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French as a Second Language in Canada

Potential for Collaboration

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Context

The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), received funding from the Department of Canadian Heritage, Official Languages Support Programs, for a project housed at the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT) that began during the summer of 2014. The project had two main goals: (1) to provide an overview of issues in FSL teaching and learning that are “top of mind” across the various regions of Canada; and (2) to identify areas where collaboration among the provinces and territories (P/Ts¹) is occurring and would be productive in improving FSL education.

The report is organized as follows: for reasons of length, the literature review developed for the proposal is included as APPENDIX A. The body of the report contains, first, a discussion of the methodology of the study (research questions and data collection phases); next, the findings from the focus groups and the survey; and lastly, a summary of the main findings and the implications of the study.

¹ “P/T” refers to provinces and territories or provincial and territorial.

1. Literature review

The proposal for this project included a wide-ranging literature review taking into account all the issues identified as relevant to the scope of the project. That literature review is included in APPENDIX A; relevant literature is cited as needed in the interpretation of the findings of this study.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research questions

The research questions guiding the study are:

1. What are the strengths of FSL programs currently in place in P/Ts? Which do they have in common?
2. What are the main challenges in FSL programs in P/Ts? Which do they have in common?
3. In what ways do P/Ts currently collaborate to improve FSL programs?
4. What are the top research priorities for the coming decade related to FSL education in Canada based on the findings of this study?
5. What pan-Canadian planning, program, and pedagogy initiatives can be recommended based on the findings of this study?

Of these five questions, the research team was instructed to place special emphasis on the fifth.

2.2 Data-collection phases

2.2.1 Focus groups²

Focus groups were held in three regions of Canada: one in Atlantic Canada (Prince Edward Island), one in central Canada (Ontario), and one in Western Canada that included Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Northwest Territories. British Columbia/Yukon could not be included in this phase of the project, as there was an ongoing teachers' strike in British Columbia; however, that region did participate in the survey phase (described below). Taken together, focus-group participants included representatives from each of the following categories: parents [Canadian Parents for French (CPF)]; pan-Canadian language associations [l'Association canadienne des professeurs d'immersion (ACPI), CASLT]; P/T language associations; superintendents; consultants; ministries/departments of education; and universities (e.g., French departments, faculties of education). Those invited to participate were distinguished by their knowledge of the issues and their contacts across their region and nationally. The focus-group sessions were expected to yield information and issues that had not previously been captured in the studies related to French as a Second Language (FSL) in Canada, most of which have been survey-based.

Taken together, the three focus groups included 19 individuals representing:

- a range of P/Ts (Alberta, Manitoba, Northwest Territories, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, and Saskatchewan);
- pan-Canadian and provincial language-teachers' associations [e.g., CASLT, ACPI,

² As suggested by Krueger and Casey (2009), focus groups were used in order to: (a) obtain a range of ideas relating to FSL education across Canada; (b) identify areas of consensus and difference among various FSL stakeholders; and (c) uncover factors that influenced the participants' opinions related to FSL.

the Ontario Modern Language Teachers' Association/l'Association ontarienne des professeurs de langues vivantes (OMLTA/AOPLV)];

- CPF;
- school-district administrators;
- ministries/departments of education; and
- universities, including faculties of education and summer language institutes.

Most participants were also teachers with wide-ranging experience in core (or basic), intensive, or immersion French. Some had international experience, and some had taught English as a Second Language (ESL) or in mainstream classrooms. Every participant was asked to share his or her relevant experience, and each used somewhat different terminology to describe his or her involvement. Thus, some people referred to FSL teaching (without specifying the type of program), while others indicated specific programs and grade levels. The following bullets summarize much of the experience represented in the focus-group participants:

- Eight (8) participants reported teaching in core/basic French in either elementary or secondary school or both.
- Eight (8) reported teaching immersion at elementary or secondary levels.
- Ten (10) reported experience as French consultants or coordinators.
- Four (4) reported experience in school administration.
- Four (4) reported experience in a ministry/department of education.
- Six (6) reported playing a role/having played a role in CASLT or ACPI.
- Two (2) reported experience in pre-service teacher education.

Since no focus-group participant was interviewed in depth about his or her work or volunteer experiences, the above is not an exhaustive list but serves to illustrate the depth and breadth of experience represented in the groups.

The research team conducted a content analysis of each transcript to identify themes, commonalities, and examples of interjurisdictional collaboration. The latter, in particular, informed the development of the survey instrument (see APPENDIX B).

2.2.2 Survey

Focus-group participants were asked to identify and contact up to eight people who are knowledgeable about FSL education in their regions. These included school administrators, teachers, active parents, university professors, or others. When contacted, these people also received a project description. In an effort to maximize coverage of all P/Ts, presidents of P/T CPF branches and language associations (provincial and national) were also contacted, provided with the project description, and asked to complete the questionnaire. Further, to ensure participation on the part of British Columbia/Yukon and other areas that might otherwise have been under-represented, the project liaison person and a few others (e.g., the vice-president of CPF British Columbia) also contacted potential key respondents in their areas. Names of additional participants were suggested by the CMEC representatives, and these participants, too, received an invitation.

All those who accepted to take part in the survey (APPENDIX B) indicated their willingness to do so in writing (by e-mail). They were then thanked and told to expect the survey in mid-November, although in fact it was distributed in early December 2014, and the survey was conducted in the first half of that month. Of the 101 invitees contacted, 68 responded.

3. Focus-group findings

3.1 Strengths of FSL programs

Table 1 presents the findings relating to perceived strengths of FSL programs in the regions represented. The first five bolded rows represent themes mentioned in at least two of the focus groups. With respect to the other themes, it is important to note that, even if a particular strength was identified by only one of the focus groups, that strength may well be present in other P/Ts. For example, inclusion was mentioned explicitly by only one group, but we are aware that all ministries/departments of education across Canada have addressed this issue. Moreover, some topics raised in only one group also arose in the research literature; for example, the last row in the table concerns larger blocks of instructional time for core/basic French, an innovation that has been shown to enhance learning and pedagogy (Mady, 2008; Marshall, 2011).

Table 1: Strengths of FSL programs identified by focus groups
(the bolded rows represent themes mentioned in at least two of the focus groups)*

Strengths	Examples cited by participants
Cultural enrichment available	Salons du livre; French for the Future; Explore program; career fairs
Introduction of the <i>diplôme d'études en langue française (DELF)</i>	Motivating to students; positive washback into daily classroom activities
Introduction of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) concepts	
Less isolation of core French teachers	Professional-development consortia
Intensive French yielding impressive results	Enrolment in intensive French programs increasing in some jurisdictions
Professional development opportunities	<i>Profil de perfectionnement</i> in some jurisdictions; self-assessment tool for teachers; professional-development (PD) days; summer bursaries for teachers; summer institutes; French-immersion program-advisory groups in some jurisdictions; training in "language across the curriculum"
Availability of early literacy support in French	
Support from ministries/departments of education	New curricula and resources; resource centres for teachers
Availability of effective teacher-education programs	
Federal-P/T agreements in the area of education	Partnerships with France in some school districts; funds for teachers to attend conferences
Increased enrolment in immersion	
Emphasis on inclusion	Greater diversity in enrolment (specifically mentioned in reference to immersion)
Blocking time for core/basic French	Hour-long blocks with teachers proficient in French, rather than shorter daily periods

*The unbolded issues have also been documented in earlier studies and are considered equally important.

There is evidence of progress over the last decade: for example, participants reported that the introduction of CEFR has resulted in more widely available cultural enrichment now. This observation contrasts with Lapkin, MacFarlane, & Vandergrift's findings (2006) showing that FSL teacher respondents to a survey were "overwhelmingly dissatisfied with the ways in which francophone culture is reflected in available teaching materials, with library resources, computer software, and opportunities for French language support in the community" (p. 36).

Other clear indications of progress are the multiple references to DELF and CEFR, absent from earlier studies. These resources have been introduced relatively recently and constitute a substantive contribution to our thinking about FSL pedagogy and assessment.

3.2 Challenges of FSL programs

Table 2 presents the challenges facing FSL programs identified by one or more of the focus groups. These challenges and others have been well documented in the literature (e.g., Lapkin, MacFarlane, & Vandergrift, 2006; Lapkin, Mady, & Arnott, 2009); it appears that they remain salient today. In some cases, an issue listed as a strength in Table 1 (e.g., inclusion) is also seen as a challenge (e.g., embracing diversity in classrooms); the fact that each of these arose in only one of the focus groups does not diminish an issue’s importance.

Further, looking at both Tables 1 and 2, it is evident that some P/Ts may have found solutions to challenges that others have not yet tried. In other words, in some P/Ts, solutions or approaches to addressing challenges have been found through experimentation, innovation, and collaboration. For example, one focus-group participant suggested that the marginalization of core French teachers can be alleviated by the professional-development opportunities cited as a strength of their FSL programming (see Table 1). A second focus-group participant reported that the challenge of “slow development of proficiency in core/basic French” could be addressed by “blocked instructional periods for core/basic French” with an effective teacher.

Table 2: Challenges facing FSL programs

(the bolded rows represent issues that were raised by at least two of the focus groups)

Challenges	Examples cited by participants
Lack of appropriate resources (books at the appropriate interest level are too complex linguistically)	Published books are geared to francophone learners
Teachers need to have had training in language-teaching methodology, and they need to be proficient in French	Shortage of qualified teachers
Because education is provincial/territorial, it is difficult to assess the L2 learning situation in Canada; lack of tools for measuring proficiency, especially speaking	Transferability of students from program to program within and across P/Ts; common terminology needed across P/Ts; lack of common standards across Canada
Working conditions for core French teachers; marginalization of core French	High turnover of teachers; decline in time allocated to core French; recognition of FSL as mainstream (as important as math)
Student retention in programs	Lack of planning/continuity; no P/T requirement for FSL
Lack of tools for L2 assessment, particularly speaking	Speaking tends not to be assessed in the early grades
Accommodating a broad range of learners within classes	Immersion students may be combined with core/basic French students at secondary level
Limited selection of subjects taught through French immersion at secondary level	
Timetabling of core/basic French	
Slow development of proficiency in core French	
Agreement needed for best practices in teacher education for FSL	
Alignment of universities with expectations at secondary level	
Need to motivate students	Need to value speaking rather than just reading/writing
Bringing ministries/departments of education together	
Access to programs	Lotteries to gain admission to immersion

3.3 Collaboration among provinces and territories

The concept of collaboration varies somewhat among the stakeholders represented in the focus groups. Examples of within-P/T collaboration, within-region collaboration, and pan-Canadian collaboration are listed below and include formal and informal communication, dissemination of information from other P/Ts related to FSL initiatives, established formalized partnerships, and borrowing ideas or materials from other P/Ts.

National associations such as CASLT are valued for the networking opportunities they provide (the CASLT leadership folios were specifically mentioned as a resource). Similarly, ACPI was mentioned for its sessions on guidebooks for administrators held in the Western provinces. National (e.g., ACPI, CPF, CASLT) and provincial (e.g., OMLTA) conferences were also cited for providing valuable networking opportunities; however, the need to hold national conferences in different regions of Canada in order to render them accessible to everyone was underscored. Some examples of networking or collaboration include:

a. within P/Ts:

- PD days are used to meet with teachers from other schools.
- There is communication within Ontario with teachers in “co-terminus” boards (i.e., teachers from the public and Catholic school districts in the same geographical area).
- Partnerships between anglophone and francophone school districts have been established in Alberta.

b. within region or across Canada:

- Prince Edward Island has consulted Newfoundland and Labrador’s Intensive French (IF) model to incorporate strategies from IF into its core French program.
- Prince Edward Island borrowed New Brunswick’s oral proficiency test.
- Atlantic provinces worked together to align L2 curricula with the CEFR levels in an effort to reach a common understanding of the CEFR proficiency levels.
- Atlantic provinces developed an on-line portfolio to help students set proficiency goals; some school districts in Alberta are borrowing from this portfolio.
- There is a national steering committee for IF.
- Some school districts in Alberta are studying Ontario’s efforts to support teacher implementation of the action-oriented approach.³
- Some school districts in Alberta have consulted Prince Edward Island’s Programme de perfectionnement linguistique.
- CPF executive directors meet regularly to discuss common issues and possible solutions.

3.4 Research priorities

The focus-group discussions yielded one clear priority for research: finding answers to why students drop out of French in secondary school. As the section entitled “Attrition” in APPENDIX A describes, the answer to this question has yet to be firmly established based on the research to date. While this trend of attrition from FSL programs has been documented across French immersion and core/basic French programs alike, it is much more prevalent

³ “The ‘action-oriented approach’ focuses on learning functional language related to accomplishing real-life tasks. This approach views students as ‘social agents’ who use ‘acts of speech’ to interact with others in order to complete tasks that involve a ‘purposeful action’ ... to achieve a given result in the context of a problem to be solved, an obligation to fulfil or an objective to be achieved” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 10). (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 32).

at the secondary level with core/basic French students when the study of French becomes optional,⁴ which is often at the beginning of secondary school (Canadian Parents for French, 2015).

Retrospective accounts from core/basic French students who opted out of secondary FSL study reveal that factors contributing to secondary-student attrition centre either on the students' lack of perceived competence or lack of opportunities to use and develop their French skills (e.g., Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation, 2004; Blais, 2003). In the case of secondary dropouts from all FSL programs, more school-based influences were identified, including "lack of course variety, forced choices between FSL and other programs, perception of heavy workload, or a misguided belief that better grades will be had outside of FSL" (CPF, 2015). Ongoing small-scale research on the topic of motivation and demotivation of secondary students in core/basic French programs (Arnott, in progress; McGregor, in progress) may shed light on what contributes to students' decision-making process related to FSL studies when it is no longer a compulsory subject.

4. Survey findings

4.1 Priority areas for collaborative attention from P/Ts

Respondents were asked first to rate the extent to which a selection of topics might benefit from collaborative attention. They were also invited to suggest areas not on the list that could benefit from such attention. They were then asked to rank first and second priorities from the listed areas and offered the opportunity to explain their selections.

As the tables in APPENDIX C show, both ratings (Table C1) and rankings (Table C2) reveal priorities in three areas: developing speaking proficiency; building learner confidence, especially in speaking; and action-oriented pedagogical approaches. Approximately 60 per cent of respondents identified these as three areas that would benefit a great deal from collaborative attention. These three areas garnered over 60 per cent of first-priority nominations and almost 55 per cent of first- and second-priority nominations combined.

The responses to open-ended items on the survey helped us understand the priorities that emerged. For example, in the case of "developing speaking proficiency," one respondent suggested "an interprovincial round table on how to better teach speaking proficiency in FSL students"; another advocated "learning tasks that promote using French orally every day."

With respect to "developing learner confidence, especially in speaking," one survey respondent commented:

“

Learners must be confident in their language skill, regardless of their proficiency, in order to risk using the language and allow themselves to learn. If the classroom environment is not encouraging and free of stress, students may hesitate to take risks and practise, interfering with language learning.

”

⁴ In some P/Ts, the study of French is not compulsory at any level; in others, it is obligatory from Grades 4 through 9.

Finally, another respondent elaborated on his or her choice of the action-oriented approach, writing:

“

Because the action-oriented approach is based on the CEFR, choosing this focus would be a means to deepen our understanding of the CEFR and provide tools appropriate for our classrooms. The CEFR is a foundational document useful for both students and teachers in core or immersion but we lack Canadian examples. Action-oriented tasks within a Canadian context would be of great benefit.

”

In order to explore the relationships among the priorities listed in the survey, correlational analyses were done. Results of these analyses showed that developing speaking proficiency and building learner confidence in speaking are thematically related, and also strongly correlated (see Table C3).

In contrast, ratings for an action-oriented approach are not strongly correlated with developing speaking proficiency and building learner confidence in speaking. The fact that there is only a weak statistical relationship among these may relate to respondents' thinking about an action-oriented approach more broadly, perhaps in relation to the development of all four skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). In fact, any significant correlation between an action-oriented approach and task-based learning suggests that relevant tasks may focus on reading, writing, and listening and not primarily on speaking.

4.2 Receptiveness to learning from other provinces and territories

The first set of questions dealt with the perceived potential for collaboration to benefit particular areas of FSL education. This was followed by two sets of questions — one for French immersion, the other for core/basic French — on the receptiveness of those locally involved in FSL education to learn from other jurisdictions.

With respect to French immersion, for all topics listed in Table C4, at least 80 per cent of respondents indicated that they were very or somewhat interested in what was being done in French immersion in other P/Ts. There are, however, differences among topics listed in the table. There is stronger interest in what other P/Ts are doing at the elementary level than at the secondary level. Over 60 per cent of respondents indicated that they were very interested in the resources and pedagogy for Grades K–8 used in other P/Ts. There was only slightly less interest in supports for students with special-education needs, more relevant to elementary than to secondary education.

In the case of core/basic French, interest in what other P/Ts are doing was somewhat less widespread. However, for all topics listed in Table C5, at least 60 per cent of respondents indicated that they were very or somewhat interested in what was being done in other P/Ts. In contrast to French immersion, levels of interest in elementary and secondary resources and pedagogy are similar. There is much less interest in sharing on the topic of special education in core/basic French than there is on sharing on special education in immersion. Similarly, learning about what other P/Ts are doing in regard to student retention garners more interest with respect to immersion than it does for core/basic French.

5. Summary of main findings

The focus groups addressed both the strengths and the challenges of FSL programs across Canada. It is evident that since earlier relevant surveys (Lapkin, MacFarlane, & Vandergrift, 2006), progress has been made in terms of the availability of cultural enrichment, more professional-development opportunities, and a greater emphasis on inclusion, among others. The newest and most prevalent strength is the introduction of the CEFR, with its pedagogical innovations and related assessment strategies.

The importance of CEFR was underlined in both the focus-group and survey data and is echoed in the representative open-ended comments included in section 4 of this report. These findings show that Canadian stakeholders see CEFR as a strength of FSL programs, with potential to inform assessment and pedagogy. Participants also reported that working with CEFR could address other central issues that were raised repeatedly: developing speaking proficiency, providing relevant professional development to teachers, providing a direction for resource development, and so on.

The challenges identified in the focus-group discussions were wide-ranging and echoed those identified in earlier surveys and literature reviews (e.g., Lapkin, MacFarlane, & Vandergrift, 2006; Lapkin, Mady, & Arnott, 2009). Salient among these were recurrent themes in the discussions: inadequate supply of qualified teachers (language-proficient and skilled in L2 pedagogy) and the need for common benchmarks and resource development, especially for the upper-secondary grades. There was also a call for research to address student attrition at the secondary level, with interest in collaborating on the subject of retention of French immersion students in particular. Relevant pedagogical and empirical initiatives examining how to increase student motivation and retention at all levels of FSL would be productive directions in response to these findings (for ongoing work in this regard, see Arnott, in progress; McGregor, in progress).

A prominent theme in the focus-group discussions, and one that carried over into the survey results and open-ended responses was the need for mutually understood proficiency benchmarks; CEFR was most often mentioned in this regard. Such benchmarks might serve to address student retention and diversity created by movement of students among programs, both locally and between provinces and territories.

Interjurisdictional collaboration is occurring, both within and across P/Ts. National associations are highly valued, though access to relevant conferences is limited by geographical considerations. The survey yielded information on priority areas for collaboration across P/Ts: developing speaking proficiency; building learner confidence, especially in speaking; and action-oriented pedagogy. Respondents also indicated an interest in learning from other provinces and territories about resources and pedagogy at the elementary level in French immersion, and about students with special needs. For core French, the interest expressed related primarily to resources for the secondary level.

6. Implications

All of the implications listed below would benefit from collaborative attention from P/Ts.

- **Maintain and enhance professional-development opportunities for FSL teachers.** Among the strengths discussed by the focus groups, supporting teachers through multiple means (e.g., summer bursaries/institutes) emerged as a very important area in need of support.
- **Focus pedagogical initiatives on developing speaking proficiency.** A strong theme running throughout the data is the urgent need to develop speaking proficiency.
- **Encourage research on learners.** The finding that emerged clearly from the focus groups relating to student attrition speaks loudly for a research study focusing on student motivation

(to continue the study of French) and its relationship to learner confidence and risk-taking.

- **Support and facilitate the dissemination of information and in-service activities around CEFR and DELF.** Across the focus groups and the survey data, participants expressed great interest in communicating and collaborating across provinces and territories on initiatives they were undertaking to adapt CEFR/DELF to the Canadian context.
- **Address the need for qualified teachers: teachers should be proficient in French and knowledgeable in language-teaching methodology.** Although this need does not fall directly into the scope of CMEC activity, through bringing P/T ministries/departments of education together and supporting the work of P/Ts and national language associations, CMEC can play a role.
- **Contribute to resource development.** The need for resources emerged strongly in two main areas: for French immersion, Grades K–8, and for core/basic French for the secondary grades.

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Brief Literature Review

Programming

In Canada, FSL is offered through a variety of delivery models with varying points of entry and instructional time. The vast majority of FSL students (85 per cent) are in the core French program, with a minority studying in the more intensive options of Intensive French, Extended French, or French immersion (Canadian Parents for French, 2008). The availability of the different program options is dependent on the school board.

Research has shown the core French program to have challenges: core French teachers and programs are marginalized (Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers, 2004; Carr, 2007; Lapkin & Barkaoui, 2008; Lapkin, Mady, & Arnott, 2009; Marshall, 2011; Mollica, Philips, & Smith, 2005; Richards, 2002), and students do not acquire functional skills (*Association pour la Promotion de l'Enseignement du Français*, 2004; CPF, 2004), for example. Efforts have been made to improve core French programming. Intensive French, for instance, has been touted as a means to improve core French. It has been shown to yield higher achievement in French than the core French program (Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers, 2005; Netten & Germain, 2000), but implementing the program has been deemed challenging (Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers, 2005). Only a minority of Canadian students are enrolled in Extended French and French immersion. Although there is a dearth of recent research on Extended French, French immersion is well researched (e.g., Genesee & Jared, 2008; Turnbull, Hart, & Lapkin, 2003) and has come to be known as the best way to learn French (Genesee, 2007). Such a combination of challenges and successes has led to a variety of potential program improvements, not only in terms of improving program delivery, but in terms of pedagogy within the programs as well.

Pedagogy

While research focusing on FSL pedagogy has highlighted the role that previous beliefs and contextual factors play in teachers' pedagogical decision making within each program (e.g., see Lapkin, Mady, & Arnott, 2009; Arnett & Mady, 2010; Lyster, 2007), more recent studies have investigated cross-curricular pedagogies being practiced in FSL programs as well as FSL teacher implementation of practices based on CEFR. Explorations of literacy-based teaching and its implementation across core (e.g., Arnott & Mady, 2013), intensive (e.g., Netten & Germain, 2005), and immersion (e.g., Lyster, Collins, & Ballinger, 2009) programs have highlighted the cross-curricular and cross-linguistic possibilities for engaging students personally and linguistically in FSL learning.

For example, with adequate opportunities for teacher collaboration, studies examining French immersion teachers facilitating the analysis of different French and English chapters of the same novel (Lyster, Collins, & Ballinger, 2009) or primary core French teachers introducing and analyzing daily messages in French (Arnott & Mady, 2013) revealed the potential for FSL pedagogy to engage learners and enhance literacy skills and metalinguistic knowledge across multiple languages.

Emphasizing the development of oral fluency in spontaneous communication has also been identified by FSL teachers as an integral strategy for adopting literacy-based pedagogy and an ideal way to maximize FSL programs and overall learning both in FSL programs and in overall learning (Netten & Germain, 2005; Arnott & Mady, 2013).

At present, Canadian researchers have also begun investigating how FSL teachers in different programs are reacting pedagogically to the widespread implementation of CEFR in Canada for teaching languages (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2010; see Arnott, 2013 for summary). Studies to date have examined FSL teachers' attitudes about the framework and the feasibility of adopting CEFR-related practices following explicit training [e.g., implementing task-based language teaching, the European Language Portfolio (ELP), the CEFR-assessment grids, etc.].

While FSL teachers appear to be reacting positively to CEFR-based training (Faez, Majhanovich, Taylor, Smith, & Crowley, 2011; Faez, Taylor, Majhanovich, & Brown, 2011), researchers advise that if the movement toward adopting CEFR-based pedagogy continues, then training needs to target teachers' existing beliefs, needs, and practices (Mison & Jang, 2011; Piccardo, 2013), as it should not be assumed that FSL teachers share the same pedagogical perspectives when it comes to CEFR (Kristmanson, Lafargue, & Culligan, 2011). This concern has been echoed in other research investigating FSL teachers' beliefs and pedagogy in action, showing that FSL teachers will inevitably exercise their agency when implementing any kind of prescribed pedagogy (Arnett, 2011).

Inclusion

Inclusion in FSL education in Canada is an identified area of challenge. The first step in inclusion is access. General access to FSL is inequitable across the country, with only some provinces and territories requiring the study of a second language, and only five (excluding Quebec) requiring the study of FSL in particular (Mady & Turnbull, 2010). More specifically, access to FSL is at times more challenging for certain student populations: English-language learners (Mady, 2012c, d, 2013a; Mady, Black, & Fulton, 2010; Taaffe, Maguire, & Pringle, 1996) and students with learning difficulties (Mady & Arnett, 2009; Arnett & Mady, 2010). Despite evidence that these student populations can be successful in learning FSL (Arnett, 2003, 2008; Carr, 2009; Genesee, 2007; Mady, 2013b), they do not always gain entry into core French (Mady, 2007) or immersion programs (Willms, 2008).

A second step in inclusion is adjusting pedagogy to meet students' needs. Teachers, however, have indicated that they require support in order to meet the needs of diverse student populations (Dicks & Kristmanson, 2008; Lapkin, MacFarlane, & Vandergrift, 2006; Mady, 2011, 2012a; Rehorick, Dicks, Kristmanson, & Cogswell, 2006).

In addition to providing a description of the status of inclusion in FSL in Canada, some of the above studies also offer suggested means of improvement. Improved information dissemination to all FSL stakeholders, including administrators and guidance counsellors; heightened research awareness; and access and specific policies to guide decision making are among the means suggested (Mady, 2012b). It is noteworthy that including students who traditionally may have been excluded could improve overall enrolment numbers for FSL.

Teacher education

Research has shown that FSL teachers do not feel well prepared to meet the needs of a diverse student population (e.g., Burge, Ouellette-Kuntz, Hutchinson, & Box, 2008; Rehorick et al., 2006). Although there have been cultural and linguistic changes in the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2006) and an increase in students identified with special needs, the teaching pool has yet to reflect such diversity (Gambhir, Broad, Evans, & Gaskell, 2008). In general, the distinction between the student and teacher populations poses challenges to the teaching corps as it attempts to meet the needs of a diverse student population (Garmon, 2004). As it pertains to FSL teacher preparation in particular, Dunn's (2011) research revealed that teacher candidates are not prepared enough to meet diverse needs and thereby create an inclusive environment.

The diversity in FSL teacher-education programming poses a challenge to developing a consistent response to meet changing needs (Arnett & Mady, 2010). Given P/T jurisdiction over teacher education and a minority of P/Ts that have regulatory bodies, Willms (2008) suggests that such inequities challenge the ability to effect changes for minority groups (e.g., students with learning difficulties) in FSL.

Attrition

Over the past decade, FSL programs have seen disproportionate attrition rates — while enrolment in French immersion programs has increased, enrolment in core French programs has seen

a steady decline (Canadian Parents for French, 2008, 2010). A small number of studies have examined the FSL student experience, either from the perspective of current students, recent dropouts, or graduates of a particular FSL program. Research on current students shows an overall tendency for FSL learners to identify the pragmatic advantages of studying FSL in Canada (e.g., getting a job, future employment); however, recent studies have revealed differences in student engagement and/or desire to continue studying French across different learner groups.

For instance, in relation to their English-speaking Canadian-born peers, allophone learners of French have been shown to be significantly more motivated (Mady, 2010) and to expect different advantages related to Canadian citizenship and identity (Carr, 2009). Kissau (2006) also reported a gender difference in motivation to learn French, with Canadian adolescent females being more interested in becoming fluent in French and their male counterparts being more inclined to want to drop out of French due to negative, homophobic perceptions of the French language. French immersion students have also shown higher engagement in their program when they have a parent who is able to support their FSL learning (e.g., a francophone parent) (Makropoulos, 2010).

Retrospective accounts of dropouts or graduates of FSL programs reveal some important factors contributing to their decision to continue or discontinue their French studies, including lack of confidence in their oral French skills (APEF, 2004), lack of opportunities to use French beyond the classroom (Blais, 2003), and a desire for more academic success in the regular English program (Beck, 2004). Of late, research has pointed to possibilities for CEFR-influenced pedagogy (mentioned earlier) to increase student engagement in FSL programs. Following the implementation of CEFR-related teaching (Majhanovich, Faez, Smith, Taylor, & Vandergrift, 2010) and administration of the corresponding test (Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, 2011), immersion and core FSL students reported a significant increase in their perceived French competence, a renewed interest in having their proficiency assessed, and an investment in choosing the level at which they wanted to be evaluated.

Proficiency

The relationship between accumulated instructional time for FSL (whether in core, intensive or immersion programs), starting grade, and the way in which instructional time is distributed (intensity of exposure at any given grade level) is complex (e.g., Lapkin, Mady, & Arnott, 2009). The contribution of each of these variables to “ultimate” proficiency remains an object of research. It would be instructive to interview “successful” FSL learners to retrace the paths of their French second-language development and seek commonalities in their journeys to proficiency. In the absence of authoritative information on how best to become proficient in French during schooling, some researchers have focused on testing proficiency outcomes using internationally validated tests.

For example, the Edmonton Public Schools district tested over 500 students in 2008 using the *DELF scolaire*; most (89 per cent) successfully achieved the level they tested for (Vandergrift, n.d.). Most immersion students sat the B2 level in Grade 12, while most core French students took B1 in the same grade. These students valued the international recognition the tests represent. The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) has conducted a study yielding similar findings (see summary in Arnott, 2013). The data collected will likely include insights into some of the challenges inherent in large-scale international testing programs (e.g., cost, limited number of Canadian participants to date, reliability of ratings over multiple sites), and suggest alternative approaches (e.g., student self-assessment) to evaluating proficiency.

Working conditions

In 2006, CASLT, ACPI, and the Canadian Teachers’ Federation sponsored a survey of FSL teachers including core, Intensive French, and immersion teachers. Over 1,300 teachers responded to an extensive questionnaire. Details are available in Lapkin, MacFarlane, & Vandergrift (2006). Across program types, teachers found it challenging to meet expectations respecting high proficiency levels in French, excellence in teaching, and knowledge of experiential, interactive L2 teaching

strategies/approaches. Integrating technology was also a challenge. Other problematic areas included adequate library resources, a need for professional development tailored to the individual teaching assignments and for networking with other FSL teachers, and help with special-needs and ESL students. Specific to immersion teachers (although this could also apply to other FSL programs) was the need to interact with regular English program teachers in order to maximize the positive transition from L1 to L2 teaching contexts. For core French teachers, there were also specific challenges, such as access to classrooms dedicated to core French teaching, marginalization in schools where core French is not considered central to the curriculum, and the need to interact with hundreds of students and, in some cases, their parents.

Given these working conditions, retaining FSL teachers has proven to be challenging. In fact, 40 per cent of the FSL teachers who participated in the aforementioned study reported that they had strongly considered leaving the profession in the past year. Other studies have shown a similar trend, highlighting difficult working conditions and lack of instructional materials as main reasons for FSL teachers leaving the profession (e.g., Karsenti, Collin, Villeneuve, Dumouchel, & Roy, 2008). These studies' suggested plans of action for curbing this trend include resource development (for French immersion in particular), FSL teacher-mentoring programs, efforts to make learning French more appealing, and in-service and pre-service support targeting proficiency development, newer methodologies, and new technologies.

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Survey Instrument

CMEC Survey on Potential Areas for Inter-Provincial Collaboration in FSL Education

December 2014

Some weeks ago you were contacted to invite you to participate in a survey relating to French Second Language programs across Canada. The context is a project sponsored by the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada (with funding from The Department of Canadian Heritage). You expressed an interest in completing the survey, hence this email.

The questions below are intended to inform potential initiatives related to French Second Language classroom pedagogy that could be undertaken by the CMEC.

Please feel free to respond to the open-ended questions in English or in French.

This survey is voluntary. If you have changed your mind and no longer want to participate, there is no obligation to do so. This survey is anonymous. The software keeps track of who has responded and who has not. It does NOT, however, include any identifying information with your survey responses.

The survey will be open for 2 weeks. The site will close on Thursday December 18 at noon.

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this survey.

Doug Hart (doug.hart@utoronto.ca) on behalf of the consultant team.

1. Focusing on FSL classroom pedagogy and practices, to what extent could each of the following topics benefit from collaborative attention from the provinces and territories?

Topic	A great deal	Quite a lot	A moderate amount	A little	Not at all
A. Learner autonomy					
B. Learner identity (bilingual/bicultural or plurilingual/pluri-cultural)					
C. Action-oriented approach*					
D. Task-based learning					
E. Student portfolios, online or other					
F. Development of speaking proficiency					
G. Literacy-based teaching (e.g., neurolinguistic approach)					
H. Cross-curricular approach to literacy development in FSL					
I. Inclusive second-language pedagogy					
J. Building learner confidence especially in speaking					

* FSL teaching where learners are treated as social agents who use functional language to do tasks modelled on real life (see Council of Europe, 2001: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/source/framework_en.pdf).

2. Which one of the topics (A-J) would you make the first priority? _____

3. Please briefly describe what you are thinking about with this priority.

4. Which one of the topics (A-J) would you make the second priority? _____

5. Please briefly describe what you are thinking about with this second priority.

6. If you think another area, not listed above, should also be a priority, what is this?

7. Thinking of the people you work with in French as Second Language Education as well as yourself, how much interest is there in what is going on in other provincial and territorial jurisdictions when it comes to the following in French IMMERSION education?

Area	Very interested	Somewhat interested	Neutral	Somewhat uninterested	Very uninterested	Not applicable
Pedagogy grades K-8						
Pedagogy grades 9-12.						
Learning resources grades K-8.						
Learning resources grades 9-12.						
Supports for students with special education needs to help retain these students.						
Scales measuring levels of French language proficiency.						
Scales showing levels of difficulty of French language texts and other materials.						
Student retention in immersion.						

APPENDIX B

8. If there is another area, not listed above, where you see an interest, please describe it below.

What about for CORE/BASIC French?

Area	Very interested	Somewhat interested	Neutral	Somewhat uninterested	Very uninterested	Not applicable
Pedagogy grades k-8.						
Pedagogy grades 9-12.						
Learning resources grades K-8.						
Learning resources grades 9-12.						
Supports for students with special education needs to help retain these students.						
Scales measuring levels of French language proficiency.						
Scales showing levels of difficulty of French language texts and other materials.						
Intensive French						
Student retention in core/basic French						

9. If there is another area, not listed above, where you see an interest in what other provinces/territories are doing, what is this?

Please add any additional comments on potential projects related to pedagogical/instructional resources that could be undertaken in collaboration among Canadian jurisdictions

[SURVEY INSTRUMENT NOT COPY-EDITED]

Survey Tables

Table C1

Focusing on FSL classroom pedagogy and practices, to what extent could each of the following topics benefit from collaborative attention from the provinces and territories?

	A great deal	Quite a lot	A moderate amount	A little	None at all	Total	Count
F Development of speaking proficiency	63.2	25.0	10.3	0.0	1.5	100.0	68
J Building learner confidence, especially in speaking	60.3	26.5	11.8	1.5	0.0	100.0	68
C Action-oriented approach	58.2	29.9	9.0	3.0	0.0	100.0	68
D Task-based learning	44.1	27.9	23.5	4.4		100.0	68
H Cross-curricular approach to literacy development in FSL	44.1	41.2	14.7	0.0	0.0	100.0	68
I Inclusive second-language pedagogy	43.3	40.3	16.4	0.0	0.0	100.0	67
B Learner identity (bilingual/bicultural or plurilingual/pluricultural)	35.8	37.3	25.4	1.5	0.0	100.0	67
G Literacy-based teaching (e.g., neurolinguistic approach)	35.3	45.6	17.6	1.5	0.0	100.0	68
E Student portfolios, on-line or other	29.4	30.9	30.9	7.4	1.5	100.0	68
A Learner autonomy	22.1	41.2	27.9	7.4	1.5	100.1	68

Table C2

Which one of the topics (A–J) would you make the first priority? Which would be second?

	1 st priority	1 st or 2 nd priorities combined
F Development of speaking proficiency	22.1	21.3
C Action-oriented approach	22.1	16.9
J Building learner confidence, especially in speaking	17.6	15.4
B Learner identity (bilingual/bicultural or plurilingual/pluricultural)	8.8	8.1
G Literacy-based teaching (e.g., neurolinguistic approach)	8.8	8.1
E Student portfolios on-line or other	4.4	8.1
I Inclusive second-language pedagogy	8.8	6.6
H Cross-curricular approach to literacy development in FSL	4.4	6.6
A Learner autonomy	1.5	3.7
D Task-based learning	0.0	3.7
Not stated	1.5	1.5
Total	100.0	100.0

Table C3

Correlations (Spearman's rho) among Ratings

	A Learner autonomy	B Learner identity (bilingual/ bicultural or plurilingual/ pluricultural)	C Action- oriented approach	D Task- based learning	E Student portfolios on-line or other	F Development of speaking proficiency	G Literacy- based teaching	H Cross- curricular approach to literacy development in FSL	I Inclusive second- language pedagogy
B Learner identity (bilingual/ bicultural or plurilingual/ pluricultural	.379								
C Action- oriented approach	.358	.267							
D Task-based learning	0.21	0.24	.700						
E Student portfolios, on-line or other	.264	.250	.287	.332					
F Development of speaking proficiency	0.16	-0.03	0.20	.361	0.18				
G Literacy-based teaching (e.g., neurolinguistic approach)	-0.09	0.08	0.11	0.19	.244	.388			
H Cross- curricular approach to literacy development in FSL	0.06	0.15	0.18	0.21	0.11	.385	.455		
I Inclusive second-language pedagogy	.287	.353	.268	.254	0.19	.321	.327	.519	
J Building learner confidence, especially in speaking	.272	0.20	.325	.383	0.17	.645	.253	.349	.526

Table C4

Thinking of the people you work with in French-as-a-Second-Language education as well as yourself, how much interest is there in what is going on in other provinces and territories when it comes to the following in French IMMERSION?

	Very interested	Somewhat interested	Neutral	Somewhat uninterested	Very uninterested	Total	Count
Learning resources Grades K–8	62.7	27.1	6.8	3.4	0.0	100.0	59
Pedagogy Grades K–8	61.7	26.7	10.0	1.7	0.0	100.0	60
Supports for students with special-education needs to help retain these students	55.6	25.4	7.9	7.9	3.2	100.0	63
Scales measuring levels of French-language proficiency	54.0	33.3	4.8	7.9	0.0	100.0	63
Learning resources Grades 9–12	50.0	32.3	12.9	4.8	0.0	100.0	62
Student retention in immersion	50.0	39.1	6.3	1.6	3.1	100.0	64
Pedagogy Grades 9–12	49.2	31.1	16.4	3.3	0.0	100.0	61
Scales showing levels of difficulty of French-language texts and other materials	42.9	39.7	7.9	7.9	1.6	100.0	63

APPENDIX C

Table C5

Thinking of the people you work with in French-as-a-Second-Language education as well as yourself, how much interest is there in what is going on in other provinces and territories when it comes to the following in CORE or BASIC French?

	Very interested	Somewhat interested	Neutral	Somewhat uninterested	Very uninterested	Total	Count
Learning resources Grades 9–12	52.5	27.9	9.8	4.9	4.9	100.0	61.0
Pedagogy Grades 9–12	50.0	29.3	8.6	6.9	5.2	100.0	58.0
Scales measuring levels of French-language proficiency	47.6	27.0	12.7	7.9	4.8	100.0	63.0
Learning resources Grades K–8	47.5	30.5	10.2	5.1	6.8	100.0	59.0
Pedagogy Grades K–8	45.8	32.2	6.8	6.8	8.5	100.0	59.0
Intensive French	42.1	26.3	17.5	7.0	7.0	100.0	57.0
Scales showing levels of difficulty of French-language texts and other materials	41.0	23.0	23.0	6.6	6.6	100.0	61.0
Supports for students with special-education needs to help retain these students	37.7	26.2	19.7	4.9	11.5	100.0	61.0
Student retention	36.0	30.0	22.0	8.0	4.0	100.0	50.0

French as a Second Language in Canada

Potential for Collaboration

The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), received funding from the Department of Canadian Heritage, Official Languages Support Programs, for a project housed at the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT) that began during the summer of 2014. The project had two main goals: (1) to provide an overview of issues in FSL teaching and learning that are “top of mind” across the various regions of Canada; and (2) to identify areas where collaboration among the provinces and territories (P/Ts) is occurring and would be productive in improving FSL education.