

French as a Second Language Teacher Candidates' Conceptions of Allophone Students and Students With Learning Difficulties

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Abstract

The diversity of Canada's French as a second language (FSL) student population is increasing with the growing numbers of Allophones and students with learning difficulties. Educational communities in FSL, however, are struggling to meet the needs of such populations. This study considered the views of 15 teacher candidates as expressed in interviews at the conclusion of their teacher education program. Through the lens of sociocultural theory, we explore the everyday and scientific conceptions developed by the teacher candidates about the aforementioned student populations. Few candidates reported learning about both student populations in their teacher education program, but nearly all worked with at least one of these student populations during their practica, possibly raising questions about the relevancy and currency of the curricula of some FSL teacher education programs.

Résumé

Les programmes de français langue seconde (FLS) accueillent une population de plus en plus diversifiée à cause d'une croissance du nombre d'élèves allophones et d'élèves ayant des troubles d'apprentissage. Cependant, les communautés éducatives de FLS ont du mal à répondre efficacement aux besoins de ces élèves. Cette étude a examiné les résultats d'entretiens avec 15 candidats à l'enseignement à la fin de leur année de formation universitaire. En employant une perspective socioculturelle, nous avons considéré les conceptions quotidiennes et scientifiques que les candidats ont développées envers ces élèves pendant cette période. Peu d'étudiants ont indiqué avoir appris les besoins de ces élèves au cours de leur formation universitaire, mais presque tous les participants ont travaillé avec au moins un élève provenant de ces groupes dans un programme de FLS lors de leurs stages en salle de classe. Il se peut donc que ces résultats soulèvent des questions par rapport à la crédibilité et à la pertinence des programmes de préparation à l'enseignement.

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Introduction

Though the construct of *inclusion* has been a consideration in Canadian education since the 1980s (Arnett, 2013b), in the past decade, there has been renewed attention and increased efforts to ensure that classroom communities across the country are open to and supportive of a wide range of learner backgrounds and needs, particularly with regard to students who represent various minority positions. While it is difficult to pinpoint precise timing and reasoning for this momentum, much of the current dialogue promoting inclusive teaching policies, principles, and practices has positioned the issue as a human rights concern, equating one's ability to access quality educational programs and supports within those programs as an equity issue (e.g., Wise, 2011).

In the Canadian educational landscape, French as a second language (FSL) education programs are challenged to offer such access and supports. In particular, since the inception of French immersion¹ in the 1960s (Lambert & Tucker, 1972), FSL programs have developed a reputation as being less than receptive to students who struggle in the classroom, particularly if those challenges are linked to a language-based learning difficulty (LD). Since the 1970s and up to the early years of this millennium, several studies and publications have challenged and/or questioned whether students with LDs are good matches for the learning goals and teaching strategies in French immersion (e.g., Bruck, 1978; Mannavarayan, 2002; Trites & Price, 1976, 1977). Though other research in that same time period argued and offered support for the rights of students with LDs to enroll in French immersion programs (e.g., Cummins, 1983; Genesee, 2007; Wise & Chen, 2010), there is still a lot of active debate within the FSL teaching community about the inclusivity of its programs (Arnett, 2013b).

Arnett (2013a, 2013b) pointed out how the initial questions about the "suitability" of French immersion programming for students with language-related challenges quickly led to questions about the "suitability" of any FSL study for students whose learning profiles revealed more specific needs. While recent research has more actively argued for and demonstrated the potential for inclusion of students with diverse learning needs (both students with LDs and newcomer students to Canada who are learning English and French²) within the context of FSL classrooms (e.g., Arnett, 2010; Mady 2012a; Wise, 2011), the perpetuation of the questions about "appropriateness" of FSL study for certain learner populations points to a continued need to consider the question of inclusion within the context of FSL.

In addition to questioning the viability of FSL education for students with LDs as specified above, such questioning has extended to the Allophone population with similar results both within intensive programming and within core French³ FSL as a subject for one period a day. Mady (2007), for example, through interviews and questionnaires with school principals and guidance counsellors, revealed that no administrators insisted that Allophones fulfill the obligatory secondary FSL credit in core French. Immigrant parents confirmed exclusionary practices toward FSL, as they reported either discouragement or refusal to have their children in FSL programs (Mady, 2012b). Similarly, immigrant high

school graduates also shared experiences of exclusion having been questioned about their desires to be in intensive FSL programs and at times refused entry (Mady, 2012a).

It is evident from the above that school personnel impact the inclusion of certain student populations in FSL. Teachers are one such influential group. This particular case study turns its attention to individuals preparing to enter the field of FSL teaching, as it primarily considers the views of 15 teacher candidates reflecting on their experiences during their year of study in Bachelor of Education programs. These candidates were interviewed as a part of a larger study looking at the beliefs and experiences of FSL teacher candidates as they pertained to the inclusion of students with LDs and Allophone students within FSL programs. The larger study aimed to determine the views of those entering the profession, the degree to which their teacher education programs featured courses or coursework that addressed the needs of these learner populations and methods of inclusive teaching, and their perceptions of the experiences and knowledge bases that most influenced their views as teacher candidates.

Specifically, the present case study uses the lens of sociocultural theory (SCT) to consider the ways in which the teacher candidates were informed by “everyday” and “scientific” conceptions of inclusive teaching practices within the FSL context (Johnson, 1999, 2009); in other words, this study wanted to consider the extent to which the teacher candidates’ views about inclusive teaching within FSL were the result of experiences they had in the classroom and/or life (everyday) and/or the result of explicitly studied content within their teacher education program (scientific). The juxtaposition between these two contexts is often one of frustration, at least as revealed in some interviews with current teachers who have been asked about how they have been prepared to meet the demands of their classrooms (e.g., Arnett, 2013b). Specifically, this study sought to determine the answers to the following questions:

1. To what extent did the teacher candidates work with Allophone students and students with LDs in their teaching practica? How do these experiences correspond to their experiences in teacher education?
2. Of those candidates who report having access to scientific and everyday conceptions of these student populations during their teacher education experience, what are those conceptions and how do they align?

By considering these questions, the goal of this paper is to explore how the presence and/or absence of certain experiences in the teacher education program and in the FSL classroom can possibly shape the knowledge teacher candidates bring into the profession, possibly identifying changes than can or should be made to teacher education programs with FSL foci to better support their candidates.

Theoretical Framework

The creation, execution, analyses, and discussion of this study were informed by SCT in second language teacher education.

Sociocultural Theory and Second Language Teacher Education

According to SCT, learning is the result of ongoing, dynamic exchanges among individuals of varying skills and experiences, using diverse and numerous tools, in a range of activities (Swain, Kinnear, & Steinman, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978). For an individual to develop cognition, these exchanges must move from the external plane, where they are mediated among the involved parties, to the internal plane, where they are then regulated by the individual. The development of such cognition cannot be separated from the social, cultural, and historical contexts that have surrounded the interactions that led to this new knowledge; it is acknowledged in the sociocultural lens that new knowledge does not suddenly appear but rather, it is the product of carefully calibrated interactions (Swain et al., 2011). The role of the individual in the learning/development experience and the shifting nature of that role throughout the learning experience are also key concerns of SCT. As Johnson (2009) explained,

how an individual learns something, what is learned, and how it is used will depend on the sum of the individual's prior experiences, the sociocultural contexts in which the learning takes place, and what the individual wants, needs, and/or is expected to do with that knowledge. (p. 2)

Johnson (1999, 2009) has spearheaded the application of the principles of SCT, as originating with the works of Vygotsky (1978) and later refinements of Wertsch (e.g., 1991) and Lantolf (2000), to second language teacher education. In so doing, one of the goals has been to frame how teacher education, as a profession, has come to define the role of teachers, construct their work as a reflection of society's views, but then also acknowledge, because of their experiences as learners in a classroom setting, what teachers believe about teaching (Lortie, 1975). In marrying SCT with teacher education, Johnson (2009) considered Vygotsky's classification of concepts—*spontaneous everyday concepts*, *non-spontaneous everyday concepts*, *spontaneous scientific concepts*, and *non-spontaneous scientific concepts*—and how those concepts shape the understandings and actions of teachers. Both types of everyday concepts are linked to one's lived experiences. The concepts develop either as a result of being implicitly socialized into a particular group or explicitly instructed in how to carry out an action within a group and/or within a particular set of parameters (Johnson, 2009). Scientific concepts, too, implicate direct instruction from a more knowledgeable member to a less knowledgeable member of the group, but this genre differs from non-spontaneous everyday concepts in that the goal of learning these concepts is to extend the knowledge beyond settings and events of one's lived experiences; the goal is to be able to apply the ideas outside of the current context and set of circumstances (Johnson, 2009).

It could be argued that teacher candidates' knowledge of everyday concepts is at least a partial consequence of the apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975). As all teachers were, at one time, students, and thus had an opportunity to be socialized into a classroom community, what they have come to know about an element of the classroom—for example, lecture, cooperative learning (Johnson, 2009), homework, use of the first language in the classroom—has been first informed by their experiences as students. As it pertains to second language education, when teacher candidates enter programs to prepare them to become second language teachers, they already have a sense of what and how they

want to use language in their classrooms, because of their own experiences; they enter those programs with ideas about how languages are best learned, taught, and constructed (Freeman, 2002). Whether those concepts are spontaneous or non-spontaneous is not known, but teacher candidates begin their formal preparation with a working knowledge of numerous everyday concepts of teaching. The goal of teacher education, though, is to facilitate exploration of the scientific concepts of the profession.

The theoretical frameworks of teaching and learning and the research bases that inform them compose the scientific concepts of education (Johnson, 2009). Johnson's (2009) framework suggests that equipping new teachers with knowledge bases anchored to various theories and bodies of research about how knowledge is developed will help them make informed decisions later on about the methods they will use to deploy their knowledge. Yet, Borg (2001) has posited that teacher education may not be an influence on teacher beliefs and knowledge bases if the courses in teacher education programs are already presenting ideas that are congruent with the perspectives of the participants. Teacher candidates may discard or limit the influence of ideas that challenge what they already believe and/or know.

In the present study, part of the goal is to establish the extent to which presented scientific conceptions about particular learner populations align with any everyday conceptions made available to participants during their teacher education program. Johnson's (1999) framework presumes an alignment between teacher education and the classroom experience, but if such an alignment is not present, the beliefs and knowledge that new teachers then bring into the classroom could possibly be more limited than realized by those who may be hiring them.

Literature Review

To properly contextualize the research questions and analyses that inform this study, the literature review will consider the primary theme of teacher candidates' experiences with students whose backgrounds are different from their own. This research literature was considered the most apt for situating the need to consider teacher candidates' beliefs and/or knowledge about these two student populations.

Teacher Candidates' Experiences With Students From Different Backgrounds

The current demographics of the Canadian teaching corps and the Canadian student population point to noticeable differences in the two groups, differences that undoubtedly shape the context in which the learning interactions occur. First, since the 1980s, countries of Asia, as opposed to those countries of the British Commonwealth, have been the primary sources of newcomers to Canada, causing a continuous growth in the number of students in Canadian schools whose home language is neither English nor French (Statistics Canada, 2008). Currently, approximately 20% of the Canadian school-age population is identified as an Allophone (Statistics Canada, 2011). Second, in that same time period, there have been increases in the number of individuals in Canada who identify as having a disability that impacts their daily life (Statistics Canada, 2012). Within the school-age population, the proportion of students with disabilities has ranged from 6% to 14%, depending on the reporting body (e.g., Hutchinson & Martin, 2012; Jordan, 2007). Most children in schools who have received services for special education do so for a learning disability, accounting

for over 40% of the special education population (Hutchinson & Martin, 2012). Juxtaposed against these trends is the reality that white, middle-class females dominate in the field of teaching (Gambhir, Broad, Evans, & Gaskell, 2008; Gay, 2010; Statistics Canada, 2006). Though there are currently no statistics that disaggregate the language backgrounds and disability experiences of the national teaching corps, the data from our current study could be extrapolated to argue that the proportion of Allophones and individuals with disabilities within the teaching force is likely an under-representative of the general population.

Two studies, to our knowledge, have examined teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of Allophones in FSL. Using interviews and questionnaires with French immersion teachers, Mady (2011) found that teachers revealed that they limited access to French immersion for Allophone students. Conversely, with research with FSL teachers who taught within the core French program, Mady (2012b) found the teachers to be inclusive in terms of access as well as pedagogy. Few studies have considered the influence of differences in the teacher candidates' and students' ethnicities, a focus that we considered to be a potential parallel to linguistic differences. Certainly, differences in ethnicities do not necessarily engender differences in language backgrounds, but of all of the demographic traits that have been explored in research (e.g., gender, race, socioeconomics), this focus had the greatest probability for implying at least some differences in home languages. Garmon (2005) has found that when teacher candidates are directly instructed in their teacher education programs about how to best support the needs of culturally diverse students, the success rate is mixed; teacher candidates who are likely to experience changes in their beliefs as a result of their teacher education program tend to be more open to new ideas in experiences, have higher rates of self-awareness, and also demonstrate a more pronounced commitment to the principles of social justice, which are relevant to promoting inclusive teaching practices. In an earlier study, Garmon (2004) discovered that those teacher candidates who were most receptive to teaching students from backgrounds different from theirs shared two key traits: they had previous, positive experiences working with individuals from different backgrounds and/or had traveled to other regions of the world and interacted with different groups. Yet, it is worth mentioning that analyses of the larger data set informing the current study that are currently in preparation revealed that the FSL teacher candidates' beliefs and views toward Allophone students may not align with the findings of Garmon (2004, 2005) for a basic reason. By nature of their selected teaching field and the paths they followed to achieve their career goals, all of the participants self-identified as multilingual; this identification could perhaps be responsible for their general reported openness to Allophone students in FSL classrooms.

Again, since the 1980s, there has been an ongoing line of research that has considered teachers' beliefs, perspectives, attitudes, and practices toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular education classroom (e.g., Cook, 2004; Friend & Bursuck, 2009; Jordan, Lindsay, & Stanovich, 1997). Some of this research has considered the work of those preparing to teach in the North American context as well (e.g., Hutchinson & Martin, 1999; McCray & McHatton, 2011; Swain, Nordness, & Leader-Janssen, 2012). Swain et al. (2012) discovered that teacher candidates who, for teacher certification, were required to take a special education course that included a field experience component had more positive views of inclusion than teacher candidates who did not have such opportunities. In other words, teacher candidates who were afforded both scientific and everyday conceptions of the educational needs of students with disabilities

felt more prepared to work with this student population in their own classrooms. Yet, despite the reality that classroom teachers will need to respond to the needs of students with disabilities in their classes, it is still the case that many teacher candidates do not complete coursework in their teacher education programs focused on students with disabilities (Burge, Ouellette-Kuntz, Hutchinson, & Box, 2008; Rojewski & Pollard, 1993).

Case studies by Arnett (2003, 2010) of two FSL classroom teachers who had been identified as “inclusive” in their practice revealed that both had engaged in pre-service and in-service opportunities to add to their understanding of this learner population; neither teacher had been required to pursue such classes, but both did so out of their own interest in responding to student needs. The current study appears to be the first, though, to endeavour to capture the experiences of FSL teacher candidates with coursework and practica that consider (or not) the learning needs of students with disabilities.

Methods

Participants

The 15 teacher candidates who participated in the semistructured interviews that inform this study were solicited from a larger, two-stage questionnaire study which bookended their Bachelor of Education (BEd) year; the larger participant pool was created through the electronic distribution of letters of invitation to various FSL teacher education programs across Canada. At the conclusion of the post questionnaire in April, respondents were asked if they would consider being interviewed about their experiences. We were able to arrange interviews with all 15 participants who had expressed such willingness. The phone interviews occurred in the following months, either at or immediately following the conclusion of the participants’ BEd programs, and were administered by a research assistant trained by the first author.

More detailed summaries of the demographic backgrounds of the participants who completed both questionnaires can be found in Arnett, Mady, and Muilenburg (2014), which were completed by 78 and 46 participants, respectively. Demographic details for the present study are provided in Table 1. Of the total number of interviewees, 80% (12/15) were female, which was a slightly lower participation rate for women than that of the larger study (just under 90%). One of the participants reported speaking a language other than English or French (German), but it was unclear if it was a home language, while another (Participant 13) disclosed that she learned English and French after coming to Canada as a child. No participants reported having an LD or a family member with an LD. Thus, it appeared that the majority of the teacher candidates did not bring formed everyday conceptions of the needs of Allophone students or students with LDs to their work in the classroom.

The provinces and regions of the teacher education programs in this study did reflect that of the larger study, but there was a deviation in the representation of the teaching contexts in the current study. In the larger study, the majority of the participants had worked exclusively in core French, but in this study, there were only five such participants. Seven participants worked exclusively in French immersion, and two worked in both core French and French immersion. Thus, most of the participants in this study gained experience in immersion classrooms, the context that has historically been the site of most debate about the presence of students with more specialized learning needs. The

participants will be described as being “from” a particular province throughout the paper. The description is used to indicate the province where the participants completed their teacher education program, including the practicum; it does not refer to their province of origin.

Table 1
Demographic Details of Participants

<u>Interviewee</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Home Language</u>	<u>Province of teacher education program</u>	<u>FSL program in practicum</u>
1	F	English	Ontario	Immersion
2	F	English	Ontario	Core
3	F	English	British Columbia	Intensive
4	F	English	British Columbia	Immersion
5	M	English	Ontario	Immersion & Core
6	F	French	Prince Edward Island	Immersion
7	F	English	Ontario	Immersion
8	F	English	British Columbia	Immersion & Core
9	M	English	Manitoba	Core
10	F	English	Prince Edward Island	Immersion
11	F	English	British Columbia	Immersion
12	F	English	British Columbia	Core
13	F	English	Ontario	Core
14	M	English	Manitoba	Core
15	F	English	British Columbia	Immersion

Instrument

The initial semistructured interview protocol⁴ consisted of 28 questions, with 13 focused on Allophone students (referred to as English Language Learners or ELLs in the interview) and 15 focused on students with LDs. The protocol was developed to extend upon details solicited from the questionnaire, to enable the participants to provide narrative accounts of their experiences in the practicum classroom, their experiences in their teacher education program, and their personal views; few demographic details were sought during this interview. Largely, the questions about Allophone students and students with LDs paralleled each other, but there were some differences in the latter part to facilitate discussion of specialized education plans for students with LDs. The interviews lasted between 20 and 40 minutes, depending on the interviewee.

Data Analysis

For the purpose of this paper, the analysis first focused on questions and statements that initially helped to define the participants' experiences in their teacher education programs and practica, then considered, through traditional two-step qualitative interview coding, the everyday and scientific conceptions of the participants (e.g., Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

The transcripts were analysed manually due to the small data set. Though specific questions in the interview protocol asked teacher candidates about their experiences in both

teacher education and their practica, the interviews were analysed to locate the actual conceptions formed by the participants. These responses were typically marked by expressions like “my belief,” or “I found,” “I learned,” “I believe.” “I think” sometimes conveyed hypothetical responses, and other times, responses linked to experiences they had. The first step of the coding was to identify the conception; the second step was to classify the conception as everyday or scientific. Though Johnson (2009) further classified everyday and scientific conceptions according to their spontaneity, the size of the data set as singular interviews with each participant prevented such a pattern from being discerned.

Results

The results section is organized according to the research questions.

Teacher Candidates' Experiences in Teacher Education and in Practica

To establish a baseline, Table 2 presents an overview of participants' initial responses to questions about the presence of Allophone students and students with LDs in their practica and about content featured in their FSL methodology classes about these two student populations.

Table 2

Participants' Experiences in Practica and Methods Classes with Allophone Students and Students With Learning Difficulties

<u>Interviewee</u>	<u>Experience with Allophones in practicum?</u>	<u>Allophones as explicit topic in FSL Methodology?</u>	<u>Experience with students with LDs in practicum?</u>	<u>Students with LDs as explicit topic in FSL Methodology?</u>
1	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	Yes	No	Yes	No
3	Yes	No	Yes	No
4	Yes	No	No	No
5	No	No	Yes	No
6	No	No	Yes	No
7	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
8	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
9	Yes	No	Maybe	No
10	No	No	Yes	No
11	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
12	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
13	No	No	Yes	No
14	Yes	No	Yes	No
15	Yes	No	No	No

As Table 2 reveals, all of the interviewees worked with members of at least one of these student populations during their practica. Nine interviewees worked with Allophone

students, and 12 interviewees gained experience working with students with LDs. Six of the 15 participants had students from both groups in their practicum experiences. One of the participants was unsure as to whether he had students with LDs because his supervising teacher would not disclose one way or the other if the students who required extra help had an LD, but did report working with Allophones.

Further, seven interviewees (46%) who reported working with Allophone students in their practica also reported that their teacher education program did not offer any information about Allophone students in FSL. Two of the 15 (13.3%) participants reported both teacher education and practicum experience with Allophone students, another two reported that their teacher education program presented information about Allophones in FSL, but did not work with any Allophone students during their practica, and the remaining four interviewees reported having no Allophone students in their practica and no mention of these students in their FSL methodology classes. Thus, for the teacher candidates who did work with Allophone students during their practicum, the vast majority (7/9 or 78%) could not access any scientific knowledge about these students and their learning needs to support the work in the practicum, thus revealing a disconnect between the content of their teacher education program and the classroom reality in most cases. It should be noted that none of the participants offered any information to indicate that Allophone students were mentioned in other courses in their teacher education program.

When considering the participants' experiences with students with LDs, the results are somewhat similar. Three of the 12 (25%) participants who had students with LDs in their practica reported learning about this student population in their FSL methodology courses; the other nine (75%) had no knowledge of students with LDs from their teacher education program. The remaining three participants, one of whom is the participant who was not sure if he taught students with LDs, all reported not learning about this student population in their FSL methodology course. However, two participants (both from Prince Edward Island) who said that students with LDs were not a topic in FSL methodology but did have these students in their practicum reported taking other courses in their teacher education program that taught them about these students and their learning needs.

When considering the information presented in Table 1 and Table 2, some other trends emerge. Allophone students and students with LDs were reported as being in all of the FSL contexts in which the participants worked. Two participants (1, 11) who only worked in French immersion reported having Allophones, and five (1, 6, 7, 10, 11) reported working with students who had LDs. The one participant (3) who worked in intensive French⁵ had both students with LD and students who were Allophones. Four of the five participants who worked in core French (2, 9, 12, 14) reported working with Allophone students, and another group of four in that same context (2, 12, 13, 14) reported working with students with LDs. Also, the participants who reported taking FSL methods courses that considered Allophones (1, 7, 11, 12) mostly worked in immersion (three of the four), which was also the case for the three participants who reported learning about students with LDs in their methods courses (two of the three). At minimum, these results convey that FSL teacher education programs should recognize a need to consider these two student populations and their learning needs across all FSL education contexts.

Everyday and Scientific Conceptions of Targeted Student Populations

As revealed through Table 2, most of the participants in the study were positioned to gather more everyday conceptions of the learning needs of Allophone students and students with LDs during their practica than draw on scientific conceptions gleaned from their FSL teacher education program. Nine of the participants (2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15) taught Allophone students, but only two of them (11, 12) actually had some coursework on these students in their program. Twelve participants (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14) reported working with students with LDs, but only three of them (1, 7, 8) had learned about these students and their learning needs in their FSL methodology classes.

The responses from Participants 11 and 12, and 1, 7, and 8 will inform the response to research question 2. These five unique participants reported access to both scientific and everyday conceptions of the two student populations (Allophone students and students with LDs, respectively). First, the responses of Participants 11 and 12 about Allophone students are considered. Both are from British Columbia, and Participant 11 worked in an immersion classroom, while Participant 12 worked in a core French classroom.

Conceptions of Allophone students.

Scientific.

During the interview, both participants were asked directly to describe how their FSL methodology course prepared them to work with Allophone students. Both of them mentioned research in their responses that seemed to consider the possibilities and/or potential of multilingual development. Participant 11 shared:

They gave me a lot of ways that I'm holding strong in this interview right now that ELL students should definitely be a part of it, and they shouldn't be exempt unless there's other disabilities that they have that exempt them for different reasons despite the fact that they're ELL. They're adamant about the fact that it puts them on a better stage, it puts the ELL students on a better stage to learn French comparatively to the other students due to the fact that they've already learned the skills and the processes behind learning another language.

Participant 12's response was shorter, but echoed that of Participant 11, in its focus of learning French as an additional language, rather than as a second language:

Yeah, we discussed it and I did research on the difference between FSL like as a second language, or French as a third language or a fourth language, so we discussed during the research and stuff in the methodology class.

Neither participant reported learning any methods or strategies specific to the experience of teaching Allophones in the FSL classroom during their FSL methods courses, just that research indicated that additional language development was a possibility; the response to this question was the only one to reveal scientific conceptions of Allophone students.

Everyday.

Participant 11 mentioned her experiences when she was asked to compare Allophone students in her FSL class with the rest of the class, and she shared, “they learn [French] easier from my experience,” an observation that technically corroborates the scientific conception presented in her FSL methodology class. Further, when asked to describe the kind of supports Allophone students needed in class, she also appeared to reference, because of her use of “I find” to open the response, her classroom experience in the practicum:

I find the adaptations are the same as with kids that are struggling for different types of issues, that are a little bit behind the other students, and these adaptations would be doing less work, or less wide spread work, or, I mean, you know, instead of answering six questions they would answer three, or something like that just because the process is just so much more of a struggle for them, so it takes them not as much time as the other students.

For Participant 12, her everyday conceptions of Allophone students appeared in only one response, and it was to a question different from those where Participant 11 shared her everyday conceptions. When asked about exempting an Allophone student from FSL, a practice that has been known to occur (Mady, 2007), she drew on her experience. Further, in this response, we found the only evidence of conflict between scientific and everyday conceptions for her:

Right now there are three of my ELLs are not participating, I’m not sure if I agree with that but they’re being taken out and getting language arts help at that time, so the decision was made that they have to improve their English first so I agree with the system I guess, with how it’s working.

As revealed above in the paper, Participant 12 reported learning about how Allophone students were capable of learning French while also learning English, and it is possible the conflicts expressed in this response are because of that knowledge.

In sum, both Participant 11 and 12 conveyed limited scientific and everyday conceptions of Allophone students in FSL. Largely, their conceptions focused on the ability of Allophone students to navigate learning French in addition to learning English.

Conceptions of students with learning difficulties.

Participants 1, 7, and 8 were the only three participants of the group of 15 who reported both learning about students with LDs in their FSL methodology classes and worked with these students during the practicum experience. Participants 1 and 7 exclusively worked in French immersion and both attended programs and completed practica in Ontario, while Participant 8 worked in both core and immersion classes and was attending a program in British Columbia.

Scientific.

During the interview, all three participants were asked directly to describe how their FSL methodology course prepared them to work with students with LDs in FSL.

Participant 1's response to the question actually alluded to her response about working with Allophone students in FSL: "A similar answer to my last answer, I think just sort of by giving me readings and research and talking about how kids with LDs benefit." She made no mention of teaching strategies or supports shared in class. Participant 7 reported, "I think more my methods class did, oh, it gave me a variety of different activities that I could do and then also provided me with the modification that I can do for students who need extra help." Like Participant 7, Participant 8 appeared to be given scientific conceptions of teaching practices for working with this student population:

We had, what did we do, we had presentations in my methodology course which dealt with challenges within teaching FSL, and we had a whole week focused on teaching children with learning and other disabilities in the French classroom. Reading the articles and hearing the presenters was, if nothing else, gave a lot of ideas about how you can adapt or deal with that issue when it comes up in your classroom.

Whereas Participants 11 and 12 reported learning about the potential and benefits of FSL study for Allophone students, only Participant 1 reported learning something similar for students with LDs. However, Participants 7 and 8 reported access to scientific conceptions of teaching practices for both student populations. In no other parts of the interview did Participants 1, 7, and 8 report any other scientific conceptions about this particular student population in FSL.

Everyday.

When Participant 1 revealed that she had students with LDs in her FSL class, she was asked to describe the experience. Her response revealed some concerns and laments, and toward the end, she appeared to convey that she did not have the knowledge base she felt she needed:

Well, I think that if a kid has an IEP that says they need such and such you should give them that, and I didn't notice anything. I read their IEPs about halfway through my practicum, and I was like "Oh, all of this stuff, which I haven't noticed any time." And I also felt like I didn't know quite what to do. Like, I felt like I should be accommodating for them and I didn't know how and I felt like I didn't have a lot of leadership in that particular area.

Thus in this instance, it appears that in gaining access to an everyday conception, Participant 1 felt that a scientific conception of the supports was needed, and as revealed earlier, such scientific conceptions were not offered during her teacher education experience.

Early in the interview, Participant 7 had disclosed she had one student with an identified LD in her French immersion class. Though generalisations based on a unique

student are not necessarily sound, this student often became a touchstone in her response to the interview questions, sometimes then revealing an everyday conception. First, when she was asked to describe what FSL context (core or immersion) she considered to be best for students with LDs, she immediately thought of her student:

Let's see, immersion was fine, he was doing fine in immersion. I think because, once again, because they're immersed in that language they just have the extra time that it takes to work on the content and to overcome that disability. Because that's all he needed, it was the extra time and because they're putting in so much extra time in the immersion context it was really good for him.

Genesee (2007) has argued that immersion is often the best context for students with language-based LDs for similar reasons, but as Participant 7 revealed, none of the scientific conceptions presented in her methodology class appeared to address this idea. Next, when asked to describe what she observed about how the classroom teacher (her associate teacher) worked with this particular student, Participant 7 revealed an awareness of how students with LDs may not be presented with opportunities to do well because of preconceptions about their potential:

[My associate teacher] often had him buddied up with someone else, one of the stronger students, so that he was still able to do the work, but he had someone else help him. Whereas the [resource/support] teacher really just kind of told him, "oh don't worry, if you can't do it I'll just give you the answers later," which wasn't the way to go about it, but, I could see the difference between the two ways of teaching.

Participant 8 pointed to developing an everyday conception of students with LDs when asked about what she observed in her students as they reacted to a classmate with an LD:

I think because I teach grade 6/7, so they're at an age where they are starting to realize their own abilities and challenges so when they realize their own they also realize in comparison to their peers. So, I know that with group projects, the other children don't tend to necessarily want to work with the children with LDs.

Social difficulties for many students with LDs have been regularly noted (e.g., see Hutchinson & Martin, 2012, for an overview of some of this literature), so Participant 8's observation aligns with what has been revealed in research. However, based on what was shared during the interview, Participant 8 likely was not aware of this research. Otherwise, Participant 8's interview did not reveal any other everyday conceptions.

In the case of all three of the participants in this subset, they had either been provided with scientific conceptions that did not necessarily align with what emerged in their classrooms, or they developed everyday conceptions in their practice that could have been supported by scientific conceptions that were not a part of their teacher education experience.

Discussion and Conclusion

With such a small corpus of data, generalisations are not possible, but as this study is the first to apparently capture the scope of the types of learning needs in a variety of FSL educational contexts across Canada, and possible disconnects between teacher education curricula and classroom teaching needs, the initial contribution of this research is to inspire additional inquiries into these issues to enable more robust findings. At minimum, the response to the first research question reveals that all FSL programs in Canada have evidence of different learning needs arising from students with LDs and other special education needs and students who are Allophones; such a finding is particularly telling for the immersion context, which has often been perceived as only teaching the strongest students who posed no academic needs because of a difficulty. The response to the first research question reveals, also, that many candidates in FSL are not necessarily learning about these two particular student populations during teacher education, despite the reality of their classrooms.

As it pertains to the second research question, it is certainly possible that the limited breadth and depth of the conceptions conveyed by the participants is typical for individuals at this particular point in their teaching career. However, more data, across more contexts, need to be captured to determine if this scope is “typical.” Further, it seems that opportunities may have been missed to alert teacher candidates to already known research about students with LDs—not necessarily in FSL—that could help them frame some of the experiences they have in practica, should they encounter these two student populations.

In closing, it is a common refrain in education that the “ivory tower” represented by academia and teacher education is often disconnected from the realities of the classroom. The present study, in its limited data set, appears to corroborate that anecdote, and in so doing, possibly issues a challenge to FSL teacher education to address this misalignment.

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Notes

¹ French immersion programs offer students an opportunity to learn French as an additional language by being instructed grade level content in French. Teachers work to support the French language development through specialized teaching.

² The newcomer students learning both French and English will be referred to as *Allophones* for the duration of this paper.

³ Core French programs are structured to teach French language at a single point in the day, or several days out of the week, for anywhere from 20 minutes to 70 minutes. Communicative competency in the language, rather than content knowledge, is the focus.

⁴ For more information about the protocol, contact the authors at calliem@nipissing.ca or kearnett@smcm.edu.

⁵ Intensive French, developed in Newfoundland, offers students, usually in either Grade 5 or Grade 6, a 5-month intensive period of literacy-based instruction entirely in French, followed by a pacing structure similar to core French. Intensive French also has a very specific method of instruction.

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