacher-in-
training, but also in the insight that it gave into how second-language instruction is currently viewed/pursued.

The opportunities that I encountered which allowed me to dramatically change my attitude towards French are also quite particular and need mentioning. As discussed above, participating in the International Baccalaureate program, which was offered for free at my secondary school, and the Explore Program, subsidized largely by the Government of Canada, were what pushed me to want to succeed. I was fortunate to be able to have access to both programs, in addition to parents that were supportive of all-round success, not excluding French. Language was always present in my household, as both my parents were bilingual (English and Italian), but the impetus to learn was placed on my brother and myself as children and we could not care less. Thus we never learned Italian growing up, speaking only English with our parents, nor was French impressed on us as neither of our parents spoke it fluently. As a student though, I wanted to do well and earn good grades, but I was having little success and looked at French as a necessary evil. Learner empowerment and its central tenets of meaningfulness, competence, choice and impact resonate deeply with me, and remind me of those learning opportunities that most impacted my own journey. When French came alive, either through exposure or clear evidence of practical application, that is when I began to see its immense worth. Once I could take the language into my own hands and use it organically (i.e. spontaneous conversations or written productions) rather than just practice it mechanically (i.e. drilling and rote memorization), it became my own.

Is empowerment the only answer? Not necessarily. Much of what learner empowerment emphasizes can be found elsewhere, however I desire to explore those aspects as they work towards a unified goal, so closely aligning with ideas of motivation. There is no one way to teach
students nor is there one sole way to motivate them. How those different factors work together and are emphasized, or not, are ultimately what impact individual students.

1.4 Overview

To respond to my research questions, I conducted a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview two to three high school Core French teachers about their instructional strategies for empowering students. Next in Chapter Two I outline my theoretical framework (using Ryan and Deci’s Self-Determination Theory), revisited during the data analysis section. In Chapter Three I review literature in the areas of FSL in Ontario, empowerment and motivation, and obstacles and barriers to teacher practice at school. Then Chapter Four is where I elaborate on the research design. In Chapter Five I report my research findings and discuss their significance in light of the existing research literature and through the lens of my theoretical framework. Finally, in Chapter 6 I identify the implications of the research findings for my own teacher identity and practice. I also present questions raised by the research findings, as well as related areas for future inquiry.
Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

2.0 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter aims to establish the theoretical framework on which the paper’s data analysis is based, acting as a lens through which to evaluate reported participant practices. Although learner empowerment is the overarching and more expansive concept being explored throughout the study, motivation has a significant place within the concept. As such, the use of a theoretical framework, in this case Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci’s (1985; 2000) Self-Determination Theory, is valuable in that it can better enhance understanding of the quality of motivation of the practices that teachers identify towards empowering students. This, in turn, is important for establishing ‘best practices’ from those empowering initiatives. The chapter begins with an overview of understandings of motivation, one of the central concepts explored in the paper, and then transitions to how it fits within the wider concept of learner empowerment. These ideas were central to the retrieval of data and formulation of the interview questionnaire. Then the theoretical framework, which figured largely into the analysis of research findings, is described, with particular emphasis on the motivational continuum and key concepts within it. Ultimately, Chapter 2 aims to situate the theoretical framework within the rest of the paper and demonstrate its value in establishing the quality of motivation found in teachers’ reported empowering practices.

2.1 Understandings of Motivation

At the heart of this study’s investigation is how educators are going beyond motivating their students, how they are increasing participation in the FSL program and working to cultivate more confident, proficient, and successful FSL students. While ‘motivation’ may serve as the starting point for this paper’s conceptual understandings, ‘learner empowerment’ is deemed to be
more appropriate for the scope of what is hoped to be investigated. That being said, it is still important to identify what motivation is, then to situate it within learner empowerment. This section explores understandings of motivation, specifically its place within the classroom and the factors that can affect it, before turning towards learner empowerment and exploring how motivation fits within the broader term.

Motivation has been generally defined as an internal state that arouses, directs, and maintains behaviour (Pearson Educational Psychology, 2016). From this broad idea, consider R.C. Gardner’s operational definition within the context of his ‘socio-educational model.’ In this context, which examines motivation within second-language learning, motivation consists of a desire to learn the language, motivational intensity and attitudes towards the learning situation (Gardner, 1985). More generally speaking, motivation (within an educational language context), consists of varying degrees of the intensity of the motivated behaviour, the desire to learn and attitudes towards learning. Rather than motivation as simply a fluctuating behavioural concept, the idea of intensity (of behaviour), desire (or interest) and attitude towards something is much more tangible and direct. They serve as ‘pillars’ from which comes the broader idea of motivation, and can, in turn, be used as achievable goals with recognizable behaviours to be targeted in classroom environments. Essentially, it is easier to work towards increasing students’ interest or participation in class than vaguely trying to motivate them.

Building off of Gardner’s ideas, multiple studies have noted the variety of factors that can affect the motivational process, or rather its intrinsic components (namely, but not limited to): a learner’s intelligence or aptitude (Dornyei, 2001); feelings of self-efficacy (Raoofi, Tan & Chan, 2012); goal-setting (Dornyei, 1994); gender (Kissau, 2006); peer influence (Kissau & Turnbull, 2008); age (Williams, Burden & Lanvers, 2002); and interest (Tin, 2013).
2.1.1 Learner empowerment. With consideration of the multiplicity of factors involved in the motivational process, some attitudes towards motivation have shifted away from an emphasis on social context and interactions to a more cognitive approach that focuses on a learner’s mental processes and their motivational effects. Frymier, Shulman & Houser (1996) developed the concept of ‘learner empowerment’ within this context, which has been considered an “expanded and more inclusive conceptualization of motivation” (p. 184), As such, it has been found to be integral to the learning process (Frymier et al., 1996; Houser & Frymier, 2009; Brooks & Young, 2011). While constructing the learner empowerment measure, Frymier et. al (1996) found that teacher immediacy, student motivation, relevance and self-esteem had a strong relationship with one another towards students feeling empowered. Essentially, empowering mental faculties strive to create a “learning environment where the desire to learn comes from factors inside (intrinsic) rather than rewards outside (extrinsic) of the student” (p. 183). The varying levels of learner empowerment are similar to those of motivation with its varying degrees of desire and attitudes towards learning. However, empowerment particularly strives for intrinsically-motivated desires rather than extrinsically-motivated ones. Motivation is not simply an end-goal; rather the focus turns specifically to intrinsic motivation and feelings of empowerment. Additionally, empowerment broadens ideas of motivation by considering feelings of meaningfulness, competency, and having an impact on the learning experience (Frymier et al., 1996; Frymier & Houser, 2009; Brooks & Young, 2011). Additionally, within learner empowerment, motivation has been found to act more as a fluctuating state than a static characteristic (Frymier et al., 1996), thus showing the variability depending on the context. As such, teachers – the creators and facilitators of students’ learning experiences in the classroom—have a significant relationship with learner empowerment.
Motivation, presented both on its own and under the umbrella of learner empowerment, is an integral aspect to the learning experience, but one which this paper does not seek to look at in isolation. Rather, learner empowerment and how teachers work towards it — which, in addition to motivation includes teacher immediacy, feelings of relevance, and self-esteem — offer a more complete picture of classroom practices and the current direction of second language teaching under the new Ontario FSL curriculum. This project’s goal was to see how educators are reportedly going beyond ‘simply’ motivating their students in the French classroom; engendering interest, enhancing student learning, and developing ‘life-long’ language learners, while not wholly exclusive of motivation, are more comfortably found under the umbrella of learner empowerment and carry very similar importance.

2.2 Overview of Self-Determination Theory

Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan’s Self-Determination Theory (2000) offers the basis for this paper’s theoretical framework, and, thus, deeper analysis of the empowering practices reported by participants. This section offers an overview of the theory, different key terms and aspects within it, and a description of the motivational continuum that informs the analysis of research findings in Chapter Five.

Found within humanistic social psychology and serving as a macrotheory of human motivation, Self-Determination Theory (or SDT) seeks to address the ‘energization’ and ‘direction’ aspects of motivation, or the degree to which one is motivated and the impetus for the motivated behavior, while also discussing different types of motivational regulation (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991). At its basis, the theory identifies three “innate, essential, and universal” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 74) needs of individuals connected to motivation: competence, relatedness and autonomy. Ultimately, people are more motivated when
opportunities to satisfy any of these needs are met, though autonomy is the only necessary aspect for people to be self-determined in their motivation rather than controlled (Brooks & Young, 2011; Deci et al., 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2008). A self-determined individual is one who is intrinsically motivated (i.e., feelings of competence and/or relatedness are met) and feels agency (or autonomy) in their actions (Brooks & Young, 2011).

The ideas of controlled and self-determined motivation depend on the regulatory factors by which they are compelled. Essentially, a self-determined behaviour depends on ‘choice’, whereas a controlled behaviour is one of ‘compliance’, or even ‘defiance’ (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Deci et al., 1991). Traditional motivational ideas hold that extrinsic motivation is an “antagonistic counterpart” to intrinsic motivation (Dornyei, 1994, p. 276); however SDT refutes this with the belief that motivation can be examined across contexts by way of an autonomy continuum of self-determined and controlled forms of motivation (Dornyei, 1994; Brooks & Young, 2011). Along the continuum, solely meeting the needs of competence and relatedness can indicate whether an individual is motivated or amotivated (not feeling compelled to act); however, autonomy demonstrates the degree to which that motivation is then self-determined or controlled. The continuum is not a developmental one with set stages of progress, but rather fluid such that people can “readily internalize a new behavioural regulation at any point” along it, with regards to their situational factors and prior experiences (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 73). For these two parts of the spectrum, the locus of causality, that aspect which drives motivation, is perceived as either internal (Self-Determined) or external (Controlled) to the self (Deci et al., 1991).

Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier and Ryan (1991) describe motivation along the continuum as first amotivation (lack of motivation/compulsion to act), then extrinsic motivation (motivated by
aspects external to the activity), and then intrinsic motivation (motivated by inherent pleasure or satisfaction, interest in the activity itself). Extrinsic motivation is further divided into four sub-groups of regulation: external regulation (where a behaviour is performed because of an external contingency, such as praise, payment or a reward), introjected regulation (internalized rules or demands that pressure one to behave, supported with sanctions or rewards), identified regulation (relatively self-determined, performed willingly and for personal reasons, yet towards a specific goal none-the-less) and integrated regulation (most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation, characterized by personal importance of an activity towards a valued outcome). As discussed earlier, self-determination is most aligned with forms of intrinsically motivated behaviour. For extrinsically motivated behaviour though, it has the potential of being internalized by individuals so that they no longer require the external locus of causality; This can appear as someone who is motivated by good grades or praise to complete a task then later completing the task for themselves and the sense of satisfaction that it gives, much like the good grades or praise did before.

Self-Determination Theory offers valuable insight into the motivational behaviours and outcomes that are central to the classroom experience. As well, this theoretical framework allows for better understanding of the ‘energization’ and ‘direction’ aspects of motivation within learner empowerment practices. This can be used to identify the type and the quality of motivation that is evident within these practices, or, ultimately, it responds to the question, ‘How motivating are the reported empowerment practices?’ Regulation categories within extrinsic motivation, amotivation, and the motivation continuum figure largely into the discussion of findings in Chapter 5.
2.3 Conclusion

With Self-Determination Theory acting as the theoretical lens through which the paper is examined, the central concept of learner empowerment must also be regarded through it. The SDT continuum, demonstrating motivation as a state from the weakest form (amotivation) to the strongest (intrinsic motivation), is the main tool to be used as are the three guiding needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy. Ideas of learner empowerment were crucial in the retrieval of data and formulation of the interview questionnaire, however in analyzing the research findings, Self-Determination Theory was applied to see where reported practices align with the continuum. In particular, learner empowerment strives for intrinsically motivating factors rather than extrinsic ones in students. As such, this theoretical framework enhances the paper’s analysis of the type or quality of motivation that educators report in their practice, and thus the degree to which they are empowering their students as learners. In this instance, ‘type/quality of motivation’ refers to those ‘energization’ and ‘direction’ aspects of motivation mentioned above, or rather the extent to which students are motivated and the impetus for the motivated behavior. This is where SDT’s central ideas of controlled versus self-determined motivation come in, hinging on the degree of autonomy that is present to determine ‘extent’ and ‘impetus.’

The use of learner empowerment and Self-Determination Theory conjure two central questions that guide this paper: how is a small sample of Ontario secondary school Core French teachers working to empower their students as learners? And how motivating are the reported empowerment practices? Both questions figure into the data analysis sections of this paper in Chapters Five and Six. In investigating these two questions, the aim is to identify reported ‘best practices’ for empowering students as learners in the French as a Second Language classroom.
thereby facilitating more confident, proficient, and successful students, something desperately needed with the current state of Core French in Southern Ontario. As discussed in Chapter One, current trends of low motivation and the small percentage of students who study French past Grade 9 must be addressed and corrected. Aligning with the recently adjusted Ontario FSL Curriculum, this study offers a valuable resource to educators and non-educators alike who want to see what can be done and, through the theoretical framework, how motivating those actions may be.
Chapter Three: Literature Review

3.0 Introduction to the Chapter

In this chapter I review research literature on French as a Second Language in Ontario, the concepts of motivation and empowerment, as well as obstacles to French language learning in Canada. In particular, I provide an overview of the French as a Second Language program in secondary schools in Ontario over the past decade, and I discuss the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and its integration into the French curriculum in Ontario. Then, I construct definitions of motivation and learner empowerment, I connect them to second-language education, teacher practices, and student autonomy, and ultimately, I integrate studies of Self-Determination Theory, the theoretical lens through which I plan to further examine teacher practice related to motivation/empowerment. Lastly, I highlight obstacles to French language learning across Canada, both for teachers and for students.

3.1 Research on French as a Second Language in Ontario

As discussed in Chapter One, the current state of French as a Second Language education in Ontario English-language public schools is in transition. Updating and refining its vision for the future of FSL, the desire is to increase student confidence, ability, success, and participation in the program, as well as the engagement of all stakeholders (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016b). Although it is too soon to study the full consequences of this change in approach, much has been documented about the inadequacy of the Ontario Core French program in the years prior. Klein (2007) found that Grade 9 Core French students were generally unhappy studying French (38% of males and 54% of females), consistently ranking it as one of their least favourite subjects in school. Males, in particular, have been singled out for their disproportionate dissatisfaction with FSL. Kissau (2006) identified societal perceptions of learning French as a
key influence on their negative attitudes, although this is far from an exclusive explanation (Kissau, 2006; Kissau & Turnbull, 2008). Giving an overall glimpse of the situation, as of 2006/2007, only 43% of all eligible students in Ontario took part in some type of FSL program (Canadian Parents for French, 2008).

Conversely, Mady (2010) found that English as a Second Language (or ESL) learners in Ontario were strongly motivated to learn French (see also Canadian Parents for French, 2010), viewing it as an integral part of adopting a Canadian cultural identity. The sense of responsibility that she found in these individuals translated into greater levels of success. As found in a further study of this group, their enhanced second language abilities (from learning English) allowed them levels of integration in FSL classes that might not necessarily have been found in other courses (Mady, 2012). Essentially, the motivation and enhanced propensity of ESL learners towards acquiring an additional language, despite less prior practice and exposure to FSL learning, often put them at similar proficiency levels with their Anglophone peers.

Negative perceptions within French as a Second Language education are not only limited to students however. In a study of 1305 FSL teachers across Canada and different streams of FSL education, Lapkin, MacFarlane and Vandergrift (2006) found that almost 40% of respondents considered leaving FSL teaching. Lack of community support, marginalization in schools, and less than ideal teaching conditions were also identified as primary concerns of FSL teachers, in line with additional research on FSL teachers (Lapkin & Barkaoui, 2008). It is also worth noting the disproportionate number of male FSL teachers as found by Kissau and Turnbull (2008). Connecting low male students’ rates of satisfaction in learning French with the low number of male French teachers, they hypothesize that male students would ultimately receive more encouragement to study the language in having that male role model. Although gender far
exceeds the purview of this paper, the presence of research — however limited — on gender as a potentially defining factor of the FSL learning experience is important to note.

3.1.1 Implementation of aspects of the CEFR. In light of the new curricular focus of Ontario’s FSL programs, it is important to discuss the influential role of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), a well-established guideline put together by the Council of Europe used to describe achievements of learners of foreign languages. This is directly noted in the Ontario Ministry of Education’s (2013a) ‘Framework for French as a Second Language in Ontario Schools’ where it is considered a “valuable asset for informing instruction and assessment practices in FSL education” (p. 4 and again on p. 18) and integral to modern FSL pedagogical approaches. Kristmanson, Lafargue and Culligan (2013) found that the use of the European Language Portfolio (or ELP), a document connected to the CEFR and designed to help support the development of learners’ autonomy, ability, and intercultural awareness (Council of Europe, 2011), helped promote a positive affective climate and differentiated environment in the language classroom. Essentially, the notions of personalization and choice implemented by teachers were positively viewed by learners. Conversely, students in that study found exposure to the ‘outside world’ of language use was truly necessary to their experience. This is an essential part of the CEFR, which seeks to engage learners in classroom language use that is similar to real life language use (Faez et al., 2011). Increased autonomy in language learning, particularly within the context of the CEFR, has been found to potentially increase motivation and thus increased student success in second language learning (Kristmanson et al., 2013; Faez et al., 2011; Piccardo, 2013; Benson 2007).

However, challenges in applying the CEFR for educators have emerged. Particular difficulties are noted in the over-abundance of freedom, more specifically a lack of clear
guidelines or restrictions to focus instruction, for some second language teachers (Piccardo, 2013) and difficulty of integrating it into practice (Faez et al., 2011; Piccardo, 2013). In regards to the former, some educators have found it difficult to follow the CEFR and the curriculum at the same time, although others have argued that institutional constraints, specifically regarding the curriculum, had been greatly lessened (Piccardo, 2013). The focus on learning outcomes as specified through the levels of proficiency in the CEFR allowed for greater teacher input. Faez, Majhanovich, Taylor, Smith and Crowley (2011) noted the difficulty integrating the CEFR by French immersion teachers in Canada, due to French serving as the medium of instruction and not necessarily the sole objective. Core French teachers, on the other hand, generally saw the CEFR as more relevant and effective for them, as the objective was for students to simply learn and practice the language.

It is important to note the absence of research findings on the recent implementation of CEFR practices in Ontario through the curriculum (see Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Starting in 2014/15, too little time has elapsed in its implementation for significant inquiry to take place. Although this paper does not aim to examine the CEFR or the conscious efforts of teachers to implement it, the guidelines it has introduced have played an important role in the current direction of the recent curriculum.

3.2 Motivation and Empowerment in Second Language Education

The importance of motivation in second language education serves as a major area of research guiding the present study. This is further expanded on by discussing learner empowerment (or simply ‘empowerment’), which has been presented as a more expansive and inclusive version of motivation. As discussed in Chapter 1, Brooks and Young (2011) characterized empowerment as a "set of motivational processes that increase personal initiation,
persistence to complete a task, and feelings of self-efficacy, or of having an impact on learning and choice” (p. 50).

Motivation, and, by extension, empowerment, has a significant role in second language education and the acquisition of languages by students. Building on Gardner’s socio-educational model of motivation (1985) for second language learning (which emphasized the role of the individual’s social context and interactions), research has consistently shown that heightened motivational intensity and positive second language (or L2) related attitudes can lead to greater L2 outcomes, such as success and competence (Dörnyei, 1994; 1998; Gardner, 1985; Lapkin, Mady & Arnott, 2009; Noels et al., 2000; Pae, 2008). On the other hand, the inverse has also been found to be true (Kissau & Turnbull, 2008; Kouritzin, Piquemal & Renaud, 2009).

Gardner’s approach, however, was not without its detractors. Dornyei (1998) and others questioned the ‘motivation engine’ idea of Gardner’s model, which groups the aspects of intensity, desire and attitude together as found in a ‘truly motivated individual.’ As such, the “high predictive capacity” (p. 122) of Gardner’s model is acknowledged, though it failed to account for those that might not be considered ‘truly motivated individuals’ (And thus did not necessarily display all three traits), as well as the source of the motivating impetus.

One study by Kouritzin, Piquemal and Renaud (2009) pursued an international comparison of Canadian, Japanese, and French university students with the intention of highlighting differences in language learning beliefs, attitudes, and motivations. Ultimately, they found that the Canadian students were less motivated than the French and Japanese students to learn a foreign language. While Japanese respondents generally chose to study foreign language to increase social capital and French students sought cultural and social enrichment, Canadian respondents highlighted economic marketability and personal experiences as important for their
investment in studying foreign languages. Their lack of integrative (social utility), rather than instrumental (practical reasoning), motivation, viewed as a key indicator of success in foreign language learning, is believed by the authors to be a “contributing factor in the persistent lack of success noted in Canada in addressing the needs of second language learners” (p. 303). Ultimately, lower levels of motivation or solely extrinsic, material factors have been found as less conducive for language learning success.

### 3.2.1 Teacher practices that promote motivation and empowerment

Teachers, in their tightly connected positions with students, are shown to have a significant effect on student motivation and empowerment. Dörnyei (1998) acknowledges that “teacher skills in motivation should be seen as central to teaching effectiveness” (p. 130), particularly when considering the importance of motivation in learning success. Multiple studies have found that teacher practice can impact student motivation and achievement, primarily in regards to teacher use of immediacy and clarity (Frymier & Houser, 2009), self-assessment and goal-setting (Faez et al., 2011; Klein, 2007), interpersonal interactions (Pae, 2008), or teaching language as a means of communication, not simply instruction (Kouriztin et al., 2009). Based on findings from his own experience and in ‘educational psychological research’, Dörnyei (1994) offered 30 points for educators to help motivate students studying a second language, from promoting self-efficacy to ways of arousing and sustaining curiosity and attention. He and Csizér (1998) then followed this up with a study of 200 English teachers in Hungary describing their use of motivational strategies, which produced the ‘Ten Commandments for Motivating Language Learners’ (at Appendix C).

Frymier and Houser (2015) found the importance of teachers recognizing both oral participation and nonverbal attentiveness as examples of engagement. Though nonverbal
attentiveness was ultimately more positively associated with student engagement, it was something more difficult for teachers to gauge. Essentially they argued that teachers must be attentive to student behaviours. This can be demonstrated by walking around the classroom and utilizing practices of immediacy (such as responding to questions posed by students or checking-in with them to see how they are doing) to lower student defensiveness and encourage openness. Required oral participation, while useful for those students more willing to communicate, can actually reduce learning for other students by increasing anxiety or distracting from learning by focusing on something to say for the sake of it (Fymier & Houser, 2015). Oral participation and attentiveness can lead to engagement (or participation), an aspect which is frequently associated with interest, motivation, and success. As such, the teacher’s has a strong role in learner empowerment.

An earlier Frymier and Houser (2009) study makes this role more explicit. Seeking to expand on ideas of empowerment, they found that students become empowered learners as a result of two major aspects: teachers’ communication behaviours and individual characteristics. They found that when teachers are clear in giving instructions or explaining new concepts, it can make students feel more competent to perform tasks. This, in turn, allows for perceptions of class activities and content as more meaningful. Additionally, teachers who are more approachable are highly immediate (quick to respond to student needs), which can allow students to feel they have more influence (impact) in the classroom. Feelings of competency, meaningfulness, and impact, along with motivation, are all part of the construct of the empowered learner (Frymier et al., 1996). Motivation, however, has been found to stem from student behaviour and that of the instructor, which can impact affective learning and performance. Essentially, clarity, demonstrated through teacher use of previews and summaries, visual aids, preparation aids for
assignments and emphasis on important points, can play a large role in developing learner empowerment and enhancing learning (Frymier & Houser, 2009)

3.2.2 The role of cultural contexts. Cultural contexts have also been found to play a role in student motivation. Noels, Clément and Pelletier (2001) noted the difficulties in language studies in North America, as “the experience of a majority group member learning the language of a minority group can be quite different than that of a minority group member learning the language of a majority group” (p. 427). Their study, which examined aspects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among French Canadian students of English, found that, in an immersion setting, students had low levels of amotivation and high intrinsic motivation. Their intrinsic motivation was enhanced by feelings of autonomy and competency in the language, as encouraged by relevant others (e.g. teachers, family members, friends, etc.) in their social world (Noels et al., 2001).

Similarly, Pae (2008) noted the importance of intrinsic motivation for successful L2 achievement (see also Jang, Reeve, Ryan & Kim, 2009); this aspect is necessary — although not solely sufficient — for achieving success, largely due to the “mediating effects of motivation and self-confidence” (Pae, 2008, p. 23). She composed her study in the “unicultural context of Korea” (p. 23), a setting where full immersion in a foreign language, such as English, would be difficult. It was within this particular context that Pae highlighted the role of the second language instructor in promoting intrinsic motivation. To achieve intrinsic motivation, instructors needed to create a social context that satisfied the inherent human needs of competency, relatedness and autonomy (as put forward by Self-Determination Theory).
Ultimately, cultural contexts can offer an important point of consideration when exploring the barriers that students have to language learning, and, by extension, the role of the instructor in helping them overcome this.

3.2.3 Connection with Self-Determination Theory. Research findings on the importance of autonomy within motivation towards L2 learning (Benson, 2007; Klein, 2007; Kristmanson et al., 2013; Noels et al., 2001; Pae, 2008) have prompted discussion of a connection with Self-Determination Theory, which figure into this paper’s analysis of findings in Chapter Five. As explained in the previous chapter, SDT considers autonomy as one of the three innate human needs, most linked to being motivated through self-determined forms of motivation rather than controlled forms (Deci et al., 1991). The other two needs, competence and relatedness, are connected to an individual’s being motivated (as opposed to being amotivated); however they do not have the same bearing on being self-determined. Similarly, empowerment, which expands on ideas of motivation, holds meaningfulness, competence, impact, and choice as four important related dimensions (Brooks & Young, 2011). Brooks and Young (2011) sought to address the link between motivational measures of SDT and empowerment measures by examining Guay et al.’s (2000) SIMS (Situational Motivation Scale) measurement with Frymier et al’s (1996) LES (Learner Empowerment Scale) measurement. Essentially, they found that intrinsic motivation was positively associated with learner empowerment from the two measures, while extrinsic motivation and amotivation were negatively linked to learner empowerment. As such, both SDT and learner empowerment strive for similar goals: intrinsically motivated learners.

As Noels, Pelletier, Clément and Vallerand (2000) found, the more internalized the reason for learning a language, the more “comfortable and persevering” (p. 76) students claimed
to be. As well, an autonomy-supportive environment with feedback enhancing the sense of competence while learning was noted to be more intrinsically motivating for students, namely they are learning because it is pleasurable or it appeals to their self-concept. Additionally, these students are less likely to feel anxious while learning or give up second language studies. These ideas are supported in further research identifying factors that can enhance the intrinsic motivating factors of a classroom environment, including autonomy and metacognition (Deci et al., 1991; Klein, 2007; Dam, 2011), choice and personalization (Kristmanson et al., 2013), and self-efficacy (Frymier et al., 1996). Conversely, a variety of studies have also identified factors which may negatively affect intrinsically motivated desires, including controlling teachers (Noels et al., 2000; Benson, 2007), failing to provide instructional feedback (Noels et al., 2000), teacher-centered methodology (Pae, 2008), and overemphasis on goal-setting and self-assessment (Kristmanson et al., 2013).

As this section has explored, the roles of motivation and empowerment in the second language classroom are crucial in beginning to understand and discuss the findings herein presented. Through insight into teacher practices, classroom contexts and basic theoretical considerations, I hope to paint a fuller picture of the FSL experience in Southern Ontario and contribute to the idea of what constitutes ‘best practice’.

3.3 Barriers to Language Learning/Instruction

An additional direction of my research is to identify some of the supports and barriers that FSL teachers in Ontario face. Findings on supports have been generally explored in this chapter’s discussion of the implementation of the CEFR, learning environments and the role of the second language teacher. This aspect is revisited more in-depth when looking at the particular experiences of teachers in this paper’s discussion of findings. Findings on barriers, on
the other hand, have been less well-documented up to now. The aim of this section is to introduce findings related to the barriers encountered by students and teachers to language learning and instruction.

3.3.1 Barriers to language learning for students. Barriers to language learning for students can be defined as those aspects which hinder a student’s desire or ability to learn, practice, or pursue a second language. Low motivation or interest (discussed more in-depth earlier on), while potentially barriers to learning themselves, are often the result of other barriers (Tin, 2013). Within these, some studies have identified social factors of learning as particularly inhibiting a student’s motivation or feelings of empowerment and second language achievement (Brooks & Young, 2011; Macintyre & Charos, 1996). Specific social factors discussed include second language anxiety (Macintyre & Charos, 1996; Pichette, 2009) and issues of ‘face’ or pride (Kissau, 2006; Knutson, 2006). Knutson (2006) identified perceptions of too much effort and being too intelligent or overly involved as particularly impactful on students’ attitudes or behaviour toward language and culture in the classroom. However, social barriers tend to abate over time with increased experience and competence (Pichette, 2009) or through teacher efforts to create a pleasant and supportive atmosphere in the classroom (Dörnyei, 2001).

Additionally, some studies have noted teacher perceptions and practices as potential barriers to students’ language learning and development. It has been noted that the behaviour of the instructor can directly influence the behaviour of the student, essentially turning the student into a reflection of their teacher (Deci et al., 1991; Houser & Frymier, 2009). Furthermore, teacher behaviour may be influenced by mistaken perceptions of their students, such as teachers acting controlling to students they believe are extrinsically motivated or autonomy supportive to those they believe are intrinsically motivated (Deci et al., 1991). Thus, students essentially
develop behaviours that are supported or encouraged by their teacher through their practice, either intentionally or not. As such, teachers may inadvertently negatively impact the learning of their students despite their best intentions. Iyengar and Lepper (2000) offer one such example, where too much choice in a classroom might not necessarily lead to the constructive or motivating results envisioned by the teacher. In this case, teachers’ efforts in autonomy can be disempowering or demotivating.

Lastly, Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier and Ryan (1991) discussed the influence of the context of home on students’ efforts and in-school achievement. They found that parenting styles concerning autonomy support versus control could “influence students’ autonomous self-regulation ... and in turn their school achievement” (p. 337). Although research on the impact of the context of home on second language learning achievement at school might not be very developed, it suggests interesting directions for future research.

**3.3.2 Barriers to language teaching.** Language teachers, as well, face barriers in their practice. Whether it might be related to the implementation of curricular documents, such as the CEFR (Faez et al., 2011), or pressures from superiors or the administrative system (Deci, Spiegel, Ryan, Koestner & Kauffman, 1982), teachers are forced to adapt. Lapkin, MacFarlane, and Vandergrift (2006) found that FSL teachers across Canada, all too often marginalized by negative attitudes towards French (see also Lapkin & Barkaoui, 2008), were limited in their own practice by what they perceived as poor access to adequate resources and a lack of support from students and the community. Within resources, a lack of access to technology and the internet, space for lesson preparation and storage, and stable classrooms for FSL teaching were cited as barriers (Lapkin et al., 2006). These findings have been echoed in reviews of similar literature (Lapkin & Barkaoui, 2008; Lapkin et al., 2009).
While the amount of barriers confronting language teachers might seem onerous, the findings discussed here are by no means exhaustive and, as such, there are still many avenues of research to further flesh out what has been presented. At home, in schools, and in teachers’ own classrooms, barriers are present for both those learning and those teaching. As well, while the attitude towards language learning, particularly French as a second language, may be changing from the provincial level through new curricular efforts and ideological commitments (See section 1.1, research context), there is a dearth of recent literature exploring how teachers are affected by these changes. These are but some of the aspects which this paper hopes to explore.

3.4 Conclusion

In this literature review I examined research related to French as a Second language studies in Ontario, ideas of motivation and empowerment, and barriers to language learning/instruction. This review demonstrates the extent that attention has been paid to teacher practices regarding learner empowerment and motivation in FSL classrooms. It also raises questions about barriers to second language instruction and points to the need for further research in the areas of curriculum implementation and its effects. Additionally, it would be useful to see how efforts to combat negative perceptions of FSL are playing out and, as more time elapses, how the new curriculum is supporting teachers.

It is hoped that the present paper can be better situated within the research landscape so as to provoke further discussion and add to the conversations surrounding what teachers can do to enhance the language learning of their students, particularly for French as a second language programs in Ontario. The emphasis on qualitative research and directly examining teacher voices, a limited but present area in second language pedagogy research in Canada, lends itself to this. Essentially, the purpose of my research was to learn about the context of FSL programs and
instruction in Canada, particularly Ontario, so that I could extract relevant and informing data from my qualitative research in Chapter Five.
Chapter Four: Research Methodology

4.0 Introduction (Chapter Overview)

In this chapter I explore research methodology. I begin by describing my general approach, procedures, and data collection instruments, as well as my rationale for these decisions given the research purpose and questions. Then, I discuss participant sampling criteria and recruitment procedures, before turning to data analysis procedures and ethical considerations relevant to my study. I subsequently weigh the strengths and limitations of my methodology, ultimately concluding with a brief summary of key methodological decisions and my rationale for them before offering a short preview of what is to follow.

4.1 Research Approach & Procedures

The present study has been conducted using a qualitative research approach that employs a literature review of recent and relevant research as well as semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with two Core French teachers. Qualitative research serves as an effective way by which the experiences of individuals and the meanings they ascribe to social or human problems can be explored. The findings of this particular form of research include “the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). More importantly, the human element, as evoked in a “natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study” is more easily demonstrated and, as such, allows for an analysis that is “inductive and establishes patterns or themes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37).

As Polit and Beck (2010) discuss, the goal of most qualitative research studies is to “provide a rich, contextualized understanding of some aspect of human experience through the intensive study of particular cases” (p. 1451). That is to say, it is the perspective of the
participant which is attempted to be understood, not that of the researcher. While sample sizes are too small to draw knowledge generalizations from, they do allow for the finding of shared understandings (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The personal experiences of individuals as well as their opinions all make up part of their understandings. These are examples of how qualitative research gives a voice to the participants, allowing them to provide meaning to overarching ‘problems’ in their own words (Creswell, 2007). As such, when considering my research purpose and the guiding questions behind it, a qualitative research study serves as the best approach by which to explore the shared experiences and understandings of a small sample of French teachers.

Due to the complex, organic nature of what individuals say, one cannot overlook their uniqueness in our studies (Creswell, 2007; p. 40). Their words, ‘how’ they describe understandings and experiences rather than simply ‘what’ they describe, are essential in beginning to understand the contexts from which they are speaking and in which they acted. This was particularly useful for the part of the present study which considers Core French teacher practices and approaches to learner empowerment, especially in considering the barriers and supports that they have encountered.

4.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection used in this study is the semi-structured interview protocol. This protocol allows for greater flexibility and responsiveness toward emerging themes on the parts of both the interviewer and respondent (Jackson II, Drummond & Camara, 2007). Interviews are usually scheduled in advance at a specific time and location outside of everyday events (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006), so as to allow for (ideally) face-to-face, “personal and intimate encounters” (Whiting, 2008, p. 36). A common tool within
qualitative research, semi-structured interviews rely on participants to offer “in-depth responses to questions about how they have constructed or understood their experience” (Jackson II et al., 2007; p. 23). As such, the format allows for the researcher to design and prepare an interview tailored to their research focus and questions, while permitting participants to elaborate and turn their attention towards other areas that might not necessarily be found within the prepared interview guide.

The implicit involvement and role of the researcher within the semi-structured interviews they are conducting also brings with it a variety of considerations. By inserting themselves into a natural environment that is sensitive to participants, this can help with the building of trust and respect, not only for the interviewee as an individual but also for the information that they are sharing (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). As DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) discuss, by establishing a ‘safe and comfortable environment’ for the participant one is better able to build a rapport or a positive relationship with them and encourage the sharing of more in-depth and personal (or authentic) experiences and attitudes. When exploring a topic such as empowering individuals as learners, examples of successful practice and individuals’ experiences with their students are essential to creating data. To explore the mindsets and practices of educators, I needed to know, among other aspects, what they have reportedly done and why they did it. Qualitative research lends itself to this, while also affording participants the opportunity to justify their rationales and allowing me as the researcher to discover any shared understandings they as a group might have (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). That is a conclusion that is made during data analysis and not during the data collection period. Although some interviews can be conducted in groups (to allow for this conclusion to be quickly drawn), I conducted mine individually, face-to-face. I organized my protocol (located in Appendix B) into four main parts
based around my research questions, starting with teacher understandings of learner empowerment, reported practices for empowering and engaging students, supports for and barriers to fostering learner empowerment, and finally teachers’ reports of assessing their students with the goal of encouraging to continue studying French as a second language.

4.3 Participants

In order to maximise the wealth and depth of data available in addressing my research question (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006), I employed purposeful sampling to select my participants. Here I review the sampling criteria I established for participant recruitment, as well as a range of possible avenues by which to pursue it. I have also included a section which will introduce each of the participants.

4.3.1 Sampling criteria. The following criteria were applied to teacher participants

1. Teachers with a minimum of five years’ experience teaching French as a Second Language in Ontario in the Core French stream. I wanted participants who were well-acquainted with the attitudes and experiences of students who participate in the program due to obligation and not by their own choice. Experienced teachers have also had more time to develop successful routines and practices, while being able to draw on more anecdotes or situational episodes that have influenced their practice.

2. Teachers were working in the Greater Toronto Area. This geographical region is a large, overwhelmingly English-speaking area full of diverse groups of students with their own attitudes and personal experiences towards learning French. The similarities and differences with which teachers approach this challenge will be interesting to investigate.

3. Teachers came recommended from other teachers or former students. These recommendations should be based on demonstrating solid teacher practice, a commitment
to getting students interested and engaged in French class, success in getting students to continue studying the French language and/or are passionate about teaching French and teaching in general. I am searching for exemplary teachers who can demonstrate and explain how they successfully empower their students as learners. The sample size is far too small to draw a generalization from in exploring whether or not teachers empower their students, rather it appears well-suited to divulging examples of best practice.

**4.3.2 Sampling procedures.** Given the small-scale nature of my study and the criteria I established earlier for the participants I wished to include, purposeful sampling serves as the means by which I find relevant individuals. As Creswell (2007) describes, purposeful sampling involves the researcher selecting individuals and sites for study due to that fact that they can “purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p. 125). Within this purposeful sampling, I planned to mix convenience sampling and snowball or chain sampling. Convenience sampling involves choosing participants by means of saving time, money and/or effort, though this can affect the data one gathers and the credibility of one’s findings (Creswell, 2007). Snowball or chain sampling uses people who know what cases are ‘information-rich’ to identify other people as cases of interest (Creswell, 2007). By means of convenience — i.e. by asking colleagues and current teachers — I was able to identify any participants from their past experiences who fit the criteria I was looking for. Once they have brought several cases to my attention, I can then establish connections with the individuals and gauge their interest in participating in the study. However, if they are not interested, I can ask if there might be anyone else they could recommend who might also fit my criteria.

One of the dominant ethical concerns of these sampling procedures is balancing those participants found through recommendations from former students and those found through
recommendations from former/current colleagues and fellow teachers. The reasoning behind why they might recommend an individual would be inherently different simply based on their positioning. As such, I needed to ensure that I screen the reasoning behind people’s recommendations, particularly so that they fit within the third criterion that I established earlier (teachers who demonstrate solid teacher practice, a commitment to getting students interested and engaged in French class, success in getting students to continue studying the French language and/or are passionate about teaching French and teaching in general). By working within a small community of teacher colleagues and mentor teachers, I had hoped that the convenience aspect of my sampling would offer a more reliable means of finding quality, relevant participants than would be found elsewhere.

4.3.3 Participant biographies. Three teachers were interviewed for this study, however only the findings from two of them were used as the audio file of the third was corrupted and therefore un-transcribable. The first teacher, under the pseudonym Donald, is a Core French teacher in Southern Ontario who has been teaching for over fifteen years, most of which at the high school that he is currently a part of. A “half-francophone,” Donald grew up speaking French with his family but the language never interested him so he chose to study Chemistry at the post-secondary level. Once his love for French was rekindled through travel experiences and exchanges at university, Donald was committed to becoming a French teacher and improving as a French speaker. The school at which Donald teaches has a large immigrant population of students and is academically-focused. Donald came highly recommended to me for my study from a teacher that I have previously worked with whom I would consider to be an exceptional teacher.
Janice is the second participant that I interviewed and her experience with French is vastly different from Donald’s. Despite coming from an immigrant family herself that spoke no French, she was put through French Immersion at a young age and encouraged to improve her language abilities. She continued studying French in university and, very early on, was on the career path towards becoming a teacher. Before she attained her current position within the administration of a Southern Ontario high school, she taught mostly Core French for around ten years at many different high schools in a range of socio-economic areas. Although she has only recently stopped teaching French, she continues to ardently support its growth and success. Janice was recommended for my study from another participant whom I was unfortunately unable to include as well.

4.4 Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves preparing and organizing the data (i.e., text data as interview transcripts) before reducing it into themes through coding the data, condensing the codes, and representing the processed data in figures, tables, or discussions (Creswell, 2007). Tracy (2010) describes rich and rigorous data analysis as one of the ‘big-tent’ criteria for excellent qualitative research. Essentially, as well as providing the reader with an explanation about the process by which the raw data (i.e. interview transcripts) are transformed and organized into the research report, analysis must be marked by “transparency regarding the process of sorting, choosing, and organizing the data” (Tracy, 2010; p. 841). I draw on these during my analysis while transcribing interviews and coding the data, particularly as they relate to my research topic and questions. From the codes, categories and themes emerged while also the converse — discrepancies or ‘null data’ — became apparent. Mady (2010) offers one such example of this, finding through her qualitative data that motivational patterns indicating a sense
of responsibility were present in one group of participants, but not in the other. This finding prompted further discussion on the varying information received, or rather what was deemed ‘important’ in the minds of participants. Ultimately, the significance of these emerging findings, themes and/or discrepancies, is then discussed in depth.

4.5 Ethical Review Procedures

Ethical research can serve as both a means of qualitative research and an end goal for it (Tracy, 2010). In our roles as interviewers who are participating in conversations with individuals, we must be aware of the unforeseen ways in which our listening and reflecting of personal information back to the speaker develop (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006) and are interpreted. Tracy (2010) describes a variety of practices that attend to ethics in qualitative approaches to research, namely procedural, situational, relational, and exiting ethics. Procedural ethics are often viewed as ‘universally necessary’ and encompass the importance of “accuracy and avoiding fabrication, fraud, omission, and contrivance” (p. 847). Research participants have a right to know the nature and potential consequences of the research, and must be free to withdraw at any point from the study. Situational ethics are those that emerge from or are based on a context’s specific circumstances. The specificity of each scene or situation forces the researcher to “reflect on, critique, and question their ethical decisions” (p. 847). Relational ethics involve the researcher being mindful of their character, actions and consequences on others. This means acting in a manner that is reciprocal with participants and showing that they are valued and respected, rather than simply being used for their stories. Lastly exiting ethics are those that follow beyond the data collection phase, particularly when sharing the results and how the work “will read, be understood, and used” (p. 847). Keeping this in mind, it is important to consider how best to present the research so as to avoid misrepresentation, misunderstanding or misuse.
With the four ethical practices discussed above, it is crucial that this research project adheres to them throughout. Confidentiality of participants and participant discussion is ensured through assigning them a pseudonym, excluding identifying markers to schools or students, and storing all data (in the form of audio records and transcripts) on a password protected computer/laptop/phone, to be destroyed after 5 years. Given the research topic, there are no known risks to participation in the study however it is important for me as the researcher to not convey the idea that I am questioning teachers’ practices; that is not the present study’s intention. Participants have the right to withdraw from participation in the study at any stage of the research. Consent letters (Appendix A) have been provided to participants, requiring their signatures giving their consent to be interviewed as well as audio-recorded. The consent letter provides an overview of the study, addresses ethical implications, and specifies expectations of participation (One 60 minute semi-structured interview).

4.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

The nature of the Master of Teaching Research Project requires that certain limitations are imposed on the confines of the present paper. A limited number of teachers that can be interviewed and approval to only use semi-structured interviews are two aspects which limit the scope that can be undertaken for the research. That being said, qualitative research still allows us to understand the richly textured experiences and reflections of participants about those experiences (Jackson II et al., 2007). The open-ended nature of the semi-structured interviews produce interview experiences that are more personal and potentially positive, allowing for more open sharing of information in an environment that is safe and comfortable (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). While it has been noted that generalization is rarely the goal of most qualitative studies (Polit & Beck, 2010), particularly due to the limited pool of participants and the
particularity of their experiences, these studies in their ‘limited-ness’ provide a “rich, contextualized understanding of some aspect of human experience” (Polit & Beck, 2010; p. 1451) that lend themselves well to the human or social problem at the root of the study.

In addition, by examining teachers, and only teachers, one is limited to a single point of view in the classroom experience. As such, the effectiveness of teacher practices can only be measured from their perspectives and not from the students who participated in them first-hand. While this may fail to provide a holistic approach to the idea of successful and effective teacher practices, it does allow the researcher to see (as it is one of the goals of this paper) just how teachers understand their practices and what they view as successful. The use of only one perspective provides the opportunity to more completely explore said perspective and, through the use of interviews, to ‘co-create meaning’ with participants by exploring how they perceive events and experiences (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed research methodology as connected to the execution of the data collection, analysis and participants of this research paper. First I discussed my approach using qualitative research with semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, justifying my decisions and explaining why qualitative research would be most appropriate for this task. Then I gave insight into how I collected data, namely the use of semi-structured interviews and the information related to personal experiences that this will allow me to collect. After, I presented my sampling criteria and procedures for the study while justifying why I valued certain qualities in my participants above others. In this part I discussed why I would be using a mix of convenience and snowball sampling, while also bringing up some of the ethical considerations related to finding participants. Next I briefly discussed my data analysis and the different aspects
that go into processing the raw data derived from my interviews. Finally I looked at the implicit ethical concerns of the entire research, interviewing and analysis process, particularly as they are found in the practices of procedural, situational, relational, and exiting ethics, as well as the limitations and strengths of the discussed methodology, such as the limited points of view and opportunities for co-creating meaning. Next in Chapter Four, I report on the research findings.
Chapter Five: Research Findings

5.0 Introduction to the Chapter

Chapter Five is the culmination of the previous chapters, which laid the groundwork for investigation into the central research question guiding the paper: how is a small sample of Ontario secondary school Core French teachers working to empower their students as learners?

After establishing the research context of the paper and key terms in Chapter One, Chapter Two discussed the theoretical framework of Self-Determination Theory that is featured in this chapter and addresses in greater detail the aspects of motivation within learner empowerment. Chapter Three was the literature review, exploring studies related to motivation and learner empowerment within the second language classroom, followed by Chapter Four, which explained the research methodology at the base of this paper’s qualitative data collection through participant interviews. Chapter Five, the present chapter, presents and analyzes the data collected, exploring the research findings from the participant interviews. By discussing participants’ experiences, reported practices, and understandings of learner empowerment, connections are drawn between the compiled data and the literature reviewed in Chapter Three.

Findings are organized into four main themes:

1. Teachers’ understandings of ‘empowerment’
2. Teachers’ reported efforts to empower learners
3. Factors reportedly influencing learner empowerment, and
4. Teachers’ encouragement of students’ future/continued interest in French

For each theme there are sub-themes that further illustrate emerging patterns or converging/diverging opinions on key areas. Sections include, first, a description of each theme, then reports on findings from the data, and lastly a discussion and analysis of the significance of the data with
regards to existing literature, as described in Chapter Three. Next, I summarize my findings and apply them to theoretical scrutiny through the lens of Self-Determination theory in order to respond to the secondary question that emerged within the paper (as described in Chapter Two): how motivating are teachers’ reported empowerment practices? Finally, I transition to the final chapter to bring the paper to a close.

5.1 Participants’ Understandings of ‘Empowerment’

When probing my participants for their understanding of ‘empowerment’ or ‘empowering learners,’ three key underlying aspects manifested themselves in their responses and were reiterated throughout our discussions: engagement, active learning, and success. I will first discuss how teachers connected engagement with empowerment, exploring how they perceived it in their classes through the actions and behaviours of their students and what their roles as teachers were in connection with it. Then, I will explore how active learning is connected with empowerment and how it is reportedly identified in class as a quality of student participation. Finally I will discuss the bond that participants identify between empowerment and success and the implications that they identified for this in relation to their practices.

5.1.1 Engagement and empowerment. Engagement was a point of heavy discussion and reflection for all participants. Before a student could even come to be empowered as a learner, they had to be engaged in the language, and, above all, the class. Donald stated that part of an empowered learner “[i]s somebody who’s engaged in class,” and he used the example of one of his top students from recent memory as evidence of this through their commitment to improving and learning French. Essentially, engagement is viewed as an aspect within and leading towards empowerment, however, when discussed in tandem with active learning and success, it will be more clearly demonstrated that it does not operate alone. For language learning, engagement is
viewed as particularly important, where, as Donald describes it, “you have to be engaged in class to learn the language.” Language learning and engagement were closely connected in his mind. Janice, meanwhile, emphasised that engagement wasn’t simply limited to learning in the French classroom, but rather that it was part of learning “in any classroom.”

But what is engagement? Donald described it in terms of being both physically and mentally present. When asked about this, he explained that students are “listening, paying attention, they’re answering questions, engaged with their fellow students” and, on the physical side, they are maintaining “eye-contact, sitting-up straight, [and being] physically present”.

Janice looked at it more from an emotional perspective, explaining that a part of engagement involves “a bit of happiness,” or, more precisely, that students “are actually thinking and not just sitting there daydreaming.” Essentially, engaged students can be happy, while ‘happy’ students might not necessarily be engaged. Much like Donald though, engaged behaviours in students boiled down to participation, effort, and interaction in these teachers’ perspectives.

In direct opposition to the engaged behaviours discussed were the disengaged behaviours that participants identified in students, forming a notably dichotomous series: paying attention or being distracted; physically present and in class or absent and/or unfocused; “buying-in” to school and learning or “buying-out” and not caring whatsoever; and ultimately engagement or apathy. With an aim to correcting negative behaviours, the importance of the teacher came to the fore. In Donald’s view, the foundation of engagement “is the classroom and good teaching.” Donald hoped to achieve this through “a constant, quality...French education, in the classroom.”

Janice didn’t disagree with the teaching aspect, but rather she focused on the ‘classroom’ component and emphasized how it is “the relationship-building piece... [where students] know you care about them as [sic] an individual outside of trying to get through the curriculum, then
the challenge dissipates” and students can become more engaged. As she described, the relationship that one establishes with students can help overcome many barriers and negative behaviours, which can lead towards engaged French learning, however, for her, “it has nothing to do with French at the beginning.” The teacher’s important role in the classroom and their connection to aspects of engagement, motivation, and subsequent empowerment is not lost on the participants.

5.1.2 Active learning and empowerment. ‘Active learning’ and ‘engagement’ share many similarities in the classroom in terms of mental and physical presence. While ‘engagement,’ for the purpose of this paper, has been portrayed as attitude and behaviour within class that is looked at positively by teachers, ‘active learning’ is viewed as more of a holistic attitude that can extend outwards from the classroom. When asked what an empowered learner is, Donald described them as an “active” learner, someone who is “engaged in class, and ... seeks out opportunities to enrich their classroom experience or enhance it.” Acting within and similar to learner empowerment, active learning can include and expand on engagement, and reflects a wider, more intrinsically motivated attitude that can transcend the classroom to other subjects and experiences. Within this context, ‘active learning’ can be associated more with a term like ‘initiative’ and ‘participation.’ Both Janice and Donald described students who resonated with them, who they deemed to be active learners, pursuing French through specialized summer programs and demonstrating effort to become top students.

The concept of active learning also manifests itself in the ideas of students ‘buying-in’ or ‘buying-out’ of school. Both terms were explicitly mentioned in all interviews, describing prevailing attitudes held by certain students and their subsequent behaviour. This link is most
clearly demonstrated in teachers’ examples of students who have ‘bought-out’ of school, whom Janice describes as possessing the ‘mindset ‘they can’t do it’. She went on to explain that,

it’s human nature if you’re good at something, you’re gonna [sic] be ok with doing it whereas if you feel like you’re experiences were terrible and you just, can’t excel in that area, then you’re gonna [sic] more have that attitude of ‘why try?’

As Janice explains, these ‘inactive learners,’ so to speak, possess an attitude bordering on apathy and derived from experiences and confidence. ‘Inactive learners’ are further described by Donald as being “hard to reach” or doing “little to no work, they don’t participate, they look for ways to distract themselves”.

Negative attitudes specifically in or towards the second language classroom, particularly for French in Canada (Kissau, 2006; Lapkin & Barkaoui, 2008), have been found to derive largely from low levels of motivation or poor motivating factors that didn’t resonate with students. Kouritzin, Piquemal and Renaud (2009) found that students in Canada who were studying French for reasons of economic marketability, but were unable to find social utility in the language, experienced less success and were less motivated. Speaking more generally, Janice and Donald found that the negative attitudes that manifested themselves in the French classroom were not limited to that specific subject, but were instead indicative of the students’ wider school experiences. Learner empowerment, which has been understood by teachers to encompass active learning, is thus also concerned with shifting negative attitudes. An empowered learner is an active learner, and an active learner has a positive holistic attitude towards improvement, which leaves no room for negative attitudes or low motivation. Essentially, what emerges from this discussion of active learning and the connected attitudinal dispositions is that they are not necessarily symptomatic of a particular subject area. It is
important to keep this divergent point in mind when considering the degree to which attitudes can affect student learning in the second language classroom and whether they are, in fact, isolated to a single subject area. This raises implications for learner empowerment, which will be discussed in this paper’s conclusion, related to its viability in a single classroom based on negative attitudes that can transcend French class, and thus those on which the teacher might not have as much influence.

5.1.3 Success and empowerment. When asked to describe empowerment, another important point that emerged with each participant was the strong bond between success and empowerment. As Donald described succinctly, “success breeds empowerment.” Linked to engagement, motivation, and being an active learner, success becomes that essential reward for students who are doing ‘all the right things,’ and feel a further compulsion towards empowerment. Janice, in turn, explains that, to feel successful is “to feel able, to feel capable of understanding and continuing and completing something.” Furthermore, she describes success as “fundamental” to the modern Ontario FLS curriculum which emphasizes a connection with communication, motivation, and building confidence.

With the importance of success identified in the pursuit of empowerment, the research participants explained how the connection between the two becomes integrated in their practice through their efforts to equip students with “the tools to be successful.” Janice provided the examples of using comprehension aides for students (such as graphic organizers), assigning minimal homework, and which interestingly, she connected with engagement. As she described, she “found that, when [she] gave [students] the tools to be successful, like [sic] there wasn’t a choice, [they] couldn’t not be successful if [they] had these tools in front of [them], that kept them engaged as well.” Reducing difficulty and complexity, or rather demystifying French class,
was found to be a common approach for participants, particularly in their Grade 9 Core French classrooms — a beginner-level course with a range of motivational levels present among students. That being said, the one area highlighted as the greatest challenge to ‘success,’ both in the course and in terms of providing tools, was attendance. Donald responded to the challenge with resignation: “I can’t help them if they’re not here.”

The connection between success and empowerment in these teachers’ understandings is important to draw, as success has been essentially described as a means to an end (empowerment), rather than an end in itself. This diverges from the literature review, where success was shown in a variety of studies as a positive outcome that resulted from heightened motivational intensity or positive second language attitudes (Dörnyei, 1994; 1998; Gardner, 1985; Lapkin, Mady & Arnott, 2009; Noels et al., 2000; Pae, 2008). In many of these instances, the goal of heightened motivation was success in language learning, taking the form of increased fluency or interest. The disagreement between this paper’s findings and the research literature over whether motivation breeds success or success breeds motivation is an interesting cyclical question, a ‘chicken and egg’ scenario that bears further investigation. Success and the tools that teachers employ towards it are certainly positive for students, though how this can be shown with ‘inactive’, apathetic learners needs further consideration.

From the data collected, participant understandings of learner empowerment involved engagement, active learning, and success in some form or another. Both Donald and Janice drew on their own practices, sharing many similarities with how they viewed the three aspects, but also prioritizing different ways by which to achieve them. Donald emphasized his role as a teacher and as facilitator of the classroom experience. On the other hand, Janice reiterated that the “relation-building piece” was key, with the teacher acting more as a community-builder
within the classroom. Ultimately, learner empowerment served as an underlying ideal to strive towards for both teachers, one that they may not have necessarily identified explicitly beforehand, yet one that none-the-less encapsulates their own motivations as teachers. For the participants, their pursuit of engagement, active learning, and student success- and through those aspects learner empowerment- offered students, at the very least, a modicum of scholastic success, viewed simply by Janice as “barely any failures in the classroom.”

5.2 Efforts to Empower Learners

Building off of understandings of what empowerment is and different interrelated concepts, this theme concentrates on the participants’ reported practices to empower learners. In pursuit of empowerment, improving and maintaining student engagement plays a large role. The overarching belief behind this is that teachers strive to engage their students in class in the hope that those students might become empowered as French learners. Essentially, engagement is an important and often initial step towards empowerment; its place within the learner empowerment framework confirms their relationship. The analysis will begin with how engagement and empowerment figure into participants’ conceptions of the ‘ideal’ teacher. Next, I will outline the practices that these teachers perceived to be ‘engaging’ and ‘empowering.’ Lastly, I will touch on how both participants emphasize the need to break from the ‘norm’ of French teaching, an essential departure if learner empowerment is to be fully pursued.

5.2.1 The ideal teacher. As has been discussed earlier, the teacher’s role within the classroom is not to be understated nor overlooked, especially in the pursuit of empowerment. Taking into account how distraction, lack of motivation, and negative student perceptions/attitudes can be detrimental to the learning experience, Donald simply summarized, that, ultimately, “you need a teacher.” But what is the ideal teacher? Drawing on their goals as
teachers, the advice they provide for teacher candidates, and examples that they have encountered over their careers, a variety of characteristics were noted.

Characteristics of the ideal teacher include being interesting, passionate, and pleasant. They are flexible in what they do, strive to keep learning and improving, and their goal is not simply to finish the curriculum. As well, they are reportedly full of energy, fair to their students, and demonstrate support and caring, both for the needs of students and the students as individuals. Janice constantly reiterates this last point through her emphasis on relationship-building which is at the heart of her practice and her experiences. In her emphasis of its importance, Janice explains that even if teachers are constrained by a variety of barriers and obstacles, the relationship aspect remains something that they “have control over.” As such, it is a powerful tool.

While there may be a wide variety and seemingly inexhaustible list of what the ideal teacher is and how different individuals conceive it, the underlying ideas endure of the teacher being a positive, engaging and capable presence in the classroom. While positivity and capability are general, desirable traits, it is important within the context of empowerment to note that ‘engaging’ characteristic. An engaging teacher might also be an empowering teacher as empowerment requires engagement, although the reverse is not true (Engagement as part of empowerment, not empowerment as part of engagement). Essentially, while teachers described their ‘ideal’ teacher, characteristics important to empowerment — namely engagement — manifested themselves in their descriptions. This reiterates the importance that the study ascribes to empowering students as learners, especially as it figures into what is ‘ideal.’

Turning back towards conceptions of the ‘ideal’ teacher, certain disagreements emerged between participant responses in regards to the context of the French classroom. Interestingly,
Donald noted that the ideal French language teacher is someone who speaks French all the time. In contrast, Janice put this as secondary, noting how she doesn’t like to see teachers “hired just on the basis that they know how to speak the language.” For her, the teacher as a ‘teacher’, with all the weight and meaning that that word carries, is part of her conception of the ‘ideal’, not simply a French speaker (though it is important to her as well in regards to one’s capability).

5.2.2. Engaging and empowering practices. This section looks more specifically at the classroom practices that participants employ that they identify as engaging and, by extension, empowering. In discussing general classroom practices, both participants describe how a student’s classroom experience should be enjoyable, thus the teacher, as Donald mentions, should “bring to life the language and make it interesting.” The participants also characterised the engaging teacher as someone who sets good routines, focuses on students’ strengths (that idea of changing mindsets from ‘can’t do’ to ‘can do’), and makes class ‘fun.’ Donald offered some advice that also touched on the importance of risk-taking, preparation, and variety:

You have to push your ego to the side and realize what went wrong, and change it for next time. Or get rid of it. Don’t be afraid to get rid of something... and then have ... something else to go.

The flexibility towards teaching and the reflexive attitude connected with improving practice that the quote emphasizes are closely aligned with the individualizing aspect of empowerment pedagogy. At the forefront to this approach is keeping in mind that, from Donald, “we’re teaching human beings.” As such, the ideas of fairness, empathy, and the building of relationships return. Both participants describe these aspects as being demonstrated in students feeling valued, both as individuals in the classroom community and as learners with diverse perspectives and experiences. Donald mentioned briefly the varied linguistic backgrounds of
students and the importance of acknowledging this in the French classroom, particularly at a school with a high immigrant population.

Building off of ‘individualizing’ teaching as something that engages students and directly connected to the construct of learner empowerment is ‘student voice.’ Janice explicitly linked the two in saying that,

students definitely need to be empowered and to feel like they have a voice within what’s being taught and that there’s flexibility so that it’s not so rigid in this is what we have to cover for the curriculum so we’re not going to sway one way or the other, and, I think, to empower them, yea, it comes down to where’s their voice in all of it.

The ideas that Janice evokes here of avoiding rigidity in pedagogy and practicing fluidity by allowing students to sway what occurs in class is echoed by Donald when discussing fairness. For him, fairness is “not a rigidity of approach to every student, it’s understanding each student individually and getting to know all your students as individuals.” Although the terminology is often intermingled and muddled, the importance of student voice and including their perspective in the classroom experience stays consistent.

In an empowerment framework, ‘student voice’ is changed to ‘autonomy,’ but the idea largely remains the same. The research literature about student autonomy supports the conclusions drawn by the participants regarding it being a powerful tool towards engaging students and empowering them as leaners. Kristmanson, Lafargue and Culligan (2013), in particular concluded that the notions of personalization and choice implemented by teachers were welcomed by learners and helped promote a positive affective climate and differentiated environment in the language classroom. These positive changes contributed to greater student success and improved participation. As discussed in the Chapter Three literature review, the
implications that autonomy has in enhanced student motivation and, therefore, increased student success in second language learning are large and well-documented (Kristmanson et al., 2013; Faez et al., 2011; Piccardo, 2013; Benson 2007). Motivation, as has been discussed in earlier chapters, is also an important aspect of the learner empowerment framework, thus adding another connection with engagement, autonomy, and empowerment.

5.2.3 Breaking the ‘norm’ of French teaching. Lastly, within the discussion of how teachers work to empower learners, the idea of breaking the ‘norm’ of French teaching — of departing from more limiting, less engaging, practices — was discussed by both participants. The ‘norm’ is visualized as “that ‘pencil, paper in the classroom at your desk’ piece,” in the case of Janice, or, for Donald, “sit[ting] for long periods of time... conjugating verbs and doing grammar exercises.” The sedentary, unengaging, and simply “boring” nature of the French classroom that both participants identify in their experiences as French learners still, to a smaller degree, persist. This is something that I noticed in my own experience as a student, as well as classes that I have observed much more recently. The persistence of these practices is partly to explain why student happiness in French class is generally low — 38% of males and 54% of females in Grade 9 Core French (Klein, 2007) — or why much fewer students choose to continue studying French past Grade 9 (Klein, 2007; Lapkin, Mady & Arnott, 2009; Mady, 2010). To combat this, Donald and Janice suggest for teachers to go past limiting, unengaging practices, get out of comfort zones and take risks. Through their explanations of what an engaging teacher is and what their practices look like in pursuit of empowerment, both indicate a clear departure from that ‘norm;’ the recent revised French curriculum is identified as a move away from that. They describe it as focusing more on student communication and involvement than grammar, while empowering students to “feel able, to feel capable of understanding and
continuing and completing something,” which Janice believes is fundamental for the new curriculum. Despite the recent shift, Janice’s hope for the future of FSL is for “more interaction...more doing... [and] just a lot more fun.” Although the change is evidently a step in the right direction, it remains to be seen in the Ontario context the changes that this will have on teachers who are ‘comfortable’ in how they teach and students feeling unengaged, disinterested, and/or disempowered as learners in the FLS classroom.

In sum, this section traces teachers’ reported efforts to empower learners through three important stages: conceptions of the ideal teacher and how this ‘ideal’ connects with ideas of engaging or empowering students; discussions of engaging and empowering practices; and finally the identified disempowering ‘norm’ of French as a Second Language teaching and how to go beyond it. Terms such as ‘engagement,’ ‘voice,’ and ‘motivation’ all appeared and were then discussed within the context of learner empowerment, of which they each have a role.

5.3 Factors Influencing Learner Empowerment

Focusing on the learner, their perspective and behaviour, this theme explores the variety of factors that can influence learner empowerment as identified by the research participants. Teachers as a factor will not be discussed in this section as the influence that they hold on empowerment and engagement has already been featured. For short-term distraction factors, such as fatigue and hunger, that carry an element of ‘randomness’ with them, these are considered to be barriers to everyday engagement in learning rather than factors affecting the long-term goal of empowerment. Engagement is still important for the pursuit of empowerment, however, due to the aspects mentioned being entirely dependent on students having a “good day or a bad day,” their arbitrary nature does not necessarily fit-in with the present discussion. The exception to this is if those barriers to daily engagement are consistent and symptomatic of larger
barriers, such as a learning disability or issues at home, however this falls outside of the scope of this paper’s analysis. This raises a question though: does an empowered learner necessarily need to be engaged every moment of every class? It would logically follow that no, they do not, and yet this raises questions of engagement within empowerment that will be discussed more in-depth in the subsequent theme to this one, ‘Encouraging future/continued interest in French.’

The obligation that all Ontario students complete at least one credit of high school French means that many students enter into Grade 9 in what for many of them will be their final year of French language instruction. If they continue in French after Grade 9, this can show that it is their choice and demonstrates that they want to be in French, that they enjoyed the teacher or the teacher’s program and want to continue onwards, that they are there out of necessity due to timetable issues, or that they were forced by their parents to take French. Each aspect but the latter two indicate varying levels of positive motivation and engagement in the class. Those two situations, where students are forced into the situation by others or by extenuating circumstances, can largely account for a negative reaction. Each of the factors discussed were identified by participants when discussing the choice of the program throughout the more senior grades, but it is the lack of that choice in Grade 9 that allowed for some deeper discussion about students’ prior experiences leading up to Grade 9 Core French and preconceived notions about the course.

Both participants emphasized the range of experiences that students bring with them when starting Grade 9 Core French. The levels of motivation and engagement that they demonstrate here are influenced by their experiences in middle school and as such the amount of difficulty encountered when working to empower these young students as French learners is reportedly quite varied. While Donald believed that the local middle school from which many of his Grade 9 students came did a great job of encouraging students to study French, Janice
encountered different reactions in her experiences at a range of schools. For her, one of the most difficult parts of the year was “overcoming that initial stage and preconceived notions, [and] disinterest” in French. Ultimately neither teacher believes that students starting from a position where they are demotivated or disengaged necessarily means that they cannot be empowered as French learners. The emphasis participants placed on leading programs that are not curriculum-heavy, that are fun and fast, varied and engaging help, they believe, encourage positive attitudes and get students engaged in French class regardless of what their experiences were before-hand. Essentially, each student is treated as a clean-slate with the potential to be engaged and successful, regardless of their initial attitudes and experiences.

The research supports the idea that low motivation and disinterest are usually not barriers themselves, but are the result of other barriers (Tin, 2013), such as those outlined by the participants: choice, previous experiences and pre-conceived notions. However, in addition to those factors that could negatively affect learner engagement (and, ultimately, empowerment), at least initially, it is important to note that neither participant mentioned any social factors of learning — such as second language anxiety or issues of ‘face’/pride — that could manifest themselves at school, in the classroom, or elsewhere in student’s lives to negative effects. Although the factors might not have been explicitly mentioned by these teachers, it has been shown that they can abate over time with increased experience and confidence (Pichette, 2009) or through efforts to create a pleasant and supportive atmosphere in the classroom (Dörnyei, 2001). Earlier discussions of teachers’ commitments to relationships with students, their dedication to wellness and student success reflect those practices which can reduce the barriers from social factors of learning. Essentially, while further research would be useful to see how
aware teachers are of those factors, their efforts in pursuit of empowerment and uses of engaging pedagogy do appear to address them nevertheless.

5.4 Encouraging Future/ Continued Interest in French

This theme outlines how teachers reportedly encourage students to continue studying French or, at the very least, become interested enough in the subject for the potential to arise in the future — an aspect described by Donald as “planting seeds.” In general, teachers pursued this through two avenues: quality, consistent, and personal exposure to the language; and program choices that they viewed as more conducive to student success and empowerment.

5.4.1 Exposure to the language. In the Core French classroom, exposure to the language and its varied cultural components starts with one person: the teacher. As discussed earlier, the participants view their roles as central in engaging and potentially empowering students in French, however this also includes an ‘exposure to French’ component. As Donald describes, “the only real source of French is me in class.” In the Anglophone setting of Southern Ontario, in mainstream media, popular culture, interactions at home and student’s daily lives, French, for a majority of students, has little to no presence. Thus there is the importance of speaking French in class, and being made aware of what ‘French’ culture is and can be. Through this emerge the central reasons according to participants for why exposure is important in encouraging future/continued interest in French: demonstrating its relevance and emphasizing its value.

Exposure, as described by Janice, is showing students “what’s readily available, that they can take advantage of” in terms of the French language, which can have students “wanting to pursue it even further.” In demonstrating the opportunities available to students to connect and use the language, both its real-world applicable value and the possibilities that exist within their own lives are demonstrated (E.g. what form French studies can take at the post-secondary level).
Both participants believe that by exposing students to ‘what is out there’ they can enhance their interest. This is supported by research literature from Chapter Three where students in FSL classes in Ontario have been found to identify exposure to real-life language use and opportunities in the classroom as necessary for their success (Faez et al., 2011).

Where ‘consistency’ of exposure comes in is the crucial factor of time (or the amount of exposure) that participants identified as essential to learning the language. Donald describes language as “a continuum and the more exposure you get and the more you use the language, the more you learn.” As such, student attendance and the tensions it can create with exposure are essential to consider. Donald adds that “you get so far behind and if you miss four days of class, you’ve missed a whole bunch of stuff. Whenever you’re not in class, you’re not hearing French, so ... you’re not learning new things.” Essentially, exposure to French is not only important to developing an interest in the subject and continuing on in it, but also simply being successful in the course. Attendance issues are cited by both participants as the biggest reason for why students fail. Additionally, participants understand language and language learning as a skill, thus further combining time and exposure. Donald warns that “you can’t cram language. It’s a time-sensitive thing.” Janice builds on this by identifying the essential language learning skills that should be emphasized in class: remembering and retaining information, rather than simply memorizing and regurgitating it. Exposure is held to be slower and more gradual, but it can’t be rushed. Cultivating that language ability through exposure and subsequent practice is the way towards improving fluency, which can have ramifications in success, confidence, continued interest and, ultimately, empowerment.

5.4.2 The ‘ideal’ program and student choice. The guiding idea behind this section from participant responses is that empowered students will have encountered success, which
means that they will have (hopefully) had positive experiences and strive for further success. The participants interviewed regard student success at its most basic level as passing the course and receiving the credit. A more advanced goal or imagining of what student success looks like is closer aligned with being empowered as a learner, which can manifest itself as individuals improving in French and/or acquiring life skills, improving attitudes or interest towards French, and/or choosing to continue on in the course. While pedagogy has previously been discussed with regards to how it can affect individual students, this section looks more at the effects of program-level approaches or changes. This includes conceptions of what their ideal French program looks like and how it can affect student choice of continuing on in the program at later grades.

Janice was very out-spoken regarding how she imagined the ideal French program to be. The importance of teachers, not just French speakers, and collaboration within a department that pursues innovative teaching with an aim to taking risks and improving, were some of her ideas. One that she constantly returned to, however, was combining traditional ideas of the Ontario Core French program with the Immersion program. Essentially, this combination would allow for a wider focus that combines writing and grammar concentrations (from Core French) with communication and speaking (from Immersion), the idea being that this supports more students and is more inclusive of different abilities and interests. Janice emphasized how the communicative and interactive aspects grow student self-confidence as well, an integral part of motivating language learners (Dörnyei, & Csizér, 1998). In addition, Donald emphasized the need for variety in a program, keeping the course “lively” and allowing for different types of activities and changing student groupings (e.g. small group, with a partner, individual, etc.). Notably, for the beginner classes, he reiterated that the focus should be more on oral skills and
collaboration, like what Janice described for Immersion programs, than on individual-based writing (as is the stereotypical understanding of the Core French program). Both participants connected this more active, communication-based program with the new Ontario French curriculum. Commenting on her ideal program, Janice concluded that

I feel like it’s always setting them up for success ... in French. So, to sort of get them out of that mindset of what French was like, and to show them how different and how fun it can be. So always working towards that playful learning where we’re socializing, but of course, there’s still an element of French teaching within that socializing.

Ultimately, in making the FLS classroom more varied, active, and fun, the belief is that this will also increase student levels of engagement, and, hopefully, empowerment.

Although participants were mindful of the importance that they believed should be placed on improving student success and enhancing student interest in French, unfortunately it didn’t always succeed in getting students to continue taking the course. From the data collected from these teachers, the most common reasons that students reportedly choose not to continue studying French were a lower level of interest in the subject compared with other classes, or that French simply didn’t align with the student’s end-goals for high school (i.e. the university programs they wanted to get into didn’t ‘need’ French). Donald noted that the large drop-off between Grade 9 and higher grades (as discussed in Chapter One of this paper) was normal. On the other hand, the number of students who wanted to take French, but couldn’t due to timetable conflicts or a lack of course or preferred teacher availability was much smaller in his experience than those who didn’t want to continue. Ultimately, both participants believed that the biggest factor motivating students to continue taking French, particularly for those less enamoured with language learning, was the teacher. To this end, Janice noted that “sadly, it does come down to
‘are you the teacher teaching it the next year?’ While it may not be as affirming for the French teacher part of Janice to note that students connected more with the teacher than with the subject, it does align with contemporary literature.

In a study which aimed to identify aspects that most empowered students as learners, Frymier and Houser (2009) noted that teachers’ behaviours and characteristics were two of the most important factors. It was the teacher who was identified as the part of the learning experience that most supported students and empowered them, not the program in isolation of them. With highly immediate, caring, and clear teachers, it was found that students felt more competent, viewed classroom content and activities as more meaningful, and found that they had more of an impact in the classroom; all of those attributes that students felt, along with a general increase in motivation in the classroom, fall within the construct of learner empowerment. What this shows is that while teachers may ascribe much importance to the quality and content of their program, for students it more often comes down to the teacher and how they act.

In sum, within the theme of teachers encouraging student interest in French class, participants described how this came down to two essential aspects: consistent exposure to French, and a classroom program that is both a positive experience for students and one in which they find success. In responding to the guiding question of the paper that seeks to look at how teachers are working to empower their students as learners, participants talked about how student interest, more specifically continued or future interest, was cultivated towards students becoming lifelong French language learners and, by extension, empowered students. Despite participants describing how a solid program was one of the keys to encouraging interest in French, their own findings in response to the motivating factors of ‘choice’ of the course, as well as the research literature, disagreed. Ultimately, the focus turned once again towards the
importance of the teacher in the classroom, in particular the relationship that they develop with students and the classroom community that they create, and not necessarily the program.

5.5 Theoretical Analysis

In discussing learner empowerment, motivation is an essential component. As described in Chapter One, learner empowerment is viewed as a more expansive and inclusive version of motivation that also comprises feelings of meaningfulness, competency, and agency. While each of these aspects have been demonstrated in some degree throughout the present chapter, it is that motivational aspect which needs further analysis, especially if it is to be better understood within the learner empowerment model. Essentially, learner empowerment strives for intrinsically motivating factors, or those derived from pleasure or improved feelings of ‘self,’ rather than extrinsically motivating factors, or those driven by external rewards. As such, in order to better understand the motivating actions at the heart of participants’ reported empowerment practices, Self-Determination Theory is applied as the theoretical framework guiding meta-analysis of the motivation discussed. Within SDT is an autonomy continuum of self-determined and controlled forms of motivation, starting from the least autonomous or non-self-determined form, amotivation, (lack of motivation/compulsion to act), to extrinsic motivation (motivated by aspects external to the activity), to the most autonomous or self-determined form, intrinsic motivation (motivated by inherent pleasure or satisfaction; interest in the activity itself). The guiding question for this section within the wider research question of the paper is, ‘how motivating are teachers’ reported empowerment practices?’ Section 5.5 takes findings from this chapter and applies the reported practices to the SDT continuum, while also highlighting the presence of guiding needs within SDT — competence, relatedness and autonomy. Two distinctions within the Theory form the basis of analysis of the participants’ reported practices:
Firstly, amotivation versus motivation; then, controlled motivation versus self-determined motivation. Ultimately, the framework explores the type or quality of motivation that educators report, or rather, whether reported efforts to empower learners do, in fact, align with empowerment’s intrinsically-motivated goal.

5.5.1 Amotivation versus motivation. In the dichotomy between amotivation and different forms of motivation within Self-Determination Theory, what causes an individual to be motivated rather than amotivated is whether or not their innate needs of competence and relatedness are met (Deci & Ryan, 1991). Autonomy is deemed less important in differentiating between amotivation and motivation than the other two needs. That being said, attention to both the needs of competence and relatedness in students were demonstrated in the reported practices of Donald and Janice. Attention to relatedness was shown through the participants’ repeated commitment to “bring[ing] to life the language and mak[ing] it interesting,” and building relationships with students so that they not only connected with the subject, but with the school community as well. Essentially, both participants believed that when students felt more connected with the class, they were that much more comfortable and participated or engaged in the content more. Attention to competence was demonstrated in the support and caring that both participants viewed as important to their practice, as well as the focus they gave to students’ strengths in class. Donald identified that “success breeds empowerment,” echoing Janice’s sentiments, which further emphasizes the connection that student success has in the empowerment practices as reported by both participants.

While both participants may have strived for their students to feel both competent (or capable) and connected with the classroom and French, they were also very mindful of amotivated students and the forms that this may take in class. Dubbed “inactive learners,”
“apathetic students,” or individuals who had simply “bought-out” of school, they were described, in this case by Donald, as being “hard to reach” or doing “little to no work, they don’t participate, they look for ways to distract themselves.” According to Donald and Janice, there were always one of two of these students in their Core French classes, however rarely in their experiences did the amotivated learner ultimately fail the course. More extreme forms of apathy such as uncorrected poor attendance made failure inevitable, but both participants emphasized that they tried to make their course enjoyable and conducive to student success so that students with very low motivation would at least attend, and then once present, work on earning the credit for the course. Earning the credit became identified as the bare minimum goal for some students, where the hope was that through frank conversations with the teacher, the student could relate it to something like ‘graduation’ or ‘being done with French class for good,’ and then hopefully be motivated enough to work towards it.

Ultimately, the participants interviewed were mindful of the form that amotivation may take in students and endeavoured to combat it in their classrooms. By working to bring the language to life, supporting students, encouraging student success, and making class “fun,” Donald and Janice aimed to empower their students as learners and improve their students’ experiences in French class for hopefully continued interest in the French language. The actions of both participants worked to satisfy the needs of competence and relatedness of most of the students, and when it wasn’t enough, they aimed to establish achievable goals to further connect with those students. As such, according to the continuum of Self-Determination Theory, there practices were, at the very least, motivating. The next section will explore the degree to which they were motivating.
5.5.2 Controlled motivation versus self-determined motivation. The third innate need that is mentioned within Self-Determination Theory is that of autonomy. While competence and relatedness have been discussed in relation to how they determine whether motivation or amotivation are present, it is autonomy that identifies the degree to which someone is extrinsically or intrinsically motivated. Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier and Ryan (1991) described the continuum as, at its most autonomous point, intrinsic motivation, which is fully self-determined and where an individual is motivated by the inherent pleasure of the activity itself; at its least autonomous point, there is extrinsic motivation, which is guided by external regulation, where an individual’s behaviour is performed almost solely for praise, payment, or a reward. This section will break down the reported empowerment practices of the participants into the different groups of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation within Self-Determination Theory. Then any patterns that appeared will be discussed and the central question of the research framework — how motivating are teachers’ reported empowerment practices? — will be answered. It is important to note that for all of these discussions about motivational subgroups, analysis is based off of participants’ responses regarding the intended outcomes of their practices. Whether the practices were successful or not in their aims does not fall within the purview of this study, thus it is assumed that teachers have found success with these practices, which is why they are sharing them.

Extrinsic motivation consists of four subgroups from least autonomous to most (though all still less autonomous than intrinsic motivation). The least autonomous subgroup, as briefly described above, is external regulation, which is where a behaviour is solely motivated by an external factor, such as praise, payment, or a reward. The clearest example of this practice according to the participants would be when trying to convince amotivated students to be present
in class; the only thing motivating them in this instance is receiving the credit. It is important to remember that these motivations can be gradually internalized and thus students with higher degrees of autonomy might still be motivated by ‘just getting the credit,’ albeit the difference in their minds is that the credit is not the sole form of motivation. The reported practices of both Donald and Janice seem to deviate generally from encouraging external regulation, with students’ participation and success being supported and encouraged by the teachers, rather than any one particular goal.

The subgroup within extrinsic motivation that has the second least autonomy is introjected regulation, where external contingencies that pressure someone to behave are internalized, though explicit punishments or rewards are still present. In the reported practices of the participants, there are few instances of explicit immediate punishment or reward. Introjected regulation would seem to be applicable for those students with low motivation described above, albeit with slightly more autonomy or internalized motivation towards completing the course and the ultimate ‘reward’ of the credit. Due to the heightened autonomy, these students would likely not have difficulty attending the course nor be as concerning for the teachers. Again, Donald and Janice’s reported practices do not appear to align explicitly nor consistently with this particular subgroup of extrinsic motivation.

The third subgroup, this time with the second most autonomy out of the four within extrinsic motivation is identified regulation, a relatively autonomous stage where individuals behave willingly and largely for internalized reasons, yet towards a specific goal none-the-less. This area is very similar to the subsequent one, integrated regulation, however the key difference is the departure from specific goals to valued outcomes; a gradual increase in internalizing of the extrinsic motivating factors remains consistent. Depending on the particular circumstance or the
classroom context, such as time of the year, familiarity as a class, or the task at hand, either subgroup of extrinsic motivation (this one, identified regulation, or the following one, integrated regulation) could be targeted by the participants’ reported actions. What changes is when the goal becomes less specific, something which can shift depending on what is required at that moment. Due to the participants’ emphasis on greater student voice, or greater autonomy (discussed below), the subsequent stage is more widely connected to how participants identify their own practices and thus it is discussed in greater detail, although those same practices could just as easily be applied to this stage depending on the context.

The fourth subgroup, the most autonomous within extrinsic motivation, is integrated regulation. As the most autonomous subgroup, it is characterized by feelings of personal importance of an activity towards a valued outcome. This stage appears to be the most common one found within the participants’ reported practices. Participants’ goals for students were conceptualized around student success and closely aligned with learner empowerment, but were often emphasized as long-term, to be determined by the end of the course. They manifested themselves as individuals improving in French and/or acquiring life skills, improving attitudes or interest towards French, and/or choosing to continue on in the course. In terms of more short-term emphasis, Donald and Janice discussed the importance of students feeling valued, having fun, and feeling successful. Overall, their approaches could be characterised as less focused on specific goals or targets and more on positive, constructive experiences. Towards these general goals, or rather valued outcomes, the individualizing factor of including ‘student voice’ and its explicit connection with autonomy are important. Both Janice and Donald discussed the importance of being flexible as a teacher, connecting to students individually, building relationships, and allowing opportunities for individuals to express themselves in class. As Janice
described for empowering learners, “it comes down to where’s their voice in all of it.” It is believed that by allowing students to connect deeper with the subject matter, the short-term goals will be reached, followed by the long-term goals and ultimately (hopefully) students will be empowered as learners. Additionally, it can logically follow that individuals believe their personal contributions to be important, thus fulfilling the ‘personal importance’ aspect of integrated regulation towards the valued outcomes supported by Donald and Janice in their short-term goals. In sum, the emphasis that Donald and Janice placed in their reported practices on student voice and a flexibility to approach that allow for more student-driven learning, all in support of general, positive outcomes and the long-term pursuit of student empowerment, most directly aligns with the integrated regulation subgroup of extrinsic motivation.

Lastly intrinsic motivation, the most autonomous form of motivation on the Self-Determination Theory continuum, describes when a behaviour is done for the inherent pleasure or satisfaction that it provides. This would seem to be in evidence for two ‘special’ students described by the participants; Janice referred to her particular student as her “little prodigy.” Interestingly, neither Janice nor Donald noted any particular, additional support that they gave the student that was different from what they did with everyone else; in these instances, it appears that it was the students who took the initiative to seek out additional opportunities – such as Donald’s student who participated in the Explore ‘French exchange’ program only several years after starting French with no prior experience in the language, or Janice’s who followed in her professional footsteps and worked as a check-in agent at an airport. Both teachers cited the importance of exposure to opportunities as effectively allowing the students to pursue what they did, however they did the same level of exposure for many other students though with less intrinsically motivated results. As such, it seems that the motivation to act as the students
described by the two participants did is either, a) external to the teacher, where the student simply acted on what they had become passionate about, or b) inspired by the model that their teacher posed, which happened to be an area to which they were in particular very receptive. Although it is inconclusive as to what sparked these students to become fully self-determined French learners, it is clear that the model and support offered by the teacher towards learning opportunities was something that helped them, however small. While this stage and the students identified appear to be the ideal for both Donald and Janice – essentially empowered French leaners — the examples of it actually occurring are reportedly very few. As such, I conclude that a self-determined learner is not dependent solely on teachers’ practices, but rather on internal attributes or preferences of the learner. Janice commented on this phenomena in regards to her particular highly motivated student by saying that “...monkeys [could] come in as teachers but [highly academic and very engaged students would] still learn from one another or they [would] figure it out on their own.” This charming anecdote aside, further research is needed to see just what impact — if any — teachers have on these particular learners or whether they are so intrinsically motivated that a teacher is not needed. Although Donald and Janice might conceptualize the intrinsically motivated learner as the ideal student, more in line with conceptions of what an empowered learner should be, it is difficult for them as teachers to actually facilitate this taking place independent of individual student characteristics (over which they have no power).

Ultimately, the lens of Self-Determination Theory offered some insight into the type of motivation present in participants’ reported practices and helped answer the central theoretical question that emerged through this section — how motivating are teachers’ reported empowerment practices? In working to empower students as learners, the teachers’ practices
most aligned with the most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation, integrated regulation. Although they aspired towards intrinsic motivation, the most autonomous section of the autonomy continuum within Self-Determination Theory, it was unclear as to whether their practices had an effect on motivating students to that particular degree or whether it was the attitudinal dispositions that students already possessed. Each stage of the continuum manifested itself to some degree within the participants’ reported practices, however the difficulty, especially within the extrinsic motivation subgroups, was often in differentiating between areas for similar practices, especially when lacking the context of specific situations. The study examined participant’s conceptions and reported general practices, which made it difficult trying to analyze specific details. The clearest pattern to emerge from the application of SDT was that both participants generally strived towards the three ‘innate needs’ of competence, relatedness and autonomy. Much like the continuum, they too gave particular importance to autonomy, appearing in their practice as ‘student voice,’ ‘individualizing classroom practices,’ and treating students as ‘human beings.’ In sum, although participants’ reported efforts to empower their students as learners strived towards empowerment’s more intrinsically motivated goal, these practices are largely identified within the most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation, integrated regulation, an area that is hypothesized to be less dependent on students’ attitudinal dispositions than teachers’ efforts.

5.6 Conclusion

Through Chapter Five two important questions have been addressed that guided the paper: firstly, how is a small sample of Ontario secondary school Core French teachers working to empower their students as learners? And secondly, how motivating are teachers’ reported empowerment practices? The first question is explored through teachers’ understandings of
learner empowerment, participants’ reported practices to empower students as learners, the
different factors identified by participants’ that can influence the learner empowerment process,
and then finally how participants encourage future and/or continued interest in French as a
subject. The second question was analyzed through the theoretical lens of Self-Determination
Theory, exploring the degree to which participants’ reported practices are motivating for students
and the connection of intrinsic motivation between learner empowerment and self-determined
behaviours. The findings from this research are valuable for the second language French class
within Ontario, as more still needs to be done to encourage students to continue studying French
and to ultimately be successful doing so. Additionally, this study’s emphasis on teachers’
practices rather than students’ responses provides a complementary picture to the existing field
of literature, offering insight into how educators in the field conceptualize what they are doing
and to what intended results. In the next chapter, I conclude my study with a discussion of the
implications for Core French teachers that learner empowerment approaches to education can
have on students; Recommendations will also be offered, as well as areas for further research.
Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.0 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter concludes the present study on secondary school Core French teachers’ reported understandings and pursuits of learner empowerment. First, I provide an overview of key findings and their significance within the wider existing educational research landscape. This is followed by a discussion of the broad and narrow implications of these findings as they pertain to the educational community and my own professional identity and practice. Then, I offer recommendations based off of the implications, which, ultimately, help to inform areas for further research. Finally, I bring the entire body of work to a close.

6.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

The purpose of the study was to explore Ontario intermediate (Grades 9 and 10) Core French teachers’ understandings of learner empowerment and their reported practices to foster it directly or indirectly in the classroom. The central research question that guided this study was, how is a small sample of Ontario secondary school Core French teachers working to empower their students as learner? This was first explored by investigating teachers’ understandings of learner empowerment, most notably its connections with and expansion on student engagement, active learning, and success. Interestingly, participants diverged on how they chose to achieve those aspects, with one emphasizing that their role as a teacher and as facilitator of the classroom experience was key, while the other reiterated that building a sense of community in the classroom through cultivating relationships with students was most important. Following participants’ understandings were their reported practices to empower students as learners. Their efforts as teachers in this area touched on three important stages: conceptions of the ‘ideal’ teacher and its connection with empowering students; reported empowerment practices, which
all exposed key aspects of the learner empowerment model, such as ‘engagement,’ ‘voice/autonomy,’ and ‘motivation;’ and going beyond what participants identified as the disempowering ‘norm’ of French as a Second Language teaching. The next aspect that responded to the central research question was a description of the different factors identified by participants that can influence the learner empowerment process. Apart from short-term factors, identified as more ‘random’ and not necessarily indicative of deeper, more enduring problems (such as student hunger or emotional barriers), the biggest long-term factor mentioned by participants was students’ prior experiences in the course. Participants sought to use engaging practices and an emphasis on student success to overcome negative preconceived notions and attitudes, especially in the initial classes when those negative factors were most pronounced. The final aspect responding to the central research question was participants’ reported encouragement of future and/or continued interest in French as a subject, emphasizing the important role that they believed the teacher has in this empowered outcome. Within that role, consistent exposure to French and a positive, engaging classroom program that promoted success for students were highlighted as the two essential aspects that participants emphasized in their own practices.

A second question at the heart of the study also emerged with the application of the theoretical lens Self-Determination Theory: how motivating are teachers’ reported empowerment practices? Deci and Ryan’s (1985, 2000) efforts to address understanding of the degree to which an individual may be motivated and the impetus for their motivated behaviour culminated in their theory, of which the autonomy continuum, the different types of motivational regulation, and the three essential needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy were applied to this paper’s findings. Essentially, a theoretical lens offered a deeper understanding of the degree to which participants’ reported practices are motivating for students and the connection of intrinsic
motivation between learner empowerment and self-determined behaviour. Within the theory, participants’ reported practices generally aligned with the most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation — integrated regulation — which indicated that participants were largely mindful of students’ feelings of competence, relatedness and autonomy in their practice, and worked towards more intrinsic, ‘self-determined’ forms of student motivation, even if examples of students reaching that stage were rare.

Within the context of the revised French as a Second Language curriculum for Ontario secondary school students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015), this paper lends itself to a more expansive and teacher-oriented understanding of efforts to cultivate successful, long-term students (read ‘life-long learners’) in the FSL classroom. The emphasis here is on empowering students as learners, a term that has been understood to go beyond simply motivating students and is explicitly aware of the ‘engagement’ and ‘confidence’ components that it comprises as well. The use of a theoretical framework further compliments the research by offering deeper insight into learner empowerment and investigates whether teachers’ reported practices do in fact align with its basic aim: intrinsic (self-determined) motivation. Teachers’ perceptions of their practices are an area that figures, although limitedly, into the research landscape of second-language pedagogy (see Faez et al., 2011; Lapkin & Barkaoui, 2008); however holistic understandings of successful practices, or more general investigations into what teachers report ‘works’ in their classrooms, have not been found in this study’s research literature. Ultimately, this paper contributes to the growing body of data about French as a Second Language teaching in Ontario and hopes to improve the practice through its findings.
6.2 Implications

This section discusses the implications that emerged through answering the questions at the heart of this research paper in the previous chapter. First, I begin by outlining the broad implications of my findings as they relate to the educational community. Then I focus on the narrow implications that affect my own professional identity and practice. The implications discussed here set the stage for the recommendations that will appear in the subsequent section.

6.2.1 Broad: The educational community. One of the largest implications to emerge through my research findings is that teachers might lack the support, encouragement or even accountability in going beyond the ‘disempowering’ norms of the French as a Second Language classroom. Building off of the findings about the classroom practices of this study’s specifically-chosen participants to empower their students as learners, it followed that there may be a gap between the pursuit of curriculum expectations and what actually occurs in the classroom. Both participants highlighted how teachers’ efforts remain largely behind closed doors, so there is little room for teachers to be held to higher standards save if they do it for themselves. This situation is not exclusive to second language teachers, but can apply to teachers in all subject areas. Teacher education programs may play a part in this implication as well; the possible gap between practice and theory (in the form of curriculum expectations, for example) may stem from inefficiencies or inadequacies at the teacher candidate stage. In addition, this implication might also be a point of interest for department heads, school administrators, or policy creators who would be invested in ensuring that students receive the highest quality education possible.

Ultimately, students would be the ones to most suffer with a teacher who is unable to empower them in the classroom. Students may lose interest in the subject, perform poorly or see reduced
academic success, and feel less valued, as both an individual and as a student, in the classroom environment.

An additional implication to emerge relates to how some teachers may not fully appreciate nor fulfill the important social role that they have in the classroom. This stems from findings related to the crucial role of the teacher in long-term empowerment outcomes. As such, some teachers may be limiting themselves, their practice, and their ability to empower students as learners by ascribing themselves a role in the classroom that fails to integrate into or create a classroom community. Without opportunities for student voice or interests to manifest themselves in the classroom and inform discussion, students may feel less valued and perform worse. In particular, students with negative preconceived notions of a subject or of school may already lack some of the internal motivation to succeed in that area, thus the personal connection, an initiating factor that engages them, may be even more important. Furthermore, some parents may lose confidence in teachers that do not — at best, resonate with, or at worst, appeal to — their children. Poor student-teacher relationships may negatively impact parent-teacher relationships.

A third implication that I draw from my findings is one that sticks out to me in particular as a pre-service teacher ‘from the outside looking in,’ so to speak. Tying aspects of the previous two implications together and inspired by additional conversations about this study, I believe that the negative attitudes that students hold towards French and their negative experiences in French class may be related to hiring practices concerning French as a second language teachers. If teachers are being hired largely on their ability to speak the language rather than their skills or proficiency as teachers, then the quality of teaching in the FSL classroom may be significantly
lower than other classes and subject areas that are more competitive and thus have a higher barrier to entry.

6.2.2 Narrow: My professional practice. Empowering students as learners is something that I have tried to imbue into my own practice as an aspiring French teacher in the Second Language classroom, even if I was not necessarily cognisant of the aspects by which I was pursuing it. My aim has long been to change negative student perceptions of the subject, instill confidence, develop interest, and promote positive, successful classroom experiences. In working to empower my students as learners, it gives me something to aspire to for each and every one of my students, making teaching that much more fun, and, hopefully, making school more enjoyable for my students too. One aspect that this study has made me realize though, is the important position that I as the teacher have in the classroom, not necessarily as a knowledge expert but more as a social agent who facilitates learning. The teacher and their relationship with their students can be more important than student perceptions of the course; this surprised my basic assumptions going into the French classroom. Essentially, empowering students as learners does not necessarily mean that students must find success or affirmation in the short term, but that they will be able to carry those positive experiences with them and inform their learning into the future.

6.3 Recommendations

Based on the broad implications that emerged from my research findings, I have compiled a set of recommendations that can be offered to the wider educational community. First and foremost, teachers need to be better integrated within a network of supports in the immediate educational community of which they are a part, including department heads, school administrators, support staff and policy makers in Ontario. While there is already coordination
between different groups in schools for the purpose of overseeing student success, more needs to be done to ensure that this process is not a reaction to students falling behind, but rather a prevention of it from happening. That is where pedagogy promoting learner empowerment comes to the fore. Teachers need more support from their department heads, school administrators, support staff and policy makers, both in and out of their particular subject areas, so that they can feel capable and compelled to enrich their practices and go beyond 'disempowering norms’ of French teaching. More frequent and enhanced professional development, a closer connection and improved communication between school staff, particularly when at-risk students are involved, and greater consistency among teaching staff over understandings of policy documents are some examples of the ways that support for teachers could be improved. None of these recommendations would take particularly long to implement, however increased funding and effort as a whole would be needed.

By extension, greater support and communication may also improve teacher accountability. Holding teachers accountable for failing to adjust or update their practices for changing classrooms and pedagogical climates should be enforced if student success is at the heart of schools’ goals; there is less room to hide unprepared or resistant teachers if there is less opportunity to ‘shut everyone else out of the classroom,’ so to speak. Required professional development could be ‘recommended’ to teachers as a potential tool to ensure accountability if they are resistant to updating their practice, although this may be difficult to implement due to push back from teachers and the necessary additional funding.

At the board level, French teachers should be hired on their abilities as teachers and not simply as French speakers. While supply and demand may limit the availability of teachers to choose from, responsibility then falls on teacher training programs to increase the amount of
French teachers currently available or to better train those teachers that are graduating. Emphasizing the demand that exists for FSL teachers when advertising programs, expanding programs to support teachers training in both English and French, and increasing the comprehensiveness of programs to deal with language learning at all three levels of Core French, Extended French and French Immersion are just some of the steps that can be taken to strengthen the pool of prospective French teachers available.

The final recommendation to be suggested is that student voice should occupy a greater position in the classroom. Policy makers, teachers, and teacher education programs should come together with this idea of better preparing and supporting classroom practices that encourage student autonomy with an eye towards classrooms that are not only inclusive, but prioritize student perspectives. Desirable outcomes and points of emphasis in an autonomy-focused classroom, as supported by the learner empowerment framework, include improving students’ confidence, increasing how they value school, and enhanced goal-setting and goal-reaching. Some of the ways that teachers can work towards these aims are by giving more frequent positive and constructive feedback, appealing to and showing interest in students’ interests, developing a genuine rapport with individuals (in essence, making students feel welcome and valued), and emphasizing the co-creation of success criteria while establishing together what ‘success’ (that goal to strive towards) looks like for different tasks and challenges. The recommendation of increasing student ‘presence’ in the classroom is more focused on a long-term shift of mindset that increases current trends to take the spotlight away from the teacher and place it more on the students; in essence, the role of the classroom teacher should undergo a conceptual transformation in order to most allow for this idea as currently envisioned, with the
teacher’s role shifting from that of a knowledge expert and instructor to more of a facilitator of learning and inquiry.

6.4 Areas for Further Research

In consideration of the rather limited scope of this research paper, further work needs to be done to investigate the empowering practices of secondary school teachers in the Core French classroom. A more thorough investigation into what can be done and what is being done in the FSL classroom could enhance this paper’s findings and highlight new avenues of research. Building off of this idea, it could be beneficial to explore empowerment practices in other subject areas. It would be particularly interesting to compare convergent and divergent patterns of empowerment practices so as to begin to identify common successful empowerment practices and, conversely, areas that most need improvement. Due to the centrality of ideas such as autonomy in learner empowerment and motivational frameworks, including Self-Determination Theory, it would also be interesting to explicitly focus on how teachers understand this idea and how they implement it in the classroom. This is particularly relevant in the context of Ontario, where the branching ideas of ‘inclusive classrooms’ and ‘inclusive schools’ are Ministry-wide objectives (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).

Essentially, I believe that learner empowerment, particularly if we consider ourselves to be living in a time when motivating and engaging students in school can be harder than ever, deserves more scrutiny and discussion by educational research scholars. An enhanced and further refined, operational definition of learner empowerment would go far in promoting uniform understanding of the term, while enhancing student-centered education and the pursuit of student success. Ultimately, we should continue to hold tight to the essential two-part question at the
heart of our inquiry, how can we improve our own practice as teachers and, subsequently, the learning experiences of our students?

6.5 Concluding Comments

I strongly believe that empowering students as learners forms the basis for the direction that education, at least in Ontario, is taking. It offers a consolidated face for what so many quality educators are already doing in their classrooms, and I hope that the concept starts to get the recognition that it deserves. I am thankful for the opportunity that this paper allowed me to have in reflecting on my own practice as a French teacher and the struggles that I experienced as a student in the Core French classroom to get engaged and achieve success. I only came to fit the bill of an ‘empowered learner’ late in my high school experience, something all the more stunning considering how much I have grown to love languages and worked to cultivate my linguistic identity. Often, I think back to different subject areas that never seemed to quite gain any traction with me (Math!), and I wonder what a difference someone who would have worked to empower me in that area could have had on the person that I came to be. Then I remember who I am and what I can do for students, and I smile; I wouldn’t have it any other way.
References


Appendix A: Letter of Consent

Date: 
Dear _______________________________,

My Name is Oliver Drigo 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 Core French teachers’ efforts to empower their students as learners. I am interested in interviewing teachers who demonstrate a commitment to teaching French and engaging students in continuing to study the language. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

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

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

Sincerely,

Oliver P. Drigo

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 Oliver Drigo and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ______________________________________
Name: (printed) _______________________________________________
Date: ______________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn how a small sample of Ontario secondary school Core French teachers empower their students as learners for the purpose of enhancing teacher practice and identifying supports and boundaries to language learning that teachers encounter. This interview will last approximately 60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on your experiences teaching and reports of practices related to empowering students as learners. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Background Information
- Are you a native French speaker or did you learn French as an additional language?
  - How would you describe how you learned French?
    - What were your experiences with the language growing up?
    - What experiences or abilities do you feel helped you to learn the language?
- What made you decide to want to become a French teacher?
- Which subjects/ grades/ streams have you taught?
- Can you tell me about SCHOOL?
  - How about the French Department?
  - Could you tell me about any activities organized by or with the French Department? (Such as field trips, school events, campaigns, etc.)

Teacher Perspectives/ Beliefs
- In your experience, what does an engaged student ‘look like’?
  - Conversely, what does a disengaged student in French ‘look like’?
  - In your opinion, how do you believe that students come to be ‘engaged’ or ‘disengaged’ in French class?
- Why do you feel that students might not often be interested in French class?
  - From your experiences, what have you noticed about the relationship between interest and engagement?
  - Would you add any other aspects that affect these two components?
- What is challenging for you as a teacher about working with students who lack motivation in French?
- In your view, what is the role of the teacher in students’ French engagement?
  - In your experience, to what extent is a student’s love of the subject separate from their feelings towards their teacher?

Teacher Practices
• What is your overall goal as a teacher?
  o How does this relate to your overall goal as a French teacher?
• If a student in one of your classes said that they HATE French class, how would you respond?
• Could you describe a disinterested or disengaged student in your French classroom who stands out to you?
  o How would you describe their attitude?
    ▪ How did they value French class, if at all?
  o How did they feel about their own abilities?
  o Could you describe your approach to this student?
    ▪ What strategies did you use?
    ▪ Which do you feel were most successful? Least successful?
  o By the end, how had they responded?
    ▪ What was your main take-away from this experience?
• What do your typical disengaged students in French class seem to have in common?
  o How about your typically engaged students?
• What are some ways in which you encourage students to continue studying French?

Supports and Challenges
• What do you feel most helps you encourage students to continue studying French?
• How does the French department or the school contribute to encouraging students to study French?
  o How would you like them to support you in other ways?
• What do you feel is the greatest barrier to students continuing to study French?
  o What other barriers might you identify?
• What is the biggest challenge you face in encouraging students to continue on in French?

Next Steps
• How do you understand the term ‘empowering students as learners’?
  o What is its place in the modern Ontario FLS classroom?
• In light of the recent curriculum changes and general educational trends, how do you envision the French as a Second Language teaching experience in 10 years?
• What advice could you give to pre-service teachers looking to teach French as a Second Language in Ontario?
• Do you have any final thoughts?

Thank you for your participation in this research study.
Appendix C: Ten Commandments for Motivating Language Learners


1) Set a personal example with your own behaviour
2) Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom
3) Present the tasks properly
4) Develop a good relationship with the learners
5) Increase the learners’ linguistic self-confidence
6) Make the language classes interesting
7) Promote learner autonomy
8) Personalize the learning process
9) Increase the learners’ goal-orientedness
10) Familiarize learners with the target learning culture.