

French Immersion Teachers' Experiences with the Factors that Influence Student Attrition

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Abstract

This instrumental qualitative case study sought to explore the experiences of four Ontario elementary French immersion teachers with the factors that influence elementary student attrition, where French is the minority language. The study used the social constructivist approach to learning and development (Vygotsky, 1978), as well as the principles of interaction and continuity in experience (Dewey, 1971), to show that experience shapes learning within a social context. The three research questions that guided this study were: 1) According to a group of Ontario elementary French immersion teachers, what academic and social factors influence student attrition from French immersion?; 2) How are this group of teachers' current teaching practices affected by their previous experiences with the academic and social factors that influence student attrition in French immersion, by their personal and professional learning experiences, as well as by their social context?; and 3) How might these teachers encourage students to stay in or leave French immersion? Two semi-structured individual interviews with each of the four participants were conducted. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for coding and analysis. Results suggest that academic and social factors influence student attrition, that the teachers regularly change their teaching approaches and strategies to address student attrition and to help their students learn French, and that the teachers have experience encouraging students to stay in and leave French immersion. The findings of the present study contribute to the literature on French immersion teachers' experiences with the factors that influence student attrition.

Keywords: French immersion, teacher experience, student attrition

Résumé

Cette étude de cas qualitative et instrumentale avait pour objectif d'explorer les expériences de quatre enseignantes d'immersion française de l'élémentaire en Ontario par rapport aux facteurs qui influencent le retrait scolaire des élèves au sein de ce programme de l'élémentaire dans un contexte où le français est la langue minoritaire. Cette étude se fonde sur la perspective socioconstructiviste de l'apprentissage et du développement (Vygotsky, 1978), ainsi que sur les principes d'interaction et de continuité de l'expérience (Dewey, 1971), pour démontrer que l'expérience contribue à l'apprentissage dans un contexte social. Les trois questions de recherche qui ont guidé cette étude sont : 1) Selon un groupe d'enseignantes d'immersion française en Ontario, quels sont les facteurs académiques et sociaux qui influencent le retrait scolaire des élèves en immersion française? 2) Comment les pratiques d'enseignement de ces enseignantes se transforment-elles en fonction de leurs expériences antérieures avec les facteurs académiques et sociaux qui influencent le retrait scolaire des élèves en immersion française, de leurs expériences personnelles et professionnelles en tant qu'apprenantes et en fonction de leur contexte social? et 3) Comment est-ce que ces enseignantes encouragent-elles les élèves à rester en immersion française ou à quitter ce programme? Deux entretiens individuels semi-structurés ont été menés avec chacune des participantes. Les entretiens ont été enregistrés et transcrits, codés et analysés. Les résultats suggèrent que les facteurs académiques et sociaux influencent le retrait scolaire des élèves en immersion française, que les enseignantes changent régulièrement leurs approches et leurs stratégies d'enseignement pour atténuer le retrait scolaire et aider les élèves à apprendre le français, et finalement que ces enseignantes ont encouragé certains à rester en immersion française et amener d'autres à quitter ce programme. Ces données contribuent au domaine de

connaissances lié à l'expérience des enseignantes d'immersion française en ce qui concerne le retrait scolaire d'élèves d'immersion française.

Mots clés : immersion française, expérience enseignante, retrait scolaire

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Acronyms

ACPI / CAIT	Association canadienne des professeurs d'immersion / Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers
CASLT	Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers
CÉGEP	Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel
CMEC	Council of Ministers of Education, Canada
CPF	Canadian Parents for French
ESL	English as a second language
ESOL	English as a second official language
FSL	French as a second language
FSOL	French as a second official language
IEP	Individual Education Plan
OMLTA / AOPLV	Ontario Modern Language Teachers' Association / Association ontarienne des professeurs de langues vivantes
ZPD	Zone of proximal development

List of Terms

Accommodation A requirement that outlines a student's need for a specific tool, such as a laptop for writing or computer software for visually-impaired students, that helps the student achieve normal curricular expectations.

Additional Qualifications Supplementary professional development courses that Ontario teachers can take to expand their knowledge and enhance their portfolio. Examples of courses include Environmental Education, Special Education, and Language and Speech (Ontario College of Teachers, 2015).

CÉGEP *Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel* – A college program available only in the province of Quebec, Canada, in which students earn a diploma of college studies. It takes two years for a pre-university program, and three years for a technical program. It has a professional component that is similar to Ontario colleges.

FSL French as a Second Language – a type of additional language instruction where French is learned in school as an additional language by non-native French speakers, as opposed to French as a foreign language. In Canada, FSL comprises three different streams, which are available depending on the school board:

French immersion French is the language of instruction for at least 50% of school subjects; in Ontario, it is an optional stream of FSL instruction for English public and Catholic school boards;

Extended French French is the language of instruction of French language arts and one or two other subjects; all other subjects are taught in English; in Ontario, it is an optional stream of FSL instruction for English public and Catholic school boards; and

Core French French language arts is one subject that is taught alongside all other subjects, which are all taught in English; in Ontario, it is the minimum FSL stream that English public and Catholic school boards must offer in order for students to meet FSL curricular expectations; it is obligatory starting in Grade 4.

IEP Individual Education Plan – According to the Ministry of Education (2008), this document is a written plan describing the special education program and/or services required by a particular student. It identifies learning expectations that are modified from or alternative to the expectations given in the curriculum policy document for the appropriate grade and subject or course, and/or any accommodations and special education services needed to assist the student in achieving his or her learning expectations. (para. 5)

Modification A requirement that outlines which curricular expectations the student must and can meet; for example, the student might do oral reports instead of written reports, or write five sentences instead of ten sentences in an assignment.

List of Terms (continued)

NVivo Qualitative research software developed by QSR International Pty Ltd. which is used for qualitative data coding and analysis.

Parent In this project, the term *parent* refers to a parent, guardian or other caretaker of a child who is involved in the child's education and makes decisions regarding the child's schooling.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Description of the Problem

Geopolitical and geolinguistic context of Canada. English and French are the official languages of Canada (*Official Languages Act*, 1988). English is the majority language in most regions, while French is the minority language. This is true across the country, except in the province of Quebec, where French is the majority language and English is the minority language (Statistics Canada, 2013). The majority and minority statuses of English and French across the country lead to issues regarding the rights and privileges related to Canadians' access to education in the two official languages.

Within this sociolinguistic context, the Parliament of Canada passed the Official Languages Act in 1969 in part to address and protect English- and French-speaking Canadians' right to access federal government services in the official language of their choice. Later revised in 1988, the Act sought to "ensure respect for English and French as the official languages of Canada and ensure equality of status and equal rights and privileges as to their use in all federal institutions" (*Official Languages Act*, Section II, 1988). Moreover, the Act looked to "support the development of English and French linguistic minority communities and generally advance the equality of status and use of the English and French languages" across the country (*Official Languages Act*, Section II, 1988).

In addition to the Official Languages Act, part of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) also protects Canadians' language rights. In particular, Section XXIII of the Charter described the rights of linguistic minority communities, confirming they "have the right to have their children receive primary and secondary school instruction" in English or French, depending

on the parents' first language or language of primary school education where it is the minority language of the province and "where numbers warrant." Moreover, Section XXIII "of the Charter requires provincial governments to provide education to Canadians in the official language of their choice, even in areas where a minority of residents speak that language" (Canadian Heritage, n.d., para. 4). Also regarding languages and education, Section XLIII of the Official Languages Act outlined that the Minister of Canadian Heritage "shall ... advance the equality of status and use of English and French ... and ... provide opportunities for members of English or French linguistic minority communities to be educated in their own language" (*Official Languages Act*, 1988). The Official Languages Act and Section XXIII of the Charter enshrined Canadians' right to education in the official language of their choice, whether as a majority or a minority language.

In addition, as a way to fulfill its obligations regarding Canadians' language and education rights, "the federal government made a commitment to provide partial funding for minority-language education and second-language instruction across the country" soon after the initial passing of the Official Languages Act (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada [CMEC], n.d., para. 2). Moreover, the federal government made sure that the "funding was dedicated ... to the implementation of new programs to encourage individuals to learn both official languages" (CMEC, n.d.). To that end, the Government of Canada and CMEC signed funding protocols for second- and minority-language education programs for the provinces and territories. Under the current Protocol for Agreements for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction, signed in August, 2013, the Government of Canada is "provid[ing] the provinces and territories with \$1,297,791,385 between 2013-14 and 2017-18" (CMEC, n.d.; see also Government of Canada & CMEC, n.d.).

Considering the federal government's commitment to protect both official languages, one may wonder about the ways these measures have materialized at the provincial level, and particularly in the country's most populous province: Ontario (Statistics Canada, 2014).

Geopolitical and geolinguistic context of Ontario. In the province of Ontario, English is the sole official language (Government of Ontario, 2015). As the official language, English is also the majority language of the province; however, Ontario has many Francophone communities located primarily in its eastern and northern regions (Government of Ontario, 2015). As a way to recognize these communities, the French Language Services Act (1990), also known as Law 8, protects Ontario Francophones' right to access provincial government services, while the Education Act (1990), under Part XII, Sections 290 and 291, ensures Ontario Francophones' right to French-language education. As such, there are French-language educational units and schools across Ontario. Of Ontario's 2,031,195 students in 2012-2013, 98,697 students were enrolled in the province's French-language schools (Ministry of Education, 2014c). That is, most students in Ontario go to an English-language school, thereby being educated and living in the language of the provincial majority. Regarding the federal government's obligations to funding education in Ontario, the current Protocol for Agreements for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction allotted \$79,083,312 annually to Ontario between 2013-14 and 2017-18 to fund second- and minority-language education programs in that province (Government of Canada & CMEC, n.d., p. 10).

This overview reveals that a diversity of measures has been taken at the federal and provincial levels to protect Canadians' access to education in the two official languages, and ensure that students at the primary, secondary, and postsecondary levels, as well as in other second- and minority-language education programs, can learn and use one or both of English and

French, whether as a majority, a minority, or a second language in Canada, as well as in Ontario. The following section will focus on French immersion, which is a French as a second language program that has received much praise over the years as being an effective way to teach French to students who do not speak it at home (Association canadienne des professeurs d'immersion/Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers [ACPI/CAIT], 2012; Cummins, 1983).

French immersion in Canada and Ontario. French immersion began in 1965 as a result of the demands of a group of Anglophone parents in St. Lambert, Quebec, who wanted their children to experience immersion in the French language and to learn the language of the provincial majority well (Fraser, 2011; Rebuffot, 1993). This occurred in light of the political climate at the time in Quebec, during the Quiet Revolution¹, so as to better integrate with the linguistic majority of the province. In the ensuing years, the French immersion model of French as a second language (FSL) instruction spread across Canada and the world because it was considered an effective way to teach a minority language to a majority-language population (Cummins, 1983; Johnson & Swain, 1997). As such, it is mostly taught in environments where French is a minority language, which is quite different from its initial geopolitical and geolinguistic context.

As Quiring (2008) noted, French immersion spread across Canada so readily for a few reasons, such as academics' positive reviews of it, parents' acceptance of it as an effective FSL model, and a strong political will in Canada that wished "to promote understanding between the two dominant cultures" of French and English (p. 38). Additionally, as Cummins (1983) argued:

French immersion programs have spread extremely rapidly across Canada, not so much

¹ The Quiet Revolution was a period of time in the 1960s in Quebec during which the province experienced significant political and social, as well as educational and economic, change (Dunn & West, 2011; Durocher, 2013).

because they have succeeded in transmitting high levels of French proficiency to students at no cost to other academic skills, but because they have been *seen* to have succeeded (p. 118).

It has been 50 years since the inception of French immersion education. A recent report highlighted FSL enrollment trends across Canada from 2008-2009 to 2012-2013 (Canadian Parents for French [CPF], n.d.-f). Table 1 illustrates these statistics; the numbers are from CPF (n.d.-f, p. 3)^{2,3}.

Table 1

Recent FSL Enrollment Statistics Across Canada

Year	FSL Enrollment					
	French Immersion ⁴		Core French ⁵		FSL Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
2008-2009	327,309	8.4	1,493,420	38.3	1,813,627	46.5
2009-2010	337,488	8.7	1,487,331	38.3	1,819,353	46.9
2010-2011	352,108	9.1	1,464,755	37.8	1,810,707	46.8
2011-2012	363,316	9.5	1,437,276	37.7	1,800,592	47.3
2012-2013	377,838	9.9	1,412,267	37.2	1,790,106	47.1

Table 1 shows that, in 2012-2013, 1,790,106 students across Canada, or 47.1% of students, were enrolled in FSL (CPF, n.d.-f, p. 3). Moreover, the table indicates that 377,838 students, or 9.9% of students in Canada, were enrolled in French immersion in the same year (CPF, n.d.-f, p. 3). The latter number reflects the steady increase in enrollment in that program across Canada from 2008-2009 to 2012-2013, with 327,309 students, or 8.4% of students in it (CPF, n.d.-f, p. 3).

As for Ontario, Table 2 illustrates the most recent FSL enrollment statistics in that province's elementary and secondary schools in 2012-2013. The numbers are from the Ministry

² The report does not distinguish between elementary and secondary school enrollment.

³ These numbers exclude data from Yukon, which was unavailable (CPF, n.d., p. 3).

⁴ 'French immersion' includes all French immersion programs available across Canada (CPF, n.d., p. 3).

⁵ 'Core French' includes Extended French and all core French programs available across Canada (CPF, n.d., p. 3).

of Education (2014c, p. 8). Notably, there were 174,895 students enrolled in French immersion in that year (Ministry of Education, 2014c, p. 8; see also CPF, n.d.-f). This is by far the highest enrollment of French immersion students of any province or territory (CPF, n.d.-f, p. 3).

Despite this success for the province of Ontario, Table 2 shows a sharp drop in FSL enrollment between elementary and secondary school for all three streams in 2012-2013.

Table 2

FSL Enrollment Statistics in Ontario in 2012-2013

FSL Stream	School Level		Total
	Elementary	Secondary	
Immersion	150,687	24,208	174,895
Extended	22,477	9,553	32,030
Core	640,784	124,499	765,283
Total	813,948	158,260	972,208

The sections that follow present research on some successes and challenges of French immersion education, improvements to FSL, and French immersion attrition trends.

French immersion successes and challenges. According to the research, French immersion students tend to outperform their counterparts in other FSL streams on certain skill tests and have strong language proficiency skills (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007a; Genesee, n.d.). However, despite reports of its successes, French immersion has been subject to criticism, including perceptions of its elitism and exclusivity (Hammerly, 1989; Hutchins, 2015). In addition to these criticisms, another pressing challenge facing French immersion is the trend of student attrition (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007a; Ministry of Education, 2013a; Stauble, Cruden, & Gormley, 2012).

Indeed, the Ministry of Education (2013a) of Ontario has recognized the need to increase FSL student retention to ensure students can benefit from it as much and as long as possible.

Along similar lines, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013b) contended that students should have “the opportunity” to stay in their initial FSL stream until the end of elementary school (p. 16). As Stauble, Cruden, and Gormley (2012) claimed, “[e]ffective retention strategies are required to retain” students in their original FSL stream in order to promote their success as FSL learners (Stauble, Cruden, & Gormley, 2012, p. 1). However, as the authors stated, only about a third of a Grade 1 French immersion cohort will graduate from secondary school still enrolled in it (Stauble, Cruden, & Gormley, 2012). This demonstrates that attrition between elementary and secondary school is problematic not just generally in FSL, but also for French immersion in particular, and leads to questions regarding how to address the issue.

FSL education improvements. As a way to improve FSL education in Ontario, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013a) published a *Framework* to strengthen and enhance all streams of FSL education in that province, thereby demonstrating that it recognized the need for improvements. The *Framework* provided school boards, schools, and teachers with guidelines on how to enhance teaching in FSL (Ministry of Education, 2013a). According to the *Framework*, these aforementioned stakeholders should strive to achieve its three goals:

1. Increase FSL students’ “confidence, proficiency, and achievement;”
2. Increase the number of students who stay in FSL until they graduate from secondary school; and
3. Increase engagement of parents, students, teachers, and the community in FSL (Ministry of Education, 2013a, p. 9).

The second goal, which was to increase the number of students who remain in FSL until graduation from secondary school, directly addressed the issue of student attrition from core

French, Extended French, and French immersion in Ontario (Ministry of Education, 2013a), and is, in part, the focus of the present study.

In addition to the *Framework*, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013b) released the most recent version of the elementary FSL curriculum⁶. The new curriculum shares the *Framework's* goals and visions for the future of FSL education in Ontario (Ministry of Education, 2013b). With respect to FSL student retention, the new curriculum recommended that students stay in their initial FSL program until the end of elementary school to “advance through an organized sequence of learning experiences that permits a steady accumulation of knowledge and skills” (Ministry of Education, 2013b, p. 16). Moreover, the design of the elementary FSL curriculum “prepare[s] students for success in the corresponding program at the secondary level,” suggesting that students should remain in their initial FSL program through to secondary school (Ministry of Education, 2013b, p. 16).

What is more, because teachers are on the front lines of education, they have an important impact on students' educational experiences (Ministry of Education, 2013b; Wette, 2010). It can be inferred that French immersion teachers influence their students in the same way because they “us[e] appropriate and effective instructional strategies ... enthusiasm and varied teaching and assessment approaches,” to help their students “achieve the FSL curriculum expectations” (Ministry of Education, 2013b, p. 12). However, despite these efforts, there are students who leave French immersion for different reasons, as explained next.

French immersion student attrition. Studies have shown that students may leave French immersion for a variety of reasons. For example, a student could leave because of

⁶ The most recent elementary FSL curriculum was published in early 2013 to be implemented beginning in September 2014; the previous ones were published in 1998 (core French) and 2001 (extended French and French immersion).

academic factors, such as low grades in French class (Ellsworth, 1997; Noel, 2003), because of social factors, such as the desire to spend time with friends (Beck, 2004) or a feeling of not belonging (Quiring, 2008), because of family mobility (Boudreaux & Olivier, 2009) or school program choice (Campbell, 1992, Lewis, 1986), or even because of a combination of factors (Cadez, 2006; Halsall, 1994; Obadia & Thériault, 1997). Many studies focus on students' experiences (e.g., Keep, 1993) and parents' experiences (e.g., Noel, 2003) with student attrition from French immersion. However, there is a lack of research focusing on teachers' experiences with this phenomenon (however, see Halsall, 1994; Obadia & Thériault, 1997).

The gap in the literature with respect to exploring teachers' experiences with student attrition from the French immersion program is problematic, especially considering that teachers have a significant impact on students' learning experiences, as mentioned previously (Ministry of Education, 2013b; Wette, 2010). Moreover, it is important to explore the experiences of French immersion teachers who have taught the middle and later grades of elementary school because it is towards the end of elementary school when students are making crucial decisions about their future school plans (Ministry of Education, 2013b). At that stage in life, students are beginning to prepare for secondary school and beyond; they may choose to leave French immersion for a variety of reasons, such as enrolling in a secondary school where French immersion is not offered (Boudreaux & Olivier, 2009). As a way to address some of the issues related to students leaving French immersion, elementary French immersion teachers can encourage students to stay in it until the completion of Grade 8, if not at least Grade 9, when they would earn the mandatory secondary FSL credit while still in French immersion (Ministry of Education, 2013a, 2013b, 2014b).

Significance of the Study

By exploring the experiences of Ontario elementary French immersion teachers with the factors that influence student attrition, one gains insight into the experiences of these teachers, as well as the trend of student attrition in that province. What is more, one also gains a better understanding of the factors that influence student attrition from French immersion in Ontario. For instance, it may be important to consider the status of French as a minority language in Ontario because that may explain parents' and students' decisions to leave French immersion.

Therefore, stakeholders in French immersion can work together to continue to implement changes in that stream of FSL education to encourage students' enrollment and retention in it (see Ministry of Education, 2013a, 2013b). Accordingly, this study sought to explore the experiences of a group of Ontario elementary French immersion teachers with the academic and social factors that influence student attrition.

The findings of this project will guide stakeholders in the field of FSL education, including pre-service teachers, novice and experienced practitioners, researchers in FSL, guidance counsellors, school administrators, teacher educators, school board representatives, Ministry of Education representatives, policy makers, FSL advocacy and lobbying groups such as CPF, and professional associations such as ACPI/CAIT, Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT), and the Ontario Modern Language Teachers' Association (OMLTA), as to how to strengthen French immersion in Ontario and, ultimately, contribute to higher student achievement and retention rates.

Research Objective

Given the literature on French immersion student attrition, as well as recent Ministry of Education guidelines on improving FSL education, we believed it is important to examine how

French immersion teachers address this pressing issue in their classrooms. As such, the research objective of the present study was to explore the experiences of a group of Ontario elementary French immersion teachers regarding the factors that influence student attrition, as well as how they might address the issue in their classrooms.

Overview of Thesis

The thesis is structured in the following order. In Chapter 1, I presented the Introduction to the project, including the Description of the Problem. In Chapter 2, I explain the Theoretical Framework that shaped the study. Following that, in Chapter 3, I present the Literature Review, and then the Methodology is described in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, I outline the Findings, which is followed by the Discussion of the findings in Chapter 6. Finally, I present the Conclusion to the project in Chapter 7, which includes suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study draws from Vygotsky's (1978) *social constructivist* perspective on learning and development and Dewey's (1971) principles of interaction and continuity in experience. This chapter includes an explanation of the two theories, which are followed by a figure that illustrates the interconnections between the two perspectives on learning and experience and the various elements that shape French immersion teachers' experiences with student attrition. It concludes with the research questions used in the study.

Social Constructivist Framework

This study draws primarily from Vygotsky's (1978) *social constructivist* perspective on learning and development. In that perspective, learning and development occur through the influence of dynamic external factors, the relationships one makes with others, and the social context where it all takes place (Moll, 2014; Palincsar, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky (1978) contended that learning relates directly to development and begins even before a child enters school in the "preschool years" (p. 84). More specifically, Vygotsky (1978) explained that "school learning," or more formal education than in the preschool years, "is concerned with the assimilation of the fundamentals of scientific knowledge" (p. 84). Furthermore, Vygotsky (1978) argued that "[l]earning and development are interrelated from the child's very first day of life" (p. 84). This belief led to his conception of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), a term that describes "*the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers*"

(Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). According to Prawat (1996), the Vygotskian view on learning posits that teachers' and students' "understanding ... is arrived at slowly as [they] develop and test out concepts" together in a social context (p. 93). Similarly, P. Cobb (1988) contended that "[t]eachers and students are viewed as active meaning-makers who continually give contextually based meanings to each others' [*sic*] words and actions as they interact" (p. 88). That is, teachers and students co-construct knowledge in a collaborative, reciprocal manner (P. Cobb, 1988). Indeed, as Vygotsky (1978) argued, learning "is a complex dialectical process characterized by" many factors, such as time, complexity, change, interrelations, connections, and adaptation (p. 73). We can assume, then, that in the French immersion classroom, the teacher is the one who guides the students through their learning journeys in the social context of the classroom. As for how *teachers* learn, they experience the successes and challenges of their students, which affects their knowledge and understanding of the students' progress and experiences.

Principles of Experience Framework

In addition to using the social constructivist perspective on learning (Vygotsky, 1978), the present study also draws from Dewey's (1971) principles of *interaction* and *continuity* in *experience*, wherein past experiences influence present experiences, and present experiences influence future experiences. One *interacts* with the various aspects of one's social contexts on a *continuous* basis to develop and learn from experiences; one learns from the past as one moves towards the future (Dewey, 1971). In other words, for Dewey (1916), experience is an *action*, or *something* that someone does, including its consequences, which is done in a mindful way. According to Glassman (2001), for Dewey, "in some important ways experience is synonymous with education" (pp. 7-8). Moreover, Glassman (2001) articulated that, for Dewey, "[w]orthwhile, or vital, experience in education is activity in which the link between action and

consequence is interconnected with previous and future (related) activities” (p. 8). This relates directly to Dewey’s (1971) views on the relationships between past, present, and future experiences. Indeed, this could also be true for French immersion teachers, who, as educators, engage in reflective, mindful considerations of their practice by turning to their past experiences with lesson development and delivery in order to give the most appropriate lesson for their current class (see Jaeger, 2013). In doing so, these teachers are engaging in *continuous interaction* with their experiences (Dewey, 1971). In short, in this study, the terms *learning* and *experience* are viewed as interconnected notions that relate to knowledge construction, development, and understanding in and about the world (Dewey, 1971; Vygotsky, 1978)⁷.

Trends in Educational Research

Both Vygotsky’s (1978) social constructivist view on learning and development and Dewey’s (1971) principles of interaction and continuity in experience are still in line with trends in educational research in recent decades. In the field of education we have moved from a traditional, cognitive, individual approach in learning towards a more collaborative, social process of learning (Adams, 2006; Palincsar, 1998; Teemant, Smith, Pinnegar, & Egan, 2005; Voss, Wiley, & Carretero, 1995). Moreover, the trend towards social learning is also apparent specifically within the field of second/foreign language education (Donato & Adair-Hauck, 1992; E. Johnson, 2011; Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, 2011; Swain, 2001). For example, Donato and Adair-Hauck (1992) argued that in second language classrooms, teachers and students co-construct knowledge through ‘formal instruction’ leading to “collaborative sense-making with the class” (p. 73). In other words, teachers and students work together to form

⁷ It should be noted that Dewey’s and Vygotsky’s work focused mainly on how children learn and develop; these theories can be transferred to how adults, such as French immersion teachers, learn and develop (Dewey, 1971; Vygotsky, 1978). Even Vygotsky (1978) expressed how his theories of learning and development relate to *humans*, and not only to children.

meaning-making in, and knowledge about, the world (Donato & Adair-Hauck, 1992). Moreover, Donato and Adair-Hauck (1992) articulated that teachers engage with their students by using “formal instruction in collaboration and negotiation with” them in order to develop and shape appropriate and effective lessons and activities (Donato & Adair-Hauck, 1992, p. 83).

Similarly, E. Johnson (2011) described a study of ‘peerlingual education,’ in which second language students work with older or more capable peers in the development of their second language skills. This type of learning demonstrates Vygotsky’s (1978) ZPD, in which a more capable or experienced person guides a novice in his or her learning and development.

Some research in the field of education demonstrates the use of the Vygotskian and the Deweyan perspectives on learning and experience (Romero, 2012; Swain, 2001). Romero’s (2012) study on foreign language immersion teachers teaching their native language abroad suggested that their experiences are formed through the moments that shape a teacher’s learning, including what he or she does in and out of the classroom. The author categorized the participants’ experiences into themes, which included “[l]anguage learning experiences” and “[l]anguage teaching experiences” (Romero, 2012, p. 48). Demonstrating the Deweyan perspective on learning through experience, the author found that the participants could “reflect on their own process of learning a second language by being immersed in a Spanish speaking context” (Romero, 2012, p. 48). The teachers were drawing from their experiences as second language *learners* to inform how they would be second language *teachers*. Furthermore, the teachers in this study also showed the Vygotskian view of learning and development because their experiences as foreign language immersion teachers were influenced by various factors in their social contexts, including their colleagues and students, their successes and challenges, the

country and culture in which they lived at the time of the experience, and even the teaching “manual they received during the orientation week” (Romero, 2012, p. 50).

In addition to Romero’s study on foreign language immersion teachers demonstrating the Vygotskian and Deweyan views of learning and development, Swain (2001) found that in French immersion classrooms, students could develop language skills by engaging in Vygotskian approaches to learning, such as collaborative ‘metatalk’⁸ during classroom activities to test words and ideas. In that study, the teachers’ observations of the students’ metatalk during activities led to their understanding of the students’ knowledge. One noteworthy observation is that, “by studying the substance of [students’] collaborative talk ... [t]eachers can gain insights into the hypotheses students hold about language and content, helping them to orient their instruction towards erroneously held hypotheses” (Swain, 2001, p. 60). As with E. Johnson’s (2011) aforementioned study of ‘peerlingual education,’ in which more capable students helped their peers develop second language skills, the students in Swain’s (2001) study co-constructed knowledge by testing different verb forms and words in collaborative tasks like short story writing. These studies showed that teachers learn about their students’ progress by observing and interacting with them, and adjusting their lesson plans accordingly, thereby demonstrating the Vygotskian and Deweyan perspectives on learning and development.

In Akcan’s (2004) study, French immersion teachers used a Vygotskian approach to language instruction. The teachers modeled appropriate use of the French language for their students, thereby encouraging them to build language skills together. Likewise, the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (2011) outlined that French immersion and English partner teachers collaborate in lesson planning to guide their students’ learning in both French and English

⁸ Swain (2001) described ‘metatalk’ as occurring when “learners use language to reflect on language use” (p. 50).

classes. In this way, students' knowledge about curriculum content is reinforced in both classrooms with the influence and guidance of both teachers.

McMillan (2006) found that if a teacher observed students struggling with a certain concept, such as the acquisition of vocabulary words, he or she could reinforce the concept with more or different activities or resources to help. In that study, the author described some of the participants' past experiences as FSL learners and teachers in terms of the influence that these experiences had on their current FSL teaching practices. McMillan (2006) shared an example of how one participant helped his students learn French words for a group project. When prompted by a student, sometimes the teacher would provide the student with the answer, while at other times the teacher would encourage the student to consult a dictionary or ask classmates. Such instruction methods were consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD, because the teacher guided the students in their second language learning either by providing them with answers to their questions or by encouraging them to use tools such as a dictionary or their peers. This type of instruction also reflected Dewey's (1971) principles of interaction and continuity in experience because the teacher experienced the students' strengths and challenges with respect to vocabulary acquisition and could therefore reinforce the lesson by providing the students with supplementary exposure to the words. In fact, one of the participants did just that by writing synonyms of vocabulary words "on an overhead to help students understand the more difficult French words" (McMillan, 2006, p. 74). These studies are just some examples of how French immersion teachers' experiences, or learning, are shaped by the many factors in the diverse social context of the classroom.

The abovementioned studies demonstrated that French immersion teachers learn from their students by observing the ways in which they interact during activities in class. Along

similar lines of thought, the following section illustrates the social constructivist (Vygotsky, 1978) perspective specifically as it relates to teachers' experiences with student attrition.

A Social Constructivist Perspective on Teachers' Experiences with Student Attrition

If one considers that learning and experience are contextually-bound occurrences and are affected by sociocultural factors, then one could assume that the same may be true for teachers' experiences with student attrition. Figure 1 shows the interrelationships between elementary French immersion teachers' past, present, and future experiences with the factors that influence student attrition and the way these factors may affect their current teaching practice. In turn, this may influence student attrition from French immersion. Note that the development of the figure was influenced by Vygotsky's (1978) views on learning and Dewey's (1971) views on experience.

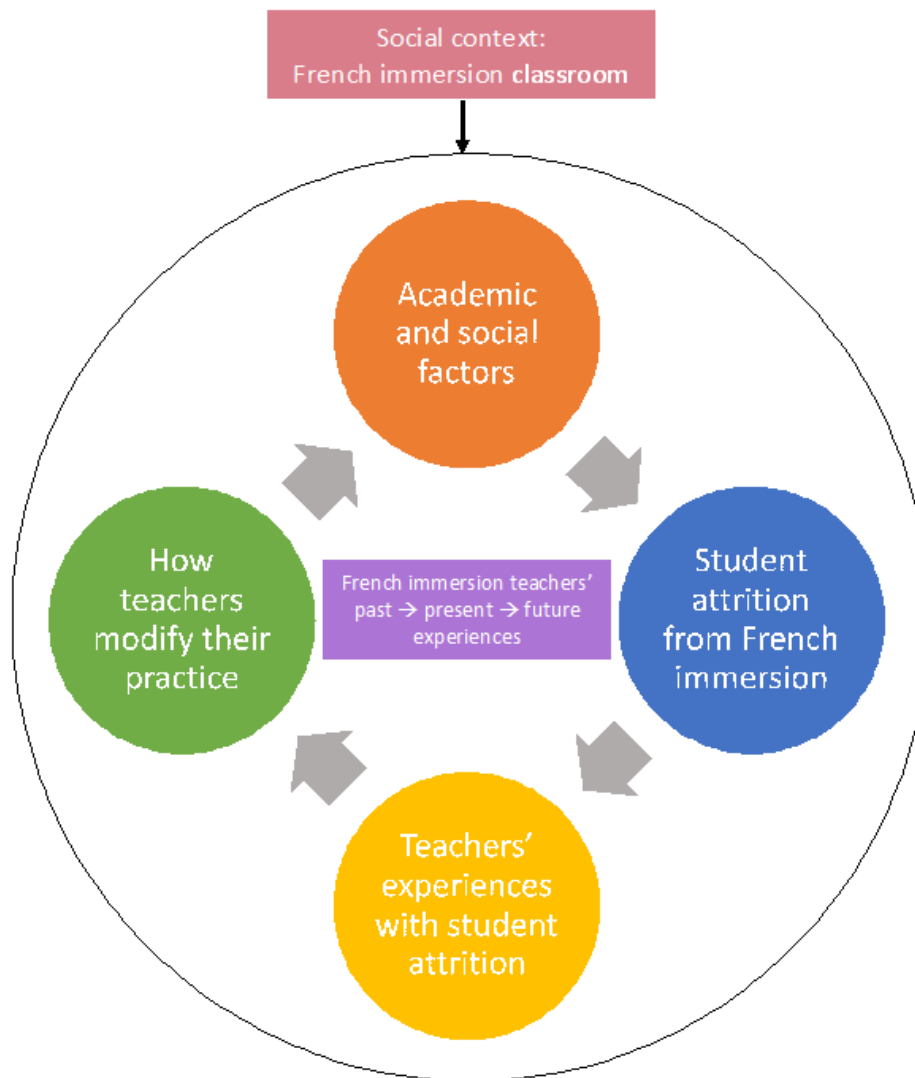


Figure 1. French immersion teachers' ongoing experiences. This figure shows that their experiences are continually affected by the various factors that influence student attrition.

Figure 1 shows that student attrition from French immersion, as well as the factors that influence it, have an impact on teachers' experiences and practices in the classroom. The figure illustrates that the process is cyclical, showing the ongoing interactions between the various elements, which are represented by circles and connected by arrows. While the initial starting point for the process is a teacher experiencing student attrition, the relationships between these factors is then ongoing and cyclical.

Moving clockwise from the circle at the top, the figure illustrates that academic and social factors influence student attrition from French immersion, which impacts the teachers' experiences with student attrition and the factors that influence it, which results in the teachers modifying their teaching practice to address it, which thereby affects the academic and social factors that influence attrition, and so on. The small rectangular box in centre of the figure shows that within this cyclical process of teachers' experiences with student attrition and the factors that lead to it, the teachers' past experiences as FSL teachers and with student attrition influence their current experiences, which, in turn, will affect their future experiences (Dewey, 1971). Additionally, the large circle around the whole figure shows that these teachers' experiences take place within the social context (Vygotsky, 1978) of the French immersion classroom. What follows next is an in-depth explanation of each of the components of Figure 1.

The circle at the top of the figure indicates the *influential factors on student attrition*, which are primarily *academic* and *social*. Some students in French immersion struggle with different *academic* aspects of it, including the curriculum, course content, difficulty with the language, grades, and homework. At times, these challenges are too much for some students to handle, and it is ultimately decided that they leave French immersion in favour of the regular English program. Alternatively, some students struggle with *social* factors in French immersion, such as the impact of a student's interests, friends, and family on the decision to leave. Thus, one circle in the figure represents the influential factors of academic and social reasons for student attrition. From that circle, following the arrow clockwise towards the right side of the figure, academic and social factors influence student attrition from French immersion, which is represented in the next circle.

The circle on the right indicates *student attrition from French immersion*. As mentioned previously, some students leave French immersion despite its many benefits and strengths (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007b; Lazaruk, 2007; Stauble, Cruden and Gormley, 2012). Moreover, student attrition can happen for many reasons, namely academic and social ones⁹ (Beck, 2004; Boudreaux, 2010; Ellsworth, 1997; Makropoulos, 2007; Obadia & Thériault, 1997). This pressing issue has persisted in French immersion for decades (Adiv, 1979; Halsall, 1994; Lewis & Shapson, 1989; Quiring, 2008). By developing an action plan to address it, even the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013a) has recognized that student attrition from French immersion still occurs. Because of its impact on French immersion teachers' experiences, *student attrition from French immersion* is one of the circles in the figure. In turn, following the arrow clockwise towards the bottom of the figure, *student attrition from French immersion* influences teachers' experiences with it, as outlined next.

In the circle at the bottom is *teachers' experiences with student attrition*. These experiences are influenced by student attrition, and, in turn, they shape how the teachers modify their teaching practice to address it. French immersion teachers play an active role in their students' decisions to leave by having discussions with the student and his or her parents, as well as with colleagues at the school like the principal and resource teacher. French immersion teachers modify their practice to help their students learn better in class, as shown in the next circle of the figure, following the arrow clockwise towards the left.

The circle on the left of the figure shows that French immersion teachers *modify their teaching practice* as a way to address student attrition. Because teaching involves reflection

⁹ For the purposes of the present study, the operational definition of *academic* factors relates to the factors which are associated with a student's educational experiences in the classroom, such as grades, assessment, homework, and difficulty of course content. As for *social* factors, they are the factors which are associated with a student's personal life related to interests, friends, and family, as well as the community and culture in which the student lives.

(Jaeger, 2013) and care (O'Connor, 2008), teachers are inclined to help their students achieve their best by improving their lessons to make them more accessible and effective. Teachers try to adjust their lessons or reinforce them in some way when they observe that students are struggling to follow along. Furthermore, French immersion teachers may reuse lessons and materials from previous years, but they adapt them to meet the needs of their current students. As a result of these changes, it is hoped that the students' learning experiences are positively influenced. If teachers and schools can be attuned to their students' needs and provide the necessary support for them, students may not feel the pressure of academic or social factors as strongly, and may therefore choose to stay in French immersion despite some challenges. In turn, the extent to which academic and social factors influence French immersion student attrition is affected, which connects to the circle at the top of the figure.

Next, within the occurrence of the four previously-explained factors that influence French immersion teachers' experiences with student attrition, the figure shows a small box which represents the teachers' past, present, and future experiences (Dewey, 1971). The box is in the middle of the rotation of the other factors to show that these experiences are ongoing and influenced by them. As the two small arrows within that box suggest, the progression of the types of experiences moves from left to right along a timeline, from past to present to future, indicating that past experiences influence present experiences and present experiences influence future experiences (Dewey, 1971). The teachers are interacting with their past and present experiences in an ongoing, continuous basis (Dewey, 1971).

Finally, considering the label in the box at the top of the figure, all of these experiences take place within the social context (Vygotsky, 1978) of the French immersion classroom, which is represented by the large circle that encompasses the diagram. French immersion teachers'

socially-influenced experiences with student attrition and the factors that lead to it take place in the dynamic, social settings of their classrooms, which include elements such as the students, the students' successes and struggles, lessons and activities, the factors that influence student attrition, student attrition itself, the teachers' past experiences as FSL teachers and with student attrition, and how the teachers adjust their practice to meet the ever-evolving needs of their students.

Research Questions

Considering the aforementioned factors that influence student attrition from French immersion, as well as Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism and Dewey's (1971) principles of experience, and the relationships between these various elements, there were three research questions that guided this study:

1. According to a group of Ontario elementary French immersion teachers, what academic and social factors influence student attrition from French immersion?
2. How are this group of teachers' current teaching practices affected by their previous experiences with the academic and social factors that influence student attrition in French immersion, by their personal and professional learning experiences, as well as by their social context?
3. How might these teachers encourage students to stay in or leave French immersion?

Chapter 3

Literature Review

This overview of the literature is articulated around the following themes: government guidelines and reports; FSL programs in Canada; French immersion; teacher experience; and student attrition. First, an outline of federal and provincial guidelines and reports for bilingualism and bilingual education in Canada is highlighted as a way to explain the development and relevance of French immersion education in the Canadian context. Next, the three FSL education models available in Canada are explained, including some distinguishing features of each model. Then, literature specifically on French immersion is presented, including an overview of it, as well as themes related to its strengths and challenges, its suitability for all learners, improving its efficacy, and the benefits of bilingualism. After that are references regarding teacher experience, with sources on teacher reflection, second/foreign language teacher experience, FSL teacher experience, pre-service teachers, and language teacher attrition. Finally, research regarding student attrition in general is presented, including literature on attrition from and studying in minority-language contexts, which is followed by references on student attrition from French immersion and the academic and social reasons for it, and then by student retention in French immersion.

Government Guidelines and Reports

Federal. In addition to the federal government's financial support for second- and minority-language education as described in the Introduction, there are guidelines and reports that reflect its recent goals regarding official language education. For example, the Official Languages Support Programs (2004) published a Roadmap on how second language education should be approached across the country. That document followed the release of the *Action Plan*

for Official Languages (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, n.d.), which outlined the federal government's initiatives and funding related to strengthening its obligations to the Official Languages Act. More recently, the Standing Committee on Official Languages (2014) produced a report on FSL education in Canada, focusing on French immersion and outlining that committee's examinations of what the federal government has done in recent years to improve FSL education across the country. Similarly, the most recent annual report by the current Commissioner of Official Languages provided his non-partisan observations of the state of French and English across the country, including issues related to immigration, minority language communities, and federal institutions (Fraser, 2015). In the report, Fraser (2015) asserted that Canadian public figures, organizations, and institutions should continue to improve their use of French and English. Additionally, the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages (2015) recently published its first of two reports on improving bilingualism of Canadian youth through a variety of initiatives.

The federal government and other interested parties are emphasizing education in French and English as a way to promote the acquisition and use of both official languages. In addition to this federal government support, there are also provincial guidelines for language education.

Provincial. The Ontario Ministry of Education recently produced several publications reflecting its goals for improving FSL education; some of these were outlined in the Introduction. They include: a framework on improving FSL education in elementary and secondary schools (2013a); the revised elementary FSL curriculum (2013b); the revised secondary FSL curriculum (2014b); a guideline on how parents of French immersion and extended French students can help their child achieve their best (2014d); and a document on inclusion for students with special needs in FSL education (2015).

FSL Programs in Canada

To learn FSL, students across Canada can enroll in one of three FSL streams that are available to varying degrees of intensity and entry grades depending on the region and the school board: core French, extended French, and French immersion (CASLT, n.d.). Additionally, intensive French is offered as an enriched program in which core French students in Grade 5 or 6 have “intensive French language exposure with three to four times the number of instruction hours” for five “months of the school year” (CASLT, n.d., p. 2; see also Netten & Germain, 2004). The streams also differ regarding their instruction aims, whether they are content-based, which subjects students must take in French versus English, curriculum expectations, and whether the stream is mandatory (CPF (Ontario), n.d.-a; Ministry of Education, 2013b). FSL education is mandatory in only six provinces and one territory: New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, and Yukon; it is optional in the other provinces and territories (CPF, n.d.-c).

Core French. In this program, French is taught as a subject in French, while all other subjects are taught in English (Ministry of Education, 2013b). Notably, core French “is the most commonly used method for teaching French” as a second language in Canada (Quiring, 2008, p. 27). More precisely, “almost 90% of FSL students in Canada” are in core French (CASLT, n.d.). The Ministry of Education (2013b) in Ontario explained in that province, core French begins in Grade 4 and students “must have accumulated a *minimum* of 600 hours of French instruction by the end of Grade 8” (p. 15). As for core French students’ proficiency in the French language, Netten and Germain (2004) noted that those students “develop minimal abilities to communicate in French [because of] limited time and teaching resources” available over the course of the program (p. 276).

Extended French. By comparison, extended French students learn at least one subject in French, such as social studies or science and technology, in addition to having French as a subject itself (Ministry of Education, 2013b). In extended French, “French must be the language of instruction for a *minimum* of 25 per cent of the total instructional time” (Ministry of Education, 2013b, p. 15). By the end of Grade 8 in Ontario, extended French students must have “a minimum of 1260 hours of instruction in French” (Ministry of Education, 2013b, p. 15). Notably, CASLT (n.d.) stated that only four provinces in Canada offer extended French: “Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland” (p. 4). Far fewer students are enrolled in extended French than in core French or French immersion (Ministry of Education, 2014c).

French immersion. Alternatively to core French and extended French, students in French immersion study various subjects in French alongside other subjects in English (Dicks & Kristmanson, 2008). In Ontario, French immersion students learn French as a subject in addition to having French as the medium of instruction of “at least two other subjects,” such as history and health and physical education, depending on the grade (Ministry of Education, 2013b, p. 16). Similarly, Roy (2008) highlighted that “French immersion is a content-based approach to learning French that integrates language-teaching into the rest of the curriculum” (p. 396).

French immersion can be taught as *total* immersion or *partial* immersion, which describe the extent to which students have classes in French versus English (Roy, 2008), though there are changes in the intensity and the amount of total instruction in French per year. In total immersion, students learn all of their subjects, except English, in French, whereas in partial immersion, they learn 50% of their subjects in French and 50% in English (Roy, 2008). The points of entry for French immersion are in Kindergarten or Grade 1 (early immersion), Grade 4

(middle immersion), and Grade 7 (late immersion) (Dicks & Kristmanson, 2008). Furthermore, French immersion can be offered in a *single-track* school (also known as an immersion centre), a *dual-track* school, or a *multi-track* school (Guimont, 2003). In a single-track school, French immersion is the only FSL stream offered in the school, whereas in a dual-track or a multi-track school, French immersion is taught alongside other FSL streams (Guimont, 2003).

In Ontario, the Ministry of Education (2013b) outlined that school boards which offer French immersion must ensure that French is “the language of instruction for a *minimum* of 50 per cent of the total instructional time ... and provide a *minimum* of 3800 hours of instruction in French by the end of Grade 8” (p. 16). Compared to core French and extended French, students in French immersion have significantly more hours of instruction in French. What is more, “French immersion is one of the most effective ways ... to become bilingual” (CPF (Ontario), n.d.-b). Much research on French immersion has been conducted over the years, as outlined in more detail in the following section.

French Immersion in Canada

French immersion has been the subject of much research and evaluation over the years (Cummins, 1998; Johnson & Swain, 1997). Cummins' (n.d., 1977, 1983, 1998, 2007) extensive research in French immersion and bilingual education demonstrated the sustained interest in French immersion and its impact on FSL education in Canada and globally. Presenting international perspectives, Johnson and Swain (1997) outlined a set of eight common features of language immersion programs from around the world, including: the use of the target language as the medium of instruction; support for students' first language; and the goal of learning another language by additive bilingualism. Lambert (1973) contended that students in bilingual programs experience *additive bilingualism*, suggesting that additional language learners go

through an addition to, or expansion of, their language repertoire when learning another language, without weakening their first language. Similarly, Bournot-Trites and Tallowitz (2002) provided an overview of the literature on second language learning and its effects on first language literacy skills. The authors found that students in immersion programs can achieve a functional level of bilingualism with no detriment to their first language, and their first language skills can even be improved as a result of their second language learning (Bournot-Trites & Tallowitz, 2002).

Research trends. Over the years, research has focused on reporting facts, trends, and statistics on FSL and French immersion education across Canada. For example, CPF has been quite prolific over the past few decades in terms of compiling data and writing reports on the state of FSL education in Canada, including information on French immersion enrollment trends across the country (n.d.-a). Also on the national scale, Statistics Canada (2004) has provided an overview and statistics of French immersion regarding enrollment trends across the country in terms of geography, student gender, academic achievement, students' socio-economic status (SES), and the influence of self-selection and other factors in the decision to enter French immersion. On the provincial scale, the Ministry of Education (2014a) and the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (2011) recently provided information regarding French immersion education, the benefits of such programs, and how classroom teachers can work together to enhance students' language learning experiences.

Very early research on French immersion explored students' language learning and cognitive development, as well as their attitudes regarding language learning (Lambert & Tucker, 1971, 1972). Decades later, threads of these themes are still present in French immersion research, as shown in the studies mentioned throughout this section. More recent research

showed that French immersion is still a successful second/foreign language education model, but myths about its actual effectiveness still persist (CAIT & Calgary Board of Education, 2010; Fraser, 2011). CAIT and the Calgary Board of Education (2010) dispelled negative myths about French immersion, including allusions to elitism, exclusivity, and the 'required' French language skills of parents and teachers. Furthermore, those authors argued that all types of learners can succeed in French immersion, that parents do not need to know French in order to support their child's learning in French immersion, and that French immersion teachers must have the right training as well as strong French language skills in order to teach effectively in French immersion. Moreover, according to Fraser (2011), "Wallace Lambert's pioneering work" and his "legacy" in building French immersion have had a positive, sustained impact on students across the country over the decades (p. 9). However, despite support for French immersion and research showing its benefits and successes, there are concerns about certain aspects of it.

Strengths and challenges. In addition to studies exploring the many characteristics of French immersion, including reporting its descriptions, types, and trends, research over the years has examined its strengths and challenges. For example, Fortune (2014) provided a synopsis of the literature on French immersion and language immersion programs, outlining both strengths and challenges inherent to them. The author contended that language immersion offers academic, educational, language, literacy, cognitive, economic, and sociocultural benefits for students (Fortune, 2014). However, the author also described challenges in immersion programs that persist, including finding high-quality staff, developing curriculum, ensuring appropriate teacher education, addressing learner difficulties, and maintaining student motivation to use the target language (Fortune, 2014).

Particularly regarding the many strengths of French immersion, such as students' native and second/foreign language skills development and their academic achievement, a plethora of research has reported on the benefits of French immersion over the years. Lazaruk (2007) expounded the many benefits that French immersion students experience as a result of bilingual education, including linguistic, academic, and cognitive advantages. Similarly, the Canadian Council on Learning (2007b) argued for the benefits and importance of bilingualism and French immersion studies, and that French immersion students tend to do better than their peers on achievement tests (see also Genesee, 1987; Lapkin, Hart, & Turnbull, 2003). More precisely, Genesee (n.d.; see also Genesee, 1978) showed that, while early French immersion students tended to lag behind their peers in certain achievement tests in the early years of elementary school, they eventually 'caught up' in a few years. Furthermore, students who were experiencing academic difficulty in French immersion also had struggles in English, suggesting the struggles are not necessarily due to being in French immersion (Genesee, 1978). Finally, Guimont (2003) found that students in single-track French immersion centres, that is, where French immersion is the only FSL stream in a school, did better on achievement tests than their peers who were in dual- or multi-track French immersion settings.

In contrast to the abovementioned benefits, concerns related to French immersion include students' lack of accuracy in using the French language. Even after years of immersion in the French language, students still struggled with accuracy in the language (Rehner & Mougeon, 2003). French immersion students tended to use more formal words as compared to their Francophone peers, which may have reflected their non-native French teachers' use of those words, as well as the quality of the materials available to FSL students (Rehner & Mougeon, 2003). Furthermore, Hammerly (1989a, 1989b) and Hutchins (2015) argued that there were

many flaws inherent in French immersion, namely that French immersion continued to suffer from being “an elitist, divisive and deeply troubled system” (Hutchins, 2015, title). However, Doell and Fenez (n.d.) contended that Hutchins (2015) neglected to show “a fair or balanced understanding of the real issues affecting French Immersion or the positive influence it has had for the large number of satisfied learners, parents and graduates of the program” (Doell & Fenez, n.d., para 1).

In addition to the aforementioned perceptions of elitism in French immersion, some research has shown exclusionary practices in what ‘type’ of student should be there. For instance, Mady and Arnett (2009) examined the inclusion and exclusion of students with special needs in FSL education. The authors found that there are systemic tensions when it comes to identifying students with learning disabilities and including them in French immersion education. That study raised issues of including all types of learners in French immersion, especially “*in this age of celebrated learner diversity and calls for corresponding differentiated instruction*” (Mady & Arnett, 2009, abstract). In another study, Mady (2013) explored the perspectives of teachers of French as a second official language (FSOL) regarding including newcomers to Canada who are learning English in French immersion streams. The data suggested that the “teachers practiced segregation and benevolence” in terms of these students’ access to FSOL education (Mady, 2013, abstract). In that study, the author and the participants argued for inclusive practices in FSOL education. These negative viewpoints on French immersion brought to light the question of whether it really is suitable for all students.

Suitability for all. In an extensive review of the literature, Mannavarayan (2001) questioned the suitability of French immersion for all learners in terms of students’ learning disabilities, and physiological and biological differences. She outlined reasons for student

attrition from French immersion, such as dissatisfaction, academic difficulties, the need for extra support and testing, and emotional and behavioral problems that students may have. In early research on the suitability of French immersion education for diverse learners, Swain and Barik (1978) found that French immersion *was* appropriate for students of different SES backgrounds; however, these students were not in fact included in French immersion classes.

Cepin (2012) illuminated issues regarding equitable access for different types of learners, focusing on Canadians' and students' right to bilingualism and highlighting the continued perception of privileged access to French immersion. Also regarding students' rights, C. Cobb (2015) questioned whether French immersion is a 'loophole' in which students cannot access special education. C. Cobb (2015) presented one parent's account of her ongoing challenges in getting special education support for her daughters in French immersion, ultimately leading to their attrition from it. Similarly, Mady and Arnett (2009) provided a detailed account of one parent's journey through the process of removing her child from French immersion because of a lack of extra support to help him overcome his academic struggles (see also Arnett & Mady, 2010; Betts, 2015; CPF, 2012a, 2012b; Mady, 2013).

Furthermore, in extensive reviews of the literature on French immersion and students who are 'at-risk,' Genesee (n.d., 2007) outlined that students who were at-risk in French immersion should be monitored regularly to determine their progress and "whether their participation in immersion should be re-evaluated" in the case of too much academic or emotional stress (Genesee, 2007, p. 680). He pointed to the benefits of being bilingual, and argued that students with learning difficulties *can* continue in French immersion despite the challenges, unless the child is "unhappy" or experiencing too much difficulty (Genesee, 2007, p. 680). Moreover, students' academic struggles were not necessarily because they were in French

immersion, as stated previously; these challenges can be present when students are in the regular English stream as well (Genesee, n.d.).

Regarding inclusion, the Ministry of Education (2015) recently published a companion guide to the *Framework for FSL* (Ministry of Education, 2013a) on how teachers and schools can include students with special education needs in FSL. This guide outlined research related to students with special education needs, information on policies and legislation regarding special education and FSL education in Ontario, as well as “strategies for ... creat[ing] inclusive environments for all students” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 9). With such support from the Ministry, it would follow that schools and teachers are better positioned to include all types of learners in FSL education, especially in a time of the aforementioned “*celebrated learner diversity*” (Mady & Arnett, 2009, abstract).

Although there are still concerns and criticisms regarding French immersion, there have been many reports outlining its strengths and benefits. Those ever-present concerns and criticisms are addressed by recent research on how to improve French immersion to encourage and support student achievement, and will be presented in the following section.

Improving French immersion. Given the aforementioned challenges facing French immersion education in Canada, including the need to improve student proficiency and retention rates, some research has suggested ways in which to improve French immersion in order to increase student experience and achievement. Rehner (2014) contended that students’ *confidence* and *proficiency* were the two main areas that should be emphasized in current FSL instruction. For example, Rehner (2014) elaborated that current FSL instruction should focus on more practical applications of the French language to improve students’ oral and written skills, as well as on improving students’ confidence in using the language orally. In New Brunswick, the

French Second Language Task Force (2012) recommended that early French immersion in that province begin in Grade 1, rather than Grade 3, to increase students' 'time on task' (see Turnbull, Lapkin, Hart, & Swain, 1998) and, therefore, students' exposure to and proficiency in the language (see also Cummins, 1983; Swain, 1978). Similarly, in terms of improving student confidence and proficiency in FSL, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013a) outlined goals in its recent *Framework* on improving FSL education across that province, as described previously.

FSL programs, including French immersion, are an effective way in which students can learn FSL and develop their bilingualism. Continued improvements to FSL education, including French immersion, will help students better develop their proficiency and confidence in using French, ultimately enhancing their bilingualism.

Benefits of bilingualism. Bilingual education is one way in which students can learn a second or foreign language and develop their bilingual skills (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007b; Cummins, n.d., 1977; Genesee, 1987; Nicolay & Poncelet, 2012; Roy & Galiev, 2011; H. H. Stern, 1973). Publications from organizations such as the Canadian Council on Learning (2008), CPF (n.d.-f), and the Modern Languages Council (n.d.) referenced a compendium of studies regarding the benefits of bilingualism in terms of learners' cognitive development, personal growth, academic achievement, and future job prospects. Studies showed that second/foreign language students 'gain' skills in another language without 'losing' skills in their native language (Archibald, Roy, Harmel, Jesney, Dewey, Moisik, & Lessard, 2006; Harley, Allen, Cummins, & Swain, 1987; Lambert, 1973). H. H. Stern (1973) argued that students in bilingual programs were successful in learning and using both languages in such programs. Likewise, a literature review by Archibald et al. (2006) on second language learning illustrated

that exposure to additional languages improved first language skills and that special needs students can learn second languages just as their non-special needs peers can.

As demonstrated, research on bilingualism and FSL education shows that learning an additional language has many benefits, notably cognitive, linguistic, economic, and academic advantages. The extent to which students experience and learn the French language in the French immersion classroom is affected at least in part by their teachers (Ministry of Education, 2013b). Likewise, teachers' experiences in French immersion are influenced by many factors, as discussed in the next section.

Teacher Experience

There are many influential and interdependent factors in the French immersion classroom, including, but not limited to, students, materials, the curriculum, and the teacher. As the objective of the present study was to explore teachers' experiences, part of the literature search focused on this topic. There are many studies which discuss *teacher experience* and its various components, such as teacher reflection and its influence on teacher practice, as well as second/foreign language teachers' experiences. It is important to explore the literature on teachers' pre-service and professional experiences both in the classroom and beyond in order to better understand how these factors influence their practice.

Teacher reflection. Recent research on teacher reflection confirmed that the process of teacher reflection, although complex, can be valuable in helping teachers better understand and improve their practice (Jaeger, 2013; Luttenberg & Bergen, 2008; Norris, 2009). Drawing from Schön's (1983) work on the reflective practices of professionals, Jaeger (2013) explained that reflective teachers engage in reflective practices before, during, and after lessons. Jaeger (2013) noted that teachers have "a repertoire of teaching strategies" and that "a given lesson is not

unique; it shares certain elements with previously taught lessons” upon which the teacher can reflect and therefore adapt lessons as necessary (pp. 89-90). However, there are barriers to teacher reflection, including time and the question of whether teacher reflection actually leads to better teaching practices (Jaeger, 2013). In a similar way, Luttenberg and Bergen (2008) argued that teacher reflection should have ‘breadth’ and ‘depth’ to be most effective in enhancing the practice, but that the skill of such reflection needs to be well-developed in order to be effective.

Norris (2009) explored holistic teacher reflection in terms of how teachers engage in the process and how it might influence their practice. She found an “immediate impact on teacher practice ... however ... any long-term impact is yet to be determined” (Norris, 2009, p. 113). Although the skill of teacher reflection must be fine-tuned to be effective, the process can have at least some impact on teacher practice, and, therefore, teacher experience. This can be true for teachers in any field, including those in second/foreign language education contexts.

Second/foreign language teacher experience. Studies regarding second/foreign language teacher experience focused on the teachers’ instruction and decision-making processes based on students’ feedback (Wette, 2010) and students’ needs (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012; Hunsaker, Nielsen, & Bartlett, 2010). Wette (2010) found that English as a second language (ESL) teachers adapted the curriculum and lesson plans to meet the needs of the students as determined by the students’ feedback “about their developing understandings” of course content (p. 577). Additionally, within the context of a three-year-long professional development program, Hunsaker et al. (2010) explored the relationship between teacher practice and student outcomes on reading. The authors found that, although students’ interest in reading declined in their early adolescent years despite the teachers’ best efforts, the teachers who had *more skills* “at

implementing appropriate practices for advanced readers” saw their students as having more enjoyment in reading (Hunsaker et al., 2010, p. 280).

Kim and Elder (2005) explored second/foreign language teachers’ practices regarding the use of the target language and students’ first language in the classroom. The authors looked at teachers’ use of the majority language, English, and the target language (Japanese, Korean, German, or French) in the classroom. The authors found that the teachers used the target language and the majority language to differing degrees, and that the teachers tended to “avoid complex interactions in the” target language, thereby affecting students’ exposure to it (Kim & Elder, 2005, abstract). The findings of that study pointed to “the teachers’ beliefs about language learning and their attitudes” as being possible influences on their decisions regarding the use of the target language versus the majority language (Kim & Elder, 2005, p. 377). Other studies explored teacher experience in FSL education specifically, as shown in the next section.

FSL teacher experience. As described previously, McMillan (2006) examined the beliefs and practices of three Grade 7 late French immersion teachers in Prince Edward Island regarding the use of French and English in the French immersion classroom. In one case, a teacher believed in using only French in the classroom, whereas another teacher believed in using some English to help the students better understand course content (McMillan, 2006). The range in the findings in McMillan’s (2006) study suggested the diversity of French immersion teachers’ beliefs and practices, which influence students’ learning experiences in the classroom and the extent to which they develop their French skills.

As for teachers’ confidence in using the target language, Salvatori (2007) found that non-native French-speaking FSL teachers were confident in their language abilities in the classroom, yet they were hesitant to interact in French with people who were more proficient in the language

than they were. Notably, the author found that those participants did not feel that their language abilities impeded their teaching practice in FSL because their abilities were stronger than those of their students. Furthermore, the participants in that study recognized that their status as FSL speakers could help them relate to their students.

Along similar lines, Salvatori and MacFarlane's (2009) report on the development of essential FSL teacher competencies outlined "the knowledge, skills and experiences needed to be an effective second-language teacher" regarding these teachers' "pedagogical skill, cultural competency, and proficiency in the target language" (Salvatori & MacFarlane, 2009, p. 2). The authors contended that having a common understanding of what it means to be "an effective FSL teacher" is essential to ensuring that current and future FSL teachers are well-equipped to develop and fine-tune the skills necessary to teach well (Salvatori & MacFarlane, 2009, p. 6).

On the national scale, Lapkin, MacFarlane, Vandergrift, and Hart (2006) conducted a survey of FSL teachers. The authors reported that most respondents, especially French immersion teachers, experienced dissatisfaction with the commercial materials available to them in the classroom, "particularly materials representing Francophone culture" (p. 1). Moreover, the FSL teachers in that study, most of whom were experienced teachers and could draw from many years in the profession, were concerned with "[f]unding for activities, lack of French-speaking supply teachers, consultants for students with special needs, [and] French-speaking non-teaching staff" (Lapkin et al., 2006, p. 1). Such gaps in resources and support for FSL teachers, and, therefore, FSL education, impeded the effectiveness with which teachers can implement the curriculum and therefore affected their experiences in the classroom.

Finally, Cammarata and Tedick (2012) pointed to the need for more teacher preparation and professional development for immersion teachers to help them in their goal of balancing

curriculum requirements. The teachers needed more support from outside of the classroom to teach more effectively inside the classroom, particularly relating to their struggle with balancing the instruction of both content and language.

As shown here, an important consideration in second/foreign language teacher experience relates to the teachers' experiences inside *and* outside of the classroom, even beginning with their pre-service training.

Pre-service teachers/Teacher education. Some of the research within the field of second/foreign language education focused particularly on the education of second/foreign teachers (K. Johnson, 2006, 2009; Singh & Richards, 2006). Some research specifically on language immersion teacher education examined practices from around the world (Erben, 2004; Johnson & Swain, 1997; Tedick, 2005). Other research focused on pre-service teacher knowledge (Faez, 2011; Freeman & Johnson, 1998, 2005), pre-service teacher development (Tsui, 2011), and mentoring for pre-service and in-service teachers (Asención Delaney, 2012). These studies pointed to the need to recognize language teachers' existing knowledge, as well as their unique professional development needs, before and within their practice. Moreover, that research showed that the experiences of pre-service foreign language teachers, including their pre-service training and their own language learning journeys, were invaluable in their development as classroom teachers and could affect their professional practice. As Tedick (2013) argued, it is not sufficient for an immersion teacher to be proficient in the target language; rather, specialized training as an immersion teacher combined with high levels of proficiency in the target language are essential in developing strong language immersion teachers.

Research on second language teacher education that was taught by distance education explored how a teacher education program that used sociocultural pedagogy could lead to pre-

service teachers using such an approach in their eventual practice, thereby reflecting the current trend towards sociocultural pedagogy in the language classroom (Teemant, 2005; Teemant, Smith, Pinnegar, & Egan, 2005). Teemant (2005) argued that this kind of teaching approach yields language teachers who are reflective and innovative in their practice.

Regarding the language proficiency of pre-service FSL teachers, some studies examined the results of language competency tests administered by Faculties of Education prior to (Bayliss & Vignola, 2000) as well as after (Boutin, Chinien, & Boutin, 1999) FSL teacher education programs. Boutin et al. (1999) pointed to the minimum requirements for candidates' French language skills as being influential in deciding which ones were accepted to FSL teacher education programs. Such requirements responded to the need for strong linguistic skills that FSL teachers must have in order to teach the curriculum effectively (Boutin et al., 1999; see also Tedick, 2013). Similarly, Bayliss and Vignola (2000) examined the profiles of FSL teacher education program candidates in terms of their French language skills and whether the candidates were successful on a proficiency test. For example, the extent to which candidates had spent time in a French setting was the most influential factor on their test success (Bayliss & Vignola, 2000).

Other literature on FSL teacher education suggested that FSL teacher education programs should provide special education training for pre-service FSL teachers (Arnett & Mady, 2010), while Thibault, Dansereau, and Lamoureux (2015) pointed to the need for future FSL teachers in Canada to develop and maintain sociocultural and sociolinguistic connections to Canadian Francophone communities in order to help their students to make relevant connections to local French language and culture.

Given the training and professional development that pre-service language teachers go through in their teacher education programs, let us examine the literature on why some of them may eventually leave the profession.

Teacher attrition. Regarding language teachers in the profession, some literature referred to the relationship between language teachers' efficacy and their attrition from the profession (Swanson, 2012). Language teacher attrition may shape how effectively language programs are delivered and, therefore, how well students can learn the target language (Swanson, 2012). Related to this topic, Karsenti, Collin, Villeneuve, Dumouchel, and Roy (2008) conducted a study to examine why new FSL teachers across Canada left the profession. Reasons included "[d]ifficult work conditions," "[l]ack of instructional materials," and "[i]nitial training" as being influential factors in their attrition (Karsenti et al., 2008, p. 5). Furthermore, those authors found that FSL teachers needed mentoring to help them in the early stages of their career (Karsenti et al., 2008). As shown in these previous sections, literature on one main theme of the present study, teacher experience, shows that it is shaped by numerous, diverse factors. The other main theme of the study is on student attrition, as explored next.

Student Attrition and Retention

Literature on student attrition suggests that the phenomenon relates to students leaving a particular stream of education for any reason(s) at any age and level of education and that it occurs through the influence of a wide variety of factors (e.g., Bailey, Onwuegbuzie, & Daley, 2003; Boudreaux, 2010; Cadez, 2006). Tinto (1975) developed a theoretical model to demonstrate how and why student attrition occurs in higher education. In his study exploring the reasons for student attrition in higher education, he articulated that his theoretical model "explains the processes of interaction between the individual and the institution that lead

differing individuals to drop out from institutions of higher education, and that also distinguishes between those processes that result in definable different forms of dropout behavior” (Tinto, 1975, p. 90). That is, the model shows that students in higher education can leave their institution for a range of reasons as a result of different elements influencing the students’ relationship with the institution, including factors like personal background, goals, grades, and social and academic integration in and around the institution. It is important to consider that student attrition and the reasons for it can differ greatly from student to student (Spann & Tinto, 1990; Tinto, 1975).

As for student attrition specifically from French immersion, Boudreaux and Olivier (2009) argued that “we can generalize Tinto’s student attrition/persistence model (1973) to the foreign language immersion setting,” thereby showing that some French immersion students may leave due to a variety of factors that affect their relationship with “institutional experiences” (p. 45). Moreover, recent research suggests that student attrition from French immersion occurs at different grade levels and for different reasons, such as academic or social motives (Boudreaux, 2011; Makropoulos, 2007; Obadia & Thériault, 1997; Quiring, 2008).

This research alludes to the influence of various elements on one’s learning and experiences within a social context, regardless of the language of instruction.

Literature on student attrition from minority-language schools showed that some students switched to a majority-language school for a variety of reasons (Cotnam, 2011; Cotnam-Kappel, 2014; Institut franco-ontarien, 2005). In its study, the Institut franco-ontarien (2005) gathered students’ perspectives on leaving French secondary school in Ontario. Some of the results suggested that the students left their French school in favour of an English one because they believed finishing secondary school in English would eventually help them succeed in university

(Institut franco-ontarien, 2005). Cotnam (2011) explored the concept of 'cultural dropout' Francophone students who left the French school system in favour of an English school. Cotnam (2011) found that the students' choices were influenced by many factors, including "socioeconomic status, consumerism, the parents' opinions regarding the importance of the French language and bilingualism ... and linguistic insecurity" (abstract). Similarly, Cotnam-Kappel (2014) contended that some language-minority elementary school students in Ontario and Corsica were at a crossroads when determining which secondary school to enter: a minority-language or a majority-language one. The author argued for students' agency in their decisions regarding school and language of instruction, as well as the need for adults "to better support children during the school choice and transition processes" (Cotnam-Kappel, 2014, abstract).

Along similar lines, research on Ontario Francophone students' transition between secondary school and post-secondary school explored the choices that students made during this time (Labrie, Lamoureux, & Wilson, 2009; Lamoureux, 2013; see also Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2015). Labrie, Lamoureux, and Wilson (2009) reported on Ontario Francophone students' choices regarding post-secondary education in terms of their program and institution options, as well as their desired language of study. The authors found that the number of young Ontario Francophones having access to post-secondary institutions had slowly increased in recent years and that most of the students selected a college education over a university education. Moreover, Labrie, Lamoureux, and Wilson (2009) concluded that the majority of Francophones who graduated from a French high school chose a French post-secondary program. When considering Francophones' access to post-secondary education in Ontario, it is important to note the number of institutions available: there are "20 public universities, 24 colleges [...] two public French-language colleges and nine French-language and

bilingual universities” in that province (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2015, paras. 1 & 2; see also Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2014).

Related to studying in French at the post-secondary level, Lamoureux (2013) and Séror and Lamoureux (2014) examined French immersion programs in Canadian universities. Lamoureux (2013) explored the experiences of students who were enrolled in a French immersion program at the University of Ottawa; the students were studying in both English and French, and would attend special FSL classes to help them with their French-language courses. Lamoureux (2013) confirmed that the participants had come to the university from all three FSL streams in secondary school. The results were categorized into three main categories: the students' motivation to study in their second language; the transition to post-secondary education; and the social aspect of the student experience. Similarly, Séror and Lamoureux (2014) examined that same French immersion program in terms of how best to integrate English students into FSL programs at the university level. The authors found that French immersion students faced many challenges in their French-language classes, particularly related to studying in their second language and getting accustomed to professors' diverse French accents. What is more, the authors raised questions regarding post-secondary FSL programs, including tensions between the institution, educators, and students, considering which students “should have access to these courses,” and whether courses targeted to FSL students should also be available to Francophone students (Séror & Lamoureux, 2014, p. 11). It is important to note that FSL and French immersion programs at the post-secondary level in Canada are very rare.

Regarding student attrition from foreign language programs, Bailey, Onwuegbuzie, and Daley (2003) found that students tended to leave because of their discomfort and anxiety with learning and using the target language. Similarly, Krashen (1981) argued that anxiety or

boredom can influence language learning and acquisition, which can be brought about by the learner's attitude and even the teaching environment. Boudreaux and Olivier (2009) delivered an overview of student attrition from foreign language immersion programs in the United States and examined the reasons why parents chose to remove their child from the program, including reports of dissatisfaction with it (see also Boudreaux, 2010). In related work, Boudreaux (2011) described French immersion student attrition and retention in the context of the state of Louisiana, in the United States, including parents' reports of inconsistencies with their pre-program aspirations, as well as reports of emotional connections to and satisfaction with French immersion.

Student attrition from French immersion. As shown in this section, research focusing on various aspects of French immersion student attrition in the Canadian context has been produced over the years. Remarkably, as Beck (2004) expressed, conducting research on the topic of French immersion student attrition can be problematic because "school boards do not tend to keep official records and track students who leave immersion programs" or for which reason(s) (p. 10). Similarly, Halsall (1994) argued that it is difficult to specify the reasons for student attrition from French immersion because the reasons differ from school board to school board, from school to school, and from student to student. Although much of the literature pointed to academic and social factors as being influential in students' decisions to leave French immersion, there was research suggesting that other factors, such as family mobility (Boudreaux & Olivier, 2009), can be influential. Some research has examined student attrition from French immersion from the perspectives of parents, students, and teachers (Hayden, 1988), while other studies explored the perspectives of French immersion students regarding their language learning motivation as reported after their attrition (Wesely, 2010). As shown in the following section, the

reasons for student attrition from French immersion vary, yet can be broadly categorized as *academic* or *social* factors.

Academic factors. There is research from the past few decades showing that students who leave French immersion do so because of academic factors, such as difficulty with course content, the language, curriculum expectations, grades, homework, and other assessments and assignments. Early studies on French immersion in the Canadian context included work by Bruck (1978, 1985a, 1985b), who examined why students who had learning disabilities and academic difficulty left French immersion. She found that students left primarily because of cognitive or affective factors, rather than strictly academic ones (Bruck, 1985a, 1985b).

Other early research on French immersion student attrition showed that students left because of course demands and their grades (Adiv, 1979). Lewis (1986) explored the opinions and attitudes of students who had left regarding French immersion, while Lewis and Shapson (1989) found that students had better grades in the English stream, even though the students said that immersion is a better option for developing bilingualism. Keep (1993) found that students with academic difficulty “are generally referred” to leave French immersion (p. 201), while Hayden (1988) argued that academic difficulty in language arts contributed to student attrition from French immersion.

Campbell (1992) examined the perspectives of students and parents, as well as teachers and principals, regarding the reasons for students leaving French immersion. He found that students and parents had favourable opinions of French immersion despite the attrition, which occurred more for the preference of another school program, like attending a non-French immersion private school, than it was a rejection of French immersion (Campbell, 1992). Lewis

(1986) also found that some students left French immersion in favour of another specialized program of study, such as the International Baccalaureate Program.

Furthermore, M. Stern (1991) described student attrition from French immersion in terms of students' decision-making processes, while Halsall (1994) examined a national CPF study sent to school boards to get their views on the reasons for student attrition from elementary and secondary schools. Results from Halsall's (1994) study included family mobility and a lack of special needs support within immersion as having influenced student attrition. Other factors that influenced student attrition from French immersion were the degree of "[c]ommitment to immersion" and "natural stages" of attrition at which points "students and parents were satisfied with the achievement attained in second language skills" (Halsall, 1994, p. 327).

Ellsworth (1997) found that participants reported "concerns with academic grade performance and ... perceived weakness" in French as reasons why they left French immersion (p. 47). Likewise, Noel (2003) reported academic factors, such as a lack of progression, as to why French immersion parents took their child out of it. Quiring (2008) contended that students who left French immersion were aware of their lack of progress and felt marginalized in the classroom. Beck (2004) argued that a sample of late French immersion students switched out because they perceived that they were not academically successful and they reported having low marks in French class. Moreover, Beck (2004) contended that some cases of student attrition were influenced by a student's preference for spending time with friends instead of doing homework. Reporting on a survey of French teachers, coordinators, principals, and helping teachers, Obadia and Thériault (1997) confirmed that students tended to leave French immersion due to academic difficulty or peer pressure.

At the stage when many Ontario students are leaving elementary school and entering high school, Morton et al. (1999) examined Grade 8 French immersion students' attrition.

Interestingly, although students who left French immersion had negative attitudes regarding learning French, their profiles were not different from those of their peers who had stayed in it in terms of academic achievement, effort and ability, self-esteem, parental encouragement, motivation, or the desire to learn the language (Morton et al., 1999). Cadez (2006) examined secondary school students' reasons for leaving French immersion, including: perceiving that they could have higher grades in the regular English stream; dealing with learning and behaviour challenges; or having difficulty with learning and using French.

As shown here, academic factors seem to be quite influential in students' decisions to leave French immersion. Other studies have explored the social factors that influence student attrition from French immersion, as follows.

Social factors. In addition to the many studies that have described academic factors as being influential in student attrition from French immersion, some studies have shown that some students leave for social reasons like personal interests, family, friends, teachers, and even the culture of the community. Studies from the past few decades suggested that these factors can include a possible lack of interest in learning French (Adiv, 1979), the need for more effective French immersion teachers and school personnel (Halsall, 1994), intrinsic or extrinsic motivation (Morton et al., 1999; Wesely, 2010), as well as unhappiness, stress, and frustration (Hayden, 1988). Satisfaction or dissatisfaction with teachers, school sites, and school administration can also influence students' decisions to leave French immersion (Boudreaux, 2010).

Morton et al. (1999) described Lambert and Lambert's (1973) study in which they found that a student's affective variables, "such as empathy, self-esteem, extroversion, inhibition,

anxiety and attitudes” can “explain differences in success,” and that attitude was a main factor to consider in language learning experiences (as cited in Morton et al., 1999, p. 6). Likewise, Morton et al. (1999) claimed that “learning a foreign language depends on a favourable attitude towards the language” (p. 7).

In particular, social and/or emotional challenges seemed to be the most pressing and stressful of the social factors that influenced students’ experiences in French immersion, and, consequently, such issues led to their attrition (Keep, 1993; Mannavarayan, 2001; Obadia & Thériault, 1997; Parkin, Morrison, & Watkin, 1987). For example, Beck (2004) found that some students left French immersion because they wanted to be with friends who were not in French immersion, and they felt they would be happier in the regular English program. Similarly, Quiring (2008) explained that some students left because of “[a] sense of not belonging” in their French immersion class (p. 175). Makropoulos (2007) claimed that students’ identity and social selection influenced their attrition. Moreover, Makropoulos (2007) found that students who were doing well in French immersion and could see the benefits of learning French were likelier to stay than their peers who left. Furthermore, that author found that students who were in early French immersion were likelier to leave than those in late French immersion because the latter students had more agency in the decision to enter French immersion than their early French immersion peers did (Makropoulos, 2007).

The reasons why students leave French immersion are varied and complex, and can be broadly categorized into academic or social factors. As for retaining students in French immersion until the end of secondary school, some literature has explored this, as outlined next.

French immersion student retention. Some French immersion students expressed their reasons for staying in it until the end of high school (Lewis, 1986; Tassone, 2001; Thorp, 2011).

Reasons to stay included feeling a sense of 'family' with classmates and having intrinsic motivation to learn the language for personal, practical, and/or socioeconomic goals (Tassone, 2001). Likewise, bilingual education offered academic and economic advantages to students (Lewis, 1986). Some students had favourable attitudes towards French immersion and continued because of personal and economic gains, as well as "tradition and family preferences" regarding French immersion education (Thorp, 2011, p. 57). Moreover, Varin (2005) argued that students can stay in French immersion until its completion if they have the right support network, including the positive influence of teachers, principals, schools, and school boards. For example, activities such as pairing up with younger students, holding cultural events, and having graduation ceremonies for French immersion graduates are ways in which to encourage French immersion student retention (Varin, 2005).

Notably, this review of the literature on French immersion, student attrition, and teacher experience indicated that there is a lack of research particularly concentrated on French immersion teachers' experiences with student attrition, which is the focus of the present study.

Chapter 4

Methodology

This instrumental qualitative case study (Creswell, 2012; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009) drew from the social constructivist perspective (Vygotsky, 1978) and Dewey's (1971) principles of interaction and continuity in experience to examine in detail the experiences of a group of current Ontario elementary French immersion teachers with the academic and social factors that influence student attrition. This chapter describes the methodology used in the present study, including information on the participants, instruments, and procedures.

In this section, case studies are compared to instrumental qualitative case studies. Yin (2009) argued that a case study allows "investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (p. 4). Moreover, the author outlined that a case study is a research project in which questions are posed regarding "a contemporary set of events ... over which the investigator has little or no control" (Yin, 2009, p. 13). That is, the researcher gathers information about the case as is without changing any elements in it. In contrast, as Creswell (2013) explained, in an instrumental qualitative case study, researchers' understanding "comes from learning about the issue of the case" (p. 101). Along similar lines, Stake (2005) contended that an instrumental qualitative case study is used "mainly to provide insight into an issue" whereas the case "facilitates our understanding of something" (p. 437). In other words, in an instrumental case study, the focus is on comprehending an issue that is known in advance according to selected theories, methods, and literature; the exploration of the case contributes to the understanding of the issue. As such, for the present study, an instrumental case study was more appropriate than a case study because the focus of this research was on exploring the issue of student attrition from French immersion.

Participants

Four Ontario elementary French immersion teachers participated in this study. This number of study participants is recommended for case studies by experts in the field of qualitative research (Creswell, 2012, 2013; Yin, 2009). To select study participants, I used *purposeful sampling* (Creswell, 2012, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002), meaning I included only teachers who met the minimum criteria to participate in the study¹⁰. The minimum criteria to participate were:

1. Teachers who have at least some experience teaching in French immersion; *and*
2. Teachers who have at least some experience with student attrition from French immersion; *and*
3. Teachers who were interested in the study and available to meet during the time of the research.

Here, the term *at least some* experience teaching in French immersion means that the participant was in at least his or her first year of teaching in French immersion. The term *at least some* experience with student attrition from French immersion means that, at the time of data collection, the participant had experienced a minimum of one student leaving French immersion. These criteria seemed relevant so as to ensure the participants would be able to discuss their personal experiences with student attrition from French immersion, thereby allowing me to obtain responses to the research questions and satisfy the research objective.

The operational definitions of teachers' levels of experience for the present study are as follows: *novice* teachers had up to three years of FSL teaching experience; *low intermediate* teachers had between three and nine years of FSL teaching experience; *high intermediate*

¹⁰ See Appendix A for the list of the minimum criteria questions posed in the recruitment email.

teachers had between ten and 15 years of FSL teaching experience; and *experienced* teachers had more than 15 years of FSL teaching experience. For the purposes of this study, I classified the teachers with respect to their number of years of experience as an *FSL* teacher because French immersion teachers in Ontario are certified to teach in all three FSL streams (Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, n.d.; Lacey & Wilson, 1999) and some French immersion teachers have experience teaching in other FSL streams.

Because teachers' experiences are at the heart of this study, the set of participants represented a diversity of levels of experience teaching in French immersion, ranging from a novice teacher to an experienced teacher. During the interviews, the participants confirmed their years of experience as an FSL and/or French immersion teacher, ranging from over one year of experience to 16 years of experience.

Recruitment. I contacted potential participants directly, rather than going through a school or school board so that the participants could feel as comfortable and free as possible in sharing information without potentially feeling pressure from their superiors to participate in the study or to provide certain responses. When I received approval from the Research Ethics Board in early September 2014, I began recruitment. I contacted people in my network of Ontario elementary French immersion teacher colleagues to access potential participants. I sent each person a recruitment email outlining the project, including a description of ideal candidates. In that email, I included a Letter of Information (Appendix B) about the study and I asked each person three questions to determine whether they met the minimum criteria (Appendix A) to participate in the study, as described previously. A total of four people responded to the recruitment email to say they were interested in and available to participate in the study; they all met the minimum criteria. I tried contacting two other potential participants for the study;

however, one was not interested in participating, and I was unable to reach the other. Once I confirmed that a potential participant met the minimum criteria and was interested in and available to participate in the study, I communicated with her by email to set up an interview time, date, and location that was convenient to her.

Participant Profiles. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of each study participant, pseudonyms were created for each participant in the study (Annabelle, Heather, Imogene, and Marianne)¹¹. Furthermore, I hid potentially identifying information, such as student, colleague, school, or school board names, or personal details of the participants, that might reveal the their identities or those of their students, colleagues, schools, or school boards. Table 3 shows an overview of the participants' profiles at the time of data collection regarding their: languages spoken; geographic region; years of experience; grade(s); FSL type(s); and school FSL track.

¹¹ All participant names used throughout the present study are pseudonyms.

Table 3

Overview of Participant Profiles

Name	Languages Spoken	Region	Years of Experience	Grade(s) Taught	FSL Type	FSL Track	# of students who left ¹²
Annabelle	French, Creole, English, Spanish	Eastern Ontario	1.5	7	early and middle; core	dual	1
Heather	Farsi, French, English	South-central Ontario	10	3	early	single	2
Imogene	French, English, Creole	Eastern Ontario	3	3/4 split class	early	dual	1
Marianne	French, English, Spanish, German	Eastern Ontario	16	n/a	early and middle; core	dual	1

Annabelle. At the time of data collection, Annabelle had a combined four and a half years of teaching experience as a teaching assistant, tutor, and teacher in a variety of subjects, primarily in French and sometimes in English, for students ranging from kindergarten to university. As a teaching assistant at a university for one year during the time in which she earned her Master's degree in French, Annabelle taught oral and written French to first- and second-year undergraduate students who were non-native French speakers. Then, while she was a tutor for two years for students in Grades 1 to 12, mainly in French and sometimes in English, Annabelle gained invaluable experience working with younger students in their French language learning. Annabelle had been a classroom teacher for a year and a half at the time of data collection, having taught Grade 2 and Grade 7 French immersion in two different schools in one

¹² As discussed in the interviews. It is possible the participants had experience with more than one student who left their FI class (except Marianne, who specified having had only one student leave her FI class).

school board in Eastern Ontario. At the time of the interviews, Annabelle was teaching Grade 7 early and middle French immersion, as well as Grade 7 core French. She discussed one student leaving her French immersion class.

Annabelle identified both French and Creole as her native languages, as she grew up using French with her mother and Creole with her father in her home country. Additionally, she was fluent in English, which she learned and used throughout elementary and secondary school¹³. She also spoke some Spanish. Annabelle identified as Francophone.

Annabelle had a Bachelor of Arts, a Bachelor of Education in FSL at the junior-intermediate level, and a Master's degree in French. She had taken Additional Qualification¹⁴ courses in Special Education, including Parts 1 and 2, as well as some professional development (PD) workshops on various topics. She had experience teaching in two schools in the same school board in Eastern Ontario. With respect to the minimum requirements the study participants must meet in order to participate, I classified Annabelle as a *novice* FSL teacher because she had under three years of FSL teaching experience.

Heather. As of the time of data collection, Heather had ten years of FSL teaching experience. As she explained, she taught Grades 6 and 8 core French for her first three to four years as a teacher, including history, geography, and art. Since that time, she was a French immersion teacher for about six years for Grades 3, 4, 6, and 7. When she taught Grades 4 and 6, she covered all subjects in French. As a Grade 7 French immersion teacher, she taught all subjects, specifying history, geography, and health. As a Grade 3 early French immersion teacher at the time of data collection, she taught all subjects in French, including language, science, and social studies. Heather discussed two students leaving her French immersion class.

¹³ The school system in Annabelle's home country was based on the British school system.

¹⁴ See the List of Terms for more information.

Heather spoke Farsi as her first language, French as her second language, and English as her third language. She was fluent in all three languages. She learned the European style of French at a French school in her home country and continued studying French while living in France and Quebec at various stages of her life. She learned English while living in Canada.

Heather held a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Education in FSL at the junior-intermediate level. She had participated in professional development activities on various aspects of teaching in French immersion. She taught in one school board in Southcentral Ontario. With respect to the minimum requirements the study participants must meet in order to participate, I classified Heather as a *high intermediate* FSL teacher because she had ten years of teaching experience in FSL.

Imogene. Imogene had three years of experience teaching in French immersion, as well as three years of experience tutoring elementary students in various subjects in English. As a French immersion teacher, she taught all subjects in French in Grades 3, 4, 5, and 6. Imogene's first language was French, she was fluent in English, which she learned in school, and she understood some Creole. Imogene identified as Francophone. At the time of the interviews, she taught split-level Grade 3/4 early French immersion. Imogene discussed one student leaving her French immersion class.

Imogene had a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Education in FSL at the junior-intermediate level. She participated in professional development sessions on various aspects of teaching in French immersion during her Bachelor of Education program and her time as a French immersion teacher. She taught in the same school in a school board in Eastern Ontario for the three years of her teaching career. With respect to the minimum requirements the study

participants must meet in order to participate, I classified Imogene as a *low intermediate* FSL teacher because she had three years of FSL teaching experience.

Marianne. A French immersion teacher for 16 years mostly at the Grade 8 level, Marianne taught a wide range of subjects to students in the junior-intermediate grades. In recent years, Marianne's classes had a roughly equal mix of early and middle French immersion students. She had additional experience teaching core French alongside her immersion classes. Marianne also had experience teaching Grades 6 and 7 French immersion physical education, French, history, geography, art, and science, as well as Grade 1 French immersion physical education. As for the core French classes, she taught Grades 5, 6, 7, and 8 French language arts. In addition to these experiences teaching FSL, Marianne taught classes in English from time to time. At the time of the interviews, Marianne was on sabbatical. She specified having had only one student leave her French immersion class throughout her career.

Marianne identified as a Francophone and was fluent in English. She spoke French all the time at home, at school, and in life in general, and spoke English when necessary in certain situations, such as with friends or family who do not speak French. She learned English in school. She also spoke some Spanish and German.

Marianne held a diploma in translation from a CÉGEP, a Bachelor of Arts in Second Language Education, and a Bachelor of Education in FSL at the junior-intermediate level. According to Marianne, there are very few professional development workshops available specifically for French immersion teachers. As for the few sessions that she did attend, she found them to be unhelpful, as most of the participants spoke English during the sessions, and, as she suggested, there is a lack of training for the people who offer those sessions. Marianne has spent the majority of her teaching career at one school in a school board in Eastern Ontario. With

respect to the minimum requirements the study participants must meet in order to participate, I classified Marianne as an *experienced* FSL teacher because she had over 15 years of FSL teaching experience.

Instruments

I conducted two semi-structured interviews with each participant to explore their experiences with the reasons for student attrition from French immersion. The primary purpose of conducting individual interviews with each participant was to ask them about their experiences with the academic and social factors that influence student attrition from French immersion, as well as how they might address it. By conducting two interviews with each participant and by asking and restating questions throughout and across the interviews, I engaged in *member checking* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Tobin, 2006). Moreover, I used multiple data entry points to gain insight about the topic directly from the participants (Creswell, 2012). By conducting interviews, I engaged directly with the participants and provided them with the space to share their experiences.

In the interviews, I used mainly *open-ended questions* in such a way “that the participants [could] best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings” (Creswell, 2012, p. 218). Open-ended questions allow for “the participant to create the options for responding,” meaning they can choose which information to share and how much of it to share (Creswell, 2012, p. 218). An advantage of conducting interviews is that the interviewer “has better control over the types of information received, because the interviewer can ask specific questions to elicit this information” (Creswell, 2012, p. 218). A disadvantage of conducting interviews is that, if the participant does not feel comfortable sharing information during the session, data could not be obtained (Creswell, 2012). To overcome this potential

challenge, I prepared additional questions using alternate wording to encourage the participant to share her experiences. In the very few instances when a participant did not have a response to a question when I posed it, the interview continued, and I returned to the question at a later time in the interview.

During the interviews, I used interview guides with small sets of questions (Appendix C) to encourage the participants to share their experiences, including with the factors that affect student attrition, how they adjust their teaching to address student attrition, and how they encourage students to stay in or leave French immersion. The questions in Interview 1 pertained mainly to the research questions and the theoretical framework of the study. Similarly, the questions in Interview 2 were based on the research questions and the theoretical framework, but were also framed by the information from Interview 1. Table 4 shows that each of the instruments (Interviews 1 and 2) allowed me to obtain responses to the research questions.

Table 4

Relationships Between the Research Questions and the Interview Questions

Research Questions	Instruments	
	Questions	
	Interview 1	Interview 2
According to a group of Ontario elementary French immersion teachers, what academic and social factors influence student attrition from French immersion?	3., 3.a.i., 3.a.ii., 3.b.	1., 2., 2.a., and dependent upon Interview 1 responses
How are this group of teachers' current teaching practices affected by their previous experiences with the academic and social factors that influence student attrition in French immersion, by their personal and professional learning experiences, as well as by their social context?	4.a.	3. and dependent upon Interview 1 responses
How might these teachers encourage students to stay in or leave French immersion?	4.b., 5.	4. and dependent upon Interview 1 responses

As Table 4 illustrates, each of the three research questions were addressed by both instruments, Interview 1 and Interview 2. Research Question 1 was addressed by Interview 1 Question 3 and Interview 2 Questions 1 and 2. Research Question 2 was addressed by Interview 1 Question 4. a. and Interview 2 Question 3. Research Question 3 was addressed by Interview 1 Questions 4. b. and 5 and Interview 2 Question 4.

Procedures

Data collection. The two interviews with each participant took place from late September 2014 to early December 2014. I composed the interview questions and left space to add follow-up questions for the second interview that were based on information obtained in the first interview. The two interviews for each participant took place approximately one month apart, depending on the participant's availability for both time and location. I met with Annabelle in the food court of a shopping centre, I called Heather's home phone using Skype, I met with Imogene in the food courts of shopping centres, and I met with Marianne at coffee shops. Because teachers are very busy and I did not want to overwhelm them with a burdensome time commitment, I scheduled each interview to take approximately 45 minutes. In most cases, the interviews lasted for approximately one hour to one and a half hours.

In the time between the two interviews I transcribed verbatim the audio files of the first interviews, began preliminary data analysis based on my notes and transcriptions, prepared for the second interview, and re-listened to each file to become more familiar with the data and to develop follow-up questions for the second interview. Six of the interviews took place in English, and two were in French. As I am proficient in both English and French, it was important to me that the participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences regardless of whether we spoke in English or French.

After each of the first interviews, the time, date, and location for the follow-up interview were set. In some cases, this was done in person at the end of the first interview, and in other cases, this was done by email in the days following the first interview. Also after each of the first interviews, I sent each participant an email to thank her again for participating in the study, and to invite her to share more information by email or phone if she chose to; in no case did a participant do so. In the days leading up to the second interview, I sent each participant a reminder email to confirm her interest and availability. Finally, after each of the second interviews, I sent each of the participants another email to thank them again for participating in the study, and to invite them to share more information by email or phone if they chose to; in no case did a participant do so. At the time of data collection, it was my understanding that because it was not part of my research ethics protocol to contact participants after the interviews to read and comment on the transcriptions or to gather missing information, I did not do so.

Data analysis. According to Merriam (2009), qualitative data analysis begins while the researcher is still collecting data. From the first set of data collected, the researcher should take the time to sit down and reflect on the information gathered, as well as “review the purpose of [the] study” and think about what to look for in the next set of data (Merriam, 2009, p. 170). Moreover, Merriam (2009) suggested that, following subsequent sets of data collection, the researcher should compare the new information with that of the previous set, and so on, until the end of data collection. By going through the contemplative process of reflection during data collection, the researcher will develop “a set of tentative categories or themes” for coding and analysis (Merriam, 2009, p. 171). This continuous flow of reflection and thought helped me keep organized and focused on the study over the three months during which data collection occurred.

Data significance and insignificance. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), one element that a case study researcher should keep in mind is *how* to choose *which* information to include in the study. As the authors argued, the case study “researcher need not always adhere to criteria of representativeness” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 257). That is, he or she should keep in mind that all types of data may be relevant to the study, whether they appear representative of the participant sample or not. Moreover, the authors contended that “a subject might only demonstrate a particular behaviour once, but it is so important so as not to be ruled out” for that reason (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 257). Perhaps that one instance of behaviour or commentary provides much insight into the issue.

In this project, there were some themes that were discussed by all four participants, alluding to their relevance in the study. As those themes in particular related directly to the research questions and the purpose of the study, I determined that they were important enough to include in the analysis. For example, all of the participants mentioned the *reasons* for student attrition, and how they might *change their approaches* in the classroom to address that issue. In contrast, there were a few instances where only one or two participants referred to a particular topic. For example, only one participant emphasized how important *social* factors are in students' decisions to leave French immersion. Because this piece of information relates directly to the study, it was included.

Using NVivo. Creswell (2012) recommended “that researchers use a qualitative computer program to facilitate the process of storing, analyzing, sorting, and representing or visualizing the data” (p. 241). I decided to use the qualitative research software NVivo for coding and analysis because I was familiar with it prior to this study and was comfortable using computer software to help with my work. In NVivo, excerpts from data files are coded into *nodes*, which are the

categories created by the researcher to which the excerpts are attributed. A data file can have several excerpts and several nodes, an excerpt can pertain to more than one node, and a node can have several excerpts from one or more data files. In one example from the present study, the node *New FSL curriculum* is referenced five times over four interviews, whereas the node *Student confidence* is referenced 19 times over six interviews (see Appendix D). In another example from the present study, an excerpt referencing both a *student's success* and his or her *difficulty with vocabulary* would be categorized into two nodes: *Success* and *Vocab difficulty*. Prior to coding, I had ideas of what nodes I would create because they would be based on the interview questions, research questions, theoretical framework, and purpose of the study (Merriam, 2009). Moreover, Merriam (2009) explained that the naming and creating of the nodes or “categories is largely an intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study’s purpose” (p. 183). When it came time to create the names of the nodes, I used intuitive words or sets of words. There are 34 nodes in total (see Appendix F).

Coding comparison chart. I developed a Coding Comparison Chart to demonstrate which participants mentioned which nodes (see Appendix E). For example, the chart shows which participant(s) mentioned the node *Parent involvement* and which did not. Moreover, the chart shows how the nodes related to the interview questions. In this way, I was able to identify the few main themes that the participants discussed across the interviews for a *thematic discourse analysis* (Creswell, 2012, 2013; Yin, 2009). This chart was very helpful to use in the development of the Findings (Chapter 5) and Discussion (Chapter 6) because it provided an at-a-glance overview of which nodes were mentioned by which participants in which interviews. I followed Creswell’s (2012) abovementioned recommendation regarding reducing the number of coding categories into a manageable number by examining the chart and reflecting on the

research questions and objective. I gradually reduced the initial list of 34 nodes to a final list of seven main themes, which relate to the research questions and objective, and are therefore the most relevant ones to discuss. In Table 5, the seven main themes of this study are presented in relationship to the study's research questions.

Table 5

Relationships Between the Study Themes and the Research Questions

Theme	Research Question		
	1	2	3
The academic factors that influence student attrition, including: students' difficulty in French class; students' French language skills	•		
The social factors that influence student attrition, including: the influence of students' friends and family	•		
Other factors that influence student attrition	•		
How the teachers change their approaches and strategies to address student attrition, including: examples of how the teachers modify their practice; assigning homework or extra work		•	
Encouraging students to stay in or leave French immersion			•
The influence of the teachers' past experiences on their current practice, including: experiences with previous lesson plans and activities; the teachers' education and training; the teachers' own second/foreign language learning experiences		•	
The influence of the social context on the teachers' experiences		•	

As shown in Table 5, the first, second, and third themes relate to Research Question 1, the fourth, sixth, and seventh themes relate to Research Question 2, and the fifth theme relates to Research Question 3.

To supplement the list of node names that was created, I developed a *Glossary of Coding Nodes* to explain the words used for coding (see Appendix F). For example, for the node *Attrition general*, the glossary explains that these are excerpts that reflect “the concept or trend of

attrition in general.” In such instances, the participants referred to the trend or concept of attrition *overall* or *in general* as opposed to discussing something specific about it.

After coding. After coding each transcription, I re-read the files to confirm that the excerpts were coded according to the appropriate nodes and to ensure that all relevant excerpts were coded. Furthermore, I had the validity of the coding tested by my thesis supervisor, who reviewed two of the transcriptions and their coding, and was able to code them using the same nodes. By examining the nodes and cross-referencing between the eight transcriptions, the commonalities and differences among the files became evident, as well as which nodes were and were not used in a single transcription. Moreover, I got a better sense of what might be the most relevant themes in the study in order to develop the Discussion (Chapter 6) (Creswell, 2012).

Validity of the Findings

For qualitative research studies, Creswell (2012) argued that the researcher should ensure that the “findings and interpretations [of the study] are accurate” (p. 259). This can be done by *member checking*, which is when a researcher checks the validity of a participants’ responses by asking the same questions in different ways, by restating what the participants have said, and by asking other participants in the study the same questions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Tobin, 2006). Moreover, as Creswell (2013) specified, member checking “involves taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants” thereby using multiple entry points to engage with the participants about their stories (p. 252).

I conducted two semi-structured interviews with each participant and did member checking by confirming with each participant in the second interview what was learned from her in the first interview. Thus, I ensured that I understood what they had shared. During the interviews, I rephrased what the participants said for certain questions and asked them about

certain topics in more than one way, thus providing them with the space to elaborate or clarify. Furthermore, because I posed the same set of questions to each participant, I gathered information on the same topics from their different points of view.

Trustworthiness of the Study

In addition to confirming the validity of the findings in a qualitative research study, researchers should verify the *trustworthiness* of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Throughout a study, as Bassey (1999) suggested, the researcher should pose reflective questions to him- or herself, such as, “Has there been prolonged engagement with data sources?” and “Has there been persistent observation of emerging issues?” (p. 75). These questions are intended to ensure the researcher has considered all aspects of data collection and presentation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This includes the length of time during which the researcher engaged with the participants, whether triangulation of data has occurred, whether the research findings can be challenged by others, and whether the research report provides enough details “to give the reader confidence in the findings” (Bassey, 1999, p. 75). In presenting these questions, Bassey (1999) encouraged the researcher to be conscious and reflective throughout the entire research process. I ensured the trustworthiness of this study by asking myself these questions throughout the research process and by making conscious, reflective decisions during the course of all aspects of the study.

Chapter 5

Findings

In this chapter, the findings of the study will be presented according to the seven following themes, which are connected to the research questions as previously shown in Table 5:

1. The academic factors that influence student attrition, including
 - a. Students' difficulty in French class; and
 - b. Students' French language skills;
2. The social factors that influence student attrition, including
 - a. The influence of students' friends and family;
3. Other factors that influence student attrition;
4. How the teachers change their approaches and strategies to address student attrition, including
 - a. Examples of how the teachers modify their practice; and
 - b. Assigning homework or extra work;
5. Encouraging students to stay in or leave French immersion; and
6. The influence of the teachers' past experiences on their current practice, including
 - a. Experiences with previous lesson plans and activities;
 - b. Their education, training, and professional development; and
 - c. Their own second/foreign language learning experiences; and
7. The influence of the social context on the teachers' experiences

Themes

The participants provided rich responses to the interview questions and shared their experiences as French immersion teachers, with student attrition, and on various topics. The

findings have been grouped according to the seven themes as mentioned previously. In this section, first, I discuss the factors that influence student attrition from French immersion; then, I describe how the teachers change their approaches and strategies to address student attrition; next, I explain how the teachers encourage students to stay in or leave French immersion; after that, I outline the influence of the teachers' past experiences on their current practice; and finally, I discuss the influence of the social context on the teachers' experiences.

Academic, social, and other factors influencing student attrition. Here, I describe the participants' responses regarding the academic, social, and other factors that influence student attrition.

Academic factors. In this study, academic factors refer to the elements associated with a student's educational experiences in the classroom, such as grades, assessment, homework, and difficulty of course content. The participants' responses regarding the academic factors that influence student attrition are categorized into two topics: students' difficulty in French class; and students' French language skills. In general, the participants alluded to the academic difficulties that some French immersion students have that are related to course content, as well as the students' French language learning challenges.

Students' difficulty in French class. In the first interview with Annabelle, she declared that she believed that students experiencing difficulty in school would likely start having such issues early on in elementary school, starting "in Grade 1, Grade 2 [...] someone has seen it [the difficulty] ... and something has to be done" (pp. 14-15). Annabelle reiterated this in the second interview, saying that "by Grade 3, they should be quite stable where they are" in terms of having learning difficulties, requiring an Individual Education Plan (IEP), or needing to leave French immersion to access support resources (p. 5). Furthermore, she thought that "by Grade 6

it should be almost set. Where do you want to be? Where do you want to go?” (Annabelle, Interview 2, p. 5). In other words, in Annabelle’s view, students who experience difficulty and may have a learning disability should be identified as such in the early grades of elementary school. In Annabelle’s experience, this process of identification would be started by the classroom teacher making observations and gathering information about the student’s progress and discussing them with the student and his or her parents, as well as school administration and the learning resource teacher, potentially leading to assessments by the student’s family doctor and a psychologist (Interview 1).

Annabelle explained that older students in elementary school “have to prepare for high school,” and therefore are focused on their studies (Interview 1, p. 22). Annabelle claimed that because they are preparing for their future studies and academic paths, students like her Grade 7s are less concerned with spending time with friends and more concerned with their school work and academic future (Interview 1, p. 22). According to Annabelle, students in Grades 7 and 8 “are going to see each other during recess,” so they can socialize during that time, and not in class (Interview 1, p. 23). Regarding older elementary students’ attrition, she said, “I don’t think it’s because of their friends if they are going to switch [from] immersion,” clarifying that the reason why they may leave “has to be academic,” such as struggling because learning French and learning *in* French is “too hard” (Annabelle, Interview 1, p. 23). That is, because students in the later grades of elementary school are preparing for their future and deciding what high school programs interest them the most, leaving any stream of French immersion would be because of an academic influence that would have an impact on their current and future school experiences.

As for Heather, she confirmed that academic factors influenced students in the junior grades to leave early French immersion. She said that it is only academic factors, not social ones,

which have an impact on French immersion student attrition. In her experience, social factors, such as negative perceptions about learning FSL, are experienced “only in core French” (Heather, Interview 1, p. 7). Drawing from her experiences teaching at the junior level, mainly Grades 4 and 6 early French immersion, she stated that some students who left found it “too hard and they didn’t have the basic skills so sometimes it was harder for them especially [to] follow instructions or [because] the workload is a lot” (Heather, Interview 1, p. 24). Furthermore, Heather explained that students in those grades need to “be able to read [...] chapter books, and [...] maybe do a summary, do a report” (Interview 1, p. 24). In this type of activity, the students would be building on the second language reading and writing skills they learned in earlier grades, but, as Heather explained, “sometimes it’s too much, you know, following at school, then they [have] homework they can’t follow, so they struggle [...] it’s hard for them, they get stressed” and some of them are therefore unable to continue in French immersion (Interview 1, p. 24). Additionally, some early French immersion students will reach Grade 8 and “decide they don’t like French because it’s too much” and will not continue it in high school (Heather, Interview 1, p. 25). However, despite the difficulties that some students may experience in French immersion, Heather advocated that students,

shouldn’t give up [in] the early years in my opinion, but if they’re a student who’s really, really struggling, a lot of it’s processing, you know, they don’t understand, it’s a learning disability, not a language disability [...] then they should not stay [...] in a school with two languages ... so it could be many issues. But [...] if it’s not that, then they should try it ‘cause it’s always good to have a second language. (Interview 1, p. 26)

In Heather’s view, it seemed as though students who were having difficulty in French class should stay in French immersion as long as possible because of the many benefits of learning and

knowing a second language; however, this should not be to the detriment of the student (Interview 1, p. 26). Moreover, Heather explained that when a student is having academic difficulty in English class, he or she can also have academic difficulty in French class; it is not necessarily that the student is having difficulty with learning in French (Interview 1, p. 5). However, as Heather stated, sometimes the student struggles too much and “should not be in immersion” (Interview 1, p. 11). This comment could be a reflection on the lack of support resources in French immersion for students who are struggling. However, it could also reflect some perceptions of what kind of student should be in it; if some students struggle ‘too much’ in immersion, they should switch to the English program.

Heather articulated that academic factors can have a significant impact on how a student progresses in later grades. The same could be said for student progress in French immersion, as Heather declared (Interview 1). For instance, Heather explained that the early French immersion Grade 1 program is “oral,” while at the end of Grade 2 is when the students start learning “reading comprehension [...] and then they actually start reading in Grade 3, so a lot of these students that come to the higher grades, they have trouble because they don’t understand” the course content that is related to reading at those grades in particular (Interview 1, p. 4).

What is more, Heather said that some students in the junior grades who struggle with reading have academic difficulty in some subjects because, for example, science and “social studies [require] a lot of reading and writing, so [the students] cannot follow” along with the lesson (Interview 1, p. 4). Furthermore, Heather confirmed in the second interview that some students might have trouble understanding “instructions in French and they have a hard time following different steps in the French language, and then the marks are low usually in the level 2s or lower than that, so they can’t follow the curriculum” (p. 1). These situations could lead to

the students' attrition from French immersion because of 'too many' struggles. For Heather, academic reasons influence student attrition from early French immersion.

As for Imogene's views, she emphasized that academic factors have more impact than social ones on students' decisions to leave French immersion. Particularly for older students, such as those in Grade 6, Imogene explained that the ones who are having trouble at that age have "been having troubles since the beginning" of elementary school (Interview 1, p. 4). In one example, Imogene recalled having a struggling student whose parent "did not want to switch him to the English program," and, because the parent has the final say in whether the child will leave French immersion, "that student keeps struggling [year] after year" (Interview 1, p. 4). In examples like that one, the situation was complex because the parent wanted the child to stay in French immersion despite the child's struggles, and the child continued to experience difficulty because of a lack of support resources "on the French side, it's very hard, very, very hard to get support. It's just not common. So the teacher would spend more time with that particular student" (Imogene, Interview 1, p. 4). Imogene confirmed that, once she learns that a student is having difficulty, she "would definitely help them" as much as she could (Interview 1, p. 4). These last two comments are in line with what classroom teachers are expected to do in terms of helping students who are struggling (Ministry of Education, 2008, 2010).

The year after Imogene had that struggling student in her class, she spoke with the student's new teacher to see how he was doing. Imogene said that the teacher confirmed the student still "has academic issues, he has social issues. For him to be in that program [French immersion] just doesn't help him at all 'cause again there's not much support in immersion" (Interview 1, p. 5). In this case, it seemed as though the student was struggling a lot in French immersion and was not benefitting in any way from continuing to struggle in it year after year.

Additionally, in the second interview, when Imogene again discussed academic factors influencing student attrition, she confirmed that “it’s rare for a kid to have an IEP in immersion [... she] think[s] it’s because [they] don’t have resources, like there’s no educational assistant in immersion” to help students who are struggling (p. 29). However, Imogene outlined that some struggling students continue in French immersion because they do not “want to leave their friends,” so they stay “just for social reasons” (Interview 1, p. 4). For Imogene, academic factors influence why some students leave early French immersion.

As for Marianne’s view on whether academic factors influence student attrition from French immersion, she explained that such factors may affect some students if they have “une estime d’eux-mêmes un peu plus faible, qui se découragent avec des erreurs, t’sais, qui se découragent facilement” (self-esteem that is a bit weaker, who are discouraged by errors, you know, who get discouraged easily¹⁵) (Interview 1, p. 18). Additionally, Marianne commented on students entering French immersion in the early years of elementary school, saying, “il y a beaucoup de difficultés académiques qui vont arriver au niveau [... s’ils] sont pas là mentalement, psychologiquement [...] ils ont pas de la maturité encore non plus pour pouvoir saisir plus les nuances” (there are many academic difficulties that will happen on the level of [...] if they] are not there mentally, psychologically [...] they are not mature enough either to be able to grasp more of the nuances) (Interview 1, p. 19). Some students are just not ready to be in French immersion, especially if they begin in Kindergarten or Grade 4, where it is the parents, not the student, who decide to enroll their child in it (Marianne, Interview 1, pp. 3-4).

However, Marianne did offer a positive comment regarding French immersion students experiencing difficulty: “j’pense pas que les difficultés académiques sont irréversibles [...] il est

¹⁵ All translations were done by the author at the time of writing.

jamais rien qui est final” (I don’t think that academic difficulties are irreversible [...] there is nothing that is final) (Interview 1, p. 19). In this view, students who experience academic difficulty at one point in school may not continue to experience it over time; it is possible to overcome an academic difficulty, or to learn to live with it, and continue on. What is more, Marianne argued in the second interview that in French immersion, it is necessary that “on puisse bien les soutenir pour s’assurer qu’ils restent dans le programme parce que dans le fond, quitter le programme c’est un peu comme, t’sais, on laisserait pas des enfants quitter l’école” (we can really support them to ensure that they stay in the program because in the end, leaving the program is a bit like, you know, we wouldn’t let kids leave school) (Interview 2, p. 2). That is to say, school boards, schools, and teachers should do all that they can to help students in French immersion to ensure that they are as well-equipped as possible to continue (Marianne, Interview 2, p. 2). Then, in the cases where students do end up leaving French immersion, school boards, schools, and teachers will have done all they can to encourage the student to stay in it (Marianne, Interview 2, p. 2). For Marianne, academic factors influence student attrition from early and middle French immersion, particularly because of a lack of support resources to help students who may be struggling.

Students’ French language skills. The participants explained that another academic challenge that may hinder some students’ progress in French immersion is related to their French language skills. Annabelle briefly mentioned students’ language skills, wondering if students who are struggling in French immersion find the language to be “not appropriate” for their learning needs (Interview 1, p. 13) or that the student is “not good at languages” (Interview 2, p. 8). For some students, learning another language is very difficult, thereby negatively affecting their academic progress in French immersion.

As Heather explained, some students who struggle in French “also struggle in English,” suggesting that their academic challenges are not necessarily related to learning the French language or learning in French (Interview 1, p. 5). However, in Heather’s experience, some of her students who were struggling in early French immersion did better once they switched to the regular English program because, as they told her afterwards, “they were happy to be in the regular program because they didn’t have to worry or think about French [...] they didn’t have to struggle thinking [about] other subjects in French” (Heather, Interview 1, p. 26). It seemed as though struggling to learn the French language negatively influenced these students’ progress in French immersion, thereby adversely affecting their academic achievement. Thus, those students left because of difficulty with the French language and their low French language skills.

As for Imogene, she briefly stated that some French immersion students who were having difficulty in English class would also have difficulty in French class because “they don’t really understand the language in English and then in French it just gets worse” (Interview 1, p. 2). In Imogene’s experience, some students struggle too much with learning another language, especially if they are having difficulty in their first language. It seems that for Imogene, if a student did not have strong literacy skills in their first language, then he or she could not build on them to develop literacy skills in additional languages.

Marianne outlined that when students face new expectations, such as when they enter French immersion, having to learn a new language can be too much for some students (Interview 1, p. 3). Marianne explained that, “quand t’ajoutes la notion de [...] une autre langue [...] ça devient un peu trop” (when you add the notion of [...] another language [...] it becomes a bit much) (Interview 1, p. 3). As Marianne outlined, some French immersion students have difficulty with comprehension in French, so when they learn science in French, for example,

“c’est un problème” (it’s a problem) (Interview 1, p. 21). This does not mean that those students have trouble with science, but rather “la langue devient un obstacle [et en science] des fois c’est des concepts plus abstraits” (the language becomes an obstacle [and in science] sometimes it’s more abstract concepts) (Marianne, Interview 2, p. 20). In cases such as these, students’ French language skills can have an impact on how they learn curriculum content. Difficulty with the French language is another example of an academic factor that influences why some students leave French immersion.

As the participants confirmed, academic factors, such as difficulty with French language skills development and course content, could be very influential in students’ decisions to leave French immersion. However, in some cases, some of the participants described how social factors influenced students’ decisions to leave.

Social factors. In addition to academic factors influencing student attrition from French immersion, social factors could also affect students’ decisions to leave. Social factors in this study are factors which are associated with a student’s life as it relates to personal interests, friends, family, and classmates, as well as the teacher, school, community, and culture in which the student lives. For two of the participants, Heather and Imogene, social factors did not influence their students’ attrition. For Annabelle, social factors influenced her younger students more than her older ones. For Marianne, social factors weighed heavily on her students’ lives. First, I present Heather’s and Imogene’s comments regarding social factors and student attrition, which is followed by Annabelle’s and Marianne’s articulations on the influence of students’ friends and family on their attrition from French immersion.

Heather was quick to say that social factors did not influence student attrition from French immersion. For Heather, social factors affected only *core* French students and not French

immersion students. This was because, in her experience teaching in early French immersion, student attrition is,

not because of friends or anything 'cause they come from Grade 1 and then usually you have support at home because [the parents] want their kids to learn the language so if they're struggling they get a tutor and all that 'cause they want them to continue.

(Heather, Interview 1, p. 7)

In Heather's experience, her early French immersion students were not influenced by social factors such as their friends or negative perceptions of French (Interview 1, p. 7). Heather explained that, by and large, early French immersion students spend many years together, have support at home, and are well-equipped to continue in French immersion, so if they face academic difficulty, they have the necessary resources to overcome it (Interview 1, p. 7). For Heather, social factors are not influential in student attrition from early French immersion.

Similarly, regarding whether social factors influenced Imogene's students to leave French immersion, she said, "I haven't seen it happen" (Interview 1, p. 6). However, she did say that some students struggle academically because of their personal disinterest in learning the language; that is, "they just choose not to work [...] they don't pay attention in class [...] they don't want to succeed [...] it's just not important to them" (Imogene, Interview 1, pp. 6-7). This likely influences their academic experiences in French immersion, potentially leading to their attrition from it. For the most part, for Imogene, social factors, such as students' friends and family, are not influential in student attrition from early French immersion.

The influence of students' friends and family. According to Annabelle, social factors influenced her younger students more than her older ones. Regarding students leaving French immersion, she said, "if they are younger, like my Grade 2s, [it's from] social factors"

(Annabelle, Interview 1, p. 21). Recalling one example in which a student left French immersion for social reasons, Annabelle said that the student “wanted to move to the English class because [Annabelle had already] moved one of [the student’s] friends” (Interview 1, p. 22). Annabelle explained that the friend had left French immersion and this student was not interested in participating in class because she wanted to spend time with her friend (Annabelle, Interview 1, pp. 21-22). What is more, Annabelle claimed that the student’s experiences in French immersion were also influenced by her family, specifically her older sisters. In this case, the student did “not care about school. And she has a sister who’s in Grade 8 and one in Grade 6 [...] her behaviour is like the girls’, like teenagers [...] and there’s] not a lot of discipline at home” (Annabelle, Interview 1, p. 4). Annabelle suggested that the student exhibited behaviour as modeled by her older sisters, which led to that student acting out in class and therefore experiencing academic difficulty (Interview 1, p. 4). In Annabelle’s experience, younger students tend to leave early French immersion for social factors.

Marianne was the only participant who emphasized the importance of social factors for her early and middle French immersion students. She claimed that social factors, such as spending a lot of time with friends, play a vital role in her students’ lives (Marianne, Interview 1, p. 4). She explained that, at the intermediate level, particularly in her Grade 7 and 8 classes, students’ social experiences are very important, and therefore can be influential in their academic choices (Marianne, Interview 1, p. 4). Marianne said: “surtout quand on arrive en 7^e et en 8^e, des niveaux où j’enseigne le plus, l’aspect social devient super important. Si ton ami est pas là, même si tu fais tous les efforts, c’est difficile” (especially when you arrive in Grade 7 and Grade 8, levels where I teach the most, the social aspect becomes super important. If your friend isn’t there, even if you make every effort, it’s hard) (Interview 1, p. 4). Moreover, as Marianne

declared, when students in the intermediate grades of elementary school are physically disconnected from their friends in different classes and having different experiences, they can experience social separation, even in the school yard (Interview 1, p. 4). For some students in the later grades of elementary school, academic influences, such as being in French immersion, might not be as important as social influences, such as being with friends.

Marianne elaborated that students who begin French immersion in Grade 7, that is, students in *late* French immersion, experience less social pressure to leave than students who are in early or middle French immersion. Marianne explained that late French immersion students “ont été ceux qui est dans la prise de décision, Okay, je commence mon programme” (were those who were involved in the decision-making, Okay, I’m starting my program) (Interview 1, p. 4). This may suggest that late French immersion students are actively involved in the decision to enter French immersion in the first place, and are therefore more invested in staying in French immersion (Marianne, Interview 1, p. 4). Marianne was the only participant to discuss students in late French immersion; she had never taught in that FSL stream (Interview 1, p. 4).

Other factors. As for other factors that might influence early and middle French immersion student attrition, such as family mobility, student behaviour, or cultural influences, the participants’ responses suggested that such factors are not very influential.

As outlined previously, Annabelle said that social factors tended to influence younger students, whereas academic factors tended to influence older students. Annabelle did not discuss other factors that might influence student attrition, other than to say briefly that factors like culture and family are “not really” influential in this decision (Interview 2, p. 5). More specifically, she said “everyone [...] wants their child to be in French immersion,” suggesting

there is a widespread perception that parents would want their child to be *in* French immersion, so would not want to have their child leave it (Annabelle, Interview 2, p. 5).

Likewise, Heather did not discuss other factors that influence student attrition from French immersion; for her, it is academic factors that are influential. However, Heather did say that one of her students, who was autistic, left French immersion because he was “having [trouble with] two languages” (Interview 2, p. 1). She suggested that “medical issues,” like autism in this student’s case, can influence students’ learning experiences in French immersion (Heather, Interview 2, p. 1).

Imogene mentioned knowing of one case of a teacher at her school who wanted a student with “behaviour issues” to leave French immersion (Interview 2, p. 8). Imogene suggested that having “behaviour issues would mean [...] you might be lower academically [...] and] if you’re low academically, then your second language most likely is not the greatest” (Imogene, Interview 1, p. 44). As for one of Imogene’s former students who was struggling academically but did not leave French immersion because his parents wanted to keep him in, he still had “behaviour issues, so the thing is even if he goes in the English program, a lot of his issues would still stay there,” as previously described (Interview 2, p. 21).

Though two of the four participants emphasized *academic* factors over *social* factors influencing student attrition, it is noted that social factors could play an important role in student attrition from French immersion in certain situations. The participants did not have much to say regarding other factors, like family mobility, student behaviour, or program type (whether early, middle, or late French immersion) as being influential in student attrition. Furthermore, it seems as though each case of student attrition was unique, including considerations of the student’s age

and grade at the time of leaving and the reason(s) for it. As the participants discussed the factors that influence French immersion student attrition, they also explained what they did to address it.

Changing approaches and strategies. As the participants explained in the interviews, and following Ministry of Education (2008, 2010; see also Ministry of Education, 2013a) guidelines regarding differentiated instruction, when teachers notice that students are struggling to grasp a concept, understand a lesson, complete an activity, do a test, or participate in class, they try to help them in any way possible. The ways in which this is done could include changing teaching approaches or strategies to alter how lessons or activities are presented, as explained in the following sections.

Examples of how the teachers modify their practice. Because Annabelle was a tutor for elementary French immersion students prior to becoming a French immersion teacher, she got first-hand experience with some of the issues that French immersion students may have (Interview 1, p. 1). Then as a classroom teacher, in such instances where her students were struggling, Annabelle changed her approaches and strategies to help them understand the lesson or concept based “on the needs of the class” (Interview 1, p. 33). For example, for the three students in her Grade 7 homeroom class who used a school board-issued laptop to help them take notes and stay organized, Annabelle would make sure she provided them with “a handout of my notes” to supplement their learning (Interview 1, p. 31). Likewise, another of Annabelle’s Grade 7 students was having difficulty in French class, but had not been identified as needing an IEP (Interview 1, p. 31). For this student, Annabelle made sure that “she too will get a copy of my notes,” and, for example, would she lend her a copy of the geography textbook to “bring the book back home [to] have a look at it [...] because [she needed] more time” with the material (Interview 1, p. 31).

Some of Annabelle's Grade 2 students had academic difficulty in French class because of their low reading skills. She clarified that two of them in particular were reading at level 5 and level 7, respectively, whereas, she said, the curriculum expectations outlined that students should be at level 18 or 19 by the end of Grade 2 (Interview 1). In this situation, Annabelle did what she could in class to help these students improve their reading skills. One way in which she did this was by working one-on-one with one of the students "to teach her decoding" (Annabelle, Interview 1, p. 6). That is, Annabelle helped the student with some of the very basics of reading: learning how to identify the letters and pronounce the sounds that letters make. Annabelle "did explain why" she was giving support to these students "to the mom[s]" to help them understand what their children were going through in French class (Interview 1, p. 4). She said that one parent was more receptive than the other to the news of her child struggling (Annabelle, Interview 1, p. 4). Furthermore, Annabelle mentioned the matter to her school administration so they could all discuss it with the students' parents, including whether the students should have IEPs for reading. Annabelle "left the school" before finding out whether the students ended up with an IEP or whether they ultimately left French immersion (Interview 1, p. 4).

Additionally, Annabelle recalled a specific example in which two of her Grade 2 students were having trouble in French class, who at the time of data collection "don't, but they will have, IEPs" (Interview 1, p. 40). For those students, Annabelle described that she began to "use more hands-on activities with them" as a way to help them understand the lesson and to have them play active roles in their learning processes (Interview 1, p. 40). However, Annabelle explained that these hands-on activities "did help them, but at the same time [she] could see that [she] was not giving enough attention to the rest of [her] class" (Interview 1, p. 40). Reflecting on this experience, Annabelle shared that, in similar situations in the future, she would try to not spend

“a lot of time on [her] kids who are not strong, you should help them, but [she] think[s] [she] gave too much” attention to them and not enough to the other students in the class (Interview 1, p. 40). She sought to find a balance between helping the students who needed the extra help, and making sure that she did not end up “neglect[ing]” the rest of the class (Annabelle, Interview 1, p. 40). These are just three examples of how Annabelle changed her teaching approaches and differentiated her lessons to help students who would otherwise have too much difficulty.

In the same way, Heather articulated that she had experience modifying her teaching practice by providing extra material to her students who were struggling in French class (Interview 1, pp. 9-10). She explained that when she sees a student is having difficulty, she tries “to communicate closely with the family [...] send extra stuff home,” for example, to help the student “with certain aspects of the grammar [...] or [...] vocabulary (Interview 1, pp. 9-10). Moreover, “on [Heather’s] website [she has] created strategies to help students with French so [...] the parents [can] help them” (Interview 1, p. 10). In class, for example, Heather said she worked hard to make sure all of her students understand the material in science and social studies by at first spending “a lot of time [on] just the vocabulary for them to understand, then the content” comes after (Interview 1, p. 5). For her, it was essential that students understand the words and phrases they will use in the lesson before beginning the lesson itself because the science and social studies texts are for “more like a French speaker and so we have to [...] put] it in simple language or re-word” the more difficult, abstract curriculum content in those subjects (Heather, Interview 1, p. 5). Heather focused on teaching vocabulary and using simplified language before teaching abstract concepts to help prepare her students (Interview 1, p. 5). This is one way in which Heather changed her approaches and modified course material when teaching curriculum content to help her students in French immersion.

As with Heather's focus on learning vocabulary before lesson content, Imogene provided her students with "a little preview" of a lesson to help them feel prepared (Interview 1, p. 8). She explained that she did this to help her struggling students in particular because

they feel left out, they're in class and they don't know what's going on, they don't know what's happening, so by [her] giving them a little preview, it kind of helps them and it prepares them [for] the lesson that [she's] about to teach. (Imogene, Interview 1, p. 8)

Such practices are encouraged by the Ministry of Education (2004), which report on literacy practices in the junior grades outlined "the strategic instruction and support [students] need to develop as fully literate readers" (p. 1; see also Ministry of Education, 2003a, 2003b). By preparing her students for an upcoming lesson, it was Imogene's goal that they be better equipped to learn what she had to teach them; this gave them time to think about the lesson and "come up with questions" for clarification before or during the lesson (Interview 1, p. 8).

In addition to providing lesson previews, Imogene offered her struggling students "a lot of one-on-one help" (Interview 1, p. 7). She said she gave these students individualized help in class because she felt responsible for their well-being and, as she outlined, "because I want them to succeed, I spend a lot of time with them" (Imogene, Interview 1, p. 7). She recalled one example of a Grade 4 student who was "very low academically" and at risk for leaving French immersion (Imogene, Interview 1, p. 18). After talking with the student and his mother, Imogene "pushed him and helped him more and more and more ... you could see like a drastic change from how he used to be to how he is now ... [b]ecause he's been having the help that he needed" (Interview 1, p. 18). With Imogene's attention and support, the student eventually began making progress in French class and required less and less one-on-one help. Imogene proudly declared that "for him it means the world [...] he did struggle socially as well, he didn't have a lot of

friends, but now, you can tell that he fits in more” (Interview 1, p. 20). By working one-on-one with students who are having trouble in French class, Imogene could help them in the instances where they were experiencing difficulty and gave them specific guidance.

Marianne declared that she was always changing her materials and approaches in French class, confirming that, “chaque année c’est jamais les mêmes personnes devant nous, on peut pas rester, j’ai pas un format qui s’applique à tout le monde parce que chaque personne apprend de façon différente et chaque élève est différent” (every year it’s never the same people in front of us, we can’t stay the same, I can’t have a format that applies to everyone because everyone learns differently and every student is different) (Interview 2, p. 5). Marianne acknowledged that each of her students was different, having unique strengths and struggles, interests and capabilities (Interview 2, p. 5). She elaborated, “mes activités sont jamais exactement les mêmes, j’ai les modifier [...] c’est de l’adapter par rapport à ce qu’ils sont capables de faire aussi” (my activities are never exactly the same, I will modify them [...] it’s to adapt them according to what they’re able to do as well) (Marianne, Interview 2, p. 5). For Marianne, recognizing and understanding that each of her students and classes was different from one another was essential in how she taught.

In addition to Marianne changing her past lesson plans to meet the needs of her current students, she mentioned the impact of the FSL curriculum expectations on students in recent years. Because of the school board-imposed reduction in the number of hours that current French immersion students have in French class compared to that of a decade or more ago, as well as the old FSL curriculum, in recent years, Marianne had to change her lesson expectations to suit all of her students (Interview 2, p. 5). Marianne explained how this reduction in hours has affected her teaching approaches, saying: “étant donné qu’ils ont moins d’heures en français, il a fallu que je

réduise certaines des attentes pour chacune des activités” (given that they have fewer hours in French, I had to reduce certain expectations for each of the activities) (Marianne, Interview 2, p. 5). That is to say, because of the way in which elementary French immersion is taught in recent years, generally, Marianne noticed that students progressing through the program are less advanced in their French language skills than those whom she taught early on in her career (Interview 2, p. 5). As such, one way in which Marianne changed her approaches is by modifying her own classroom expectations because otherwise her students would have struggled too much with learning and using French.

In another example of how Marianne changed her teaching strategies to address student attrition, she held meetings with a student and her parents to discuss the social difficulties the student was experiencing in class (Interview 1, pp. 23-24). Marianne explained that the student's best friend had left French immersion the previous year, and she was not adjusting well to the change. Furthermore, Marianne described the student as shy, reserved, with low confidence, and experiencing social difficulty (Interview 1, p. 23). To help the student, Marianne made sure that the student would do group work with certain people, “qui sont ouvertes, qui sont gentilles, qui vont essayer de sortir un peu d'elle” (who are open, who are kind, who will help her come out of her shell) (Interview 1, p. 23). Marianne would group the student with classmates who would not dominate her, but rather who would be open and encouraging to her to participate in class projects (Interview 1, p. 23). However, despite what Marianne thought was positive progress with a solid plan to help the student, the girl ended up leaving the class just a few days later with no notice to Marianne (Interview 1, pp. 26, 44). Marianne shared her impressions:

parce que ça m'a affecté parce que ... comme je dis tout à l'heure c'était vraiment là
comme une claque contre la face, j'avais vraiment pas vu venir à ce point-là, t'sais,

j'pensais vraiment, Cool, on est rendu là [...] ça fait en sorte que on se questionne, on révisé, qu'est-ce que j'aurai fait, j'aurais pu faire [...] au bout du compte, j'vois pas ce que j'aurais fait de plus, mais [...] j'pense que la décision a été déjà prise avant moi [...] est-ce que j'ai tout fait, est-ce que j'aurais fait de même.

(because it affected me because ... like I said earlier it was really like a slap in the face, I really didn't see it coming to this point, you know, I really thought, Cool, we're at this point [...] it made me question, you review, what have I done, what could I have done [...] in the end, I don't see what more I could have done, but [...] I think the decision was made before me [...] did I do everything, would I do it the same way.) (Interview 1, p. 44)

This is the only instance of one of Marianne's students leaving French immersion "pour n'importe quelle raison" (for any reason) (Interview 1, p. 26).

All four participants of the present study shared specific examples of how they changed their approaches and strategies to help students who were struggling in French immersion. The next section outlines their experiences with helping students by assigning homework and extra work, including their differing perspectives on this kind of help. First, Heather and Imogene's favourable views on assigning extra work are presented, which is followed by Annabelle's caution on this topic, and then Marianne's perspective on parents and homework in general.

Assigning homework or extra work. According to the participants, one way in which a teacher might address the issue of struggling students is by assigning homework or extra work so the students have the opportunity to practice the lesson, concept, or activity in more or different ways. In Heather's experience, this approach to reinforcing a lesson or concept was appropriate. As described previously, Heather provided students with extra worksheets and directed them to

online FSL resources (Interview 1, pp. 9-10). She also put supplementary material on her class website so the students could access it at home (Heather, Interview 1, p. 10). Heather does this because, as she put it, "I try my best, I always help them" in any way (Interview 1, p. 9).

As for Imogene, she assigned homework from time to time. She said that the students who do well with homework are the ones who receive help from their parents (Imogene, Interview 1, p.29). Imogene explained that,

you can tell who does their homework [...] It goes back to the parents helping, right, if they don't help [...] it's an ongoing battle. Like, I think parents have [...] a lot more power than they think they do [...] over their child's academic ... lives. [...] the students who are stellar, [...] their] parents push them at home. [...] And the students who are low academically, they get no help at home. The parents don't care for homework. [...] And they're the ones who are struggling. (Interview 1, pp. 29-30)

In Imogene's experience, parental involvement is important, especially when it comes to supporting students' learning, including doing homework.

However, assigning homework and involving parents might not be the most appropriate strategy. As Annabelle cautioned, it is not necessarily the students who are doing the work (Interview 1). In one example, Annabelle suspected that a Grade 2 student's parent helped the student with the homework or even did the homework for her (Interview 1, p. 4). In situations like this, Annabelle wondered how students can learn if they are not the ones who are doing the work (Interview 1, pp. 4-5). She stated that one way to check whether a student did the homework him- or herself is to ask him or her questions about it to see how he or she would reply. She recalled asking the aforementioned student questions about parts of the assignment such as, "What does this mean?" and "Why did you put this?" (Annabelle, Interview 1, p. 5).

When the student was unable to answer those questions, Annabelle said that she guessed the student had a lot of help from her parent in the assignment (Interview 1, pp. 4-5). Because of situations like this one, Annabelle avoided assigning homework to students who were struggling. She stated that, “by the end of the school year I stopped giving them homework because it was not worthwhile” (Annabelle, Interview 1, p. 5). For Annabelle, it seemed as though the emphasis was placed on making sure the homework was done well, rather than having the students do it themselves and learn from it. Another obstacle that could interfere with homework completion is that some parents rejected the notion of homework (Interview 1, p. 3). Specifically, Annabelle recalled that in her Grade 2 class, while “[s]ome of the parents were very lenient” when it came to homework, other parents told her that students are “not supposed to do homework” (Interview 1, p. 3). This, despite Annabelle’s assurances and explanations that a certain amount of homework is an expectation outlined by the Ministry of Education (Interview 1, p. 3).

Marianne also mentioned homework for her students. She said it is important that parents “soient conscients que c’est pas juste à l’école que ça va se passer [...] ils ont besoin de les aider à faire leurs devoirs, t’as juste besoin d’être là pour faire ça qu’ils les fassent” (it is important that parents are aware that it’s not just at school that it will happen [...] they need to help them do their homework, you just have to be there to make sure that they do it) (Marianne, Interview 1, p. 8). Marianne elaborated that, if students “ont des questions ils peuvent les poser à leur prof, ils peuvent appeler un ami [...] ils peuvent appeler *Allô prof*¹⁶ [...] ils peuvent aller sur Internet [...] il y a plein de solutions” (if the students have questions they can ask their teacher, they can call a friend [...] they can use *Allô prof* [...] they can go on the Internet [...] there are many solutions) (Marianne, Interview 1, p. 8).

¹⁶ *Allô prof* is a French homework help website. See the References section for more information.

Marianne suggested that parents can also help their child learn the language by recognizing that French exists outside of the classroom. In the second interview, Marianne expanded on this by recounting a school trip to Quebec City on which she accompanied a group of Grade 7 French immersion and core French students. She explained, “une des raisons pour laquelle on y va c’est pour le français” (one of the reasons for going there is for French), suggesting that students would have a chance to practice using French in authentic situations and experience it outside of the classroom (Marianne, Interview 2, p. 30).

Despite helping struggling students stay in French immersion, in some cases, switching to the regular English program may be for the best, as discussed next.

Encouraging students to stay in or leave French immersion. As described by the participants, French immersion teachers can have an influence on whether students stay in it or leave by talking with them and their parents about the students’ specific needs. In this section, I describe the participants’ responses regarding encouraging students to stay in or leave French immersion.

Encourage to stay. In many cases, a teacher could proactively encourage students to stay in French immersion by offering support and extra help where needed. Annabelle talked about the process of setting up an IEP for struggling students as a way to help them and to encourage them to stay in French immersion (Interview 1, p. 13). In order for a student to get an IEP, Annabelle explained, there must be “a report from the psychologist [...] you know, if they have some speech delays or something like that [...] yeah, the psychologist’s report has a lot to play with it” (Interview 1, p. 12). Following that process, “depending on the IEP they will see whether you can leave French immersion or not” (Annabelle, Interview 1, p. 13). In some cases, it is decided that the student should leave French immersion to access support resources in the regular

English stream; in other cases, the student can “stay in immersion but with an IEP” that outlines the student’s specific educational needs (Annabelle, Interview 1, p. 13).

As described previously, Heather tried her best to differentiate her lessons and do as much as she could to encourage all of her students to stay in French immersion (Interview 1, pp. 9-11). She did this “because [she] believe[s] in the French language, [she] think[s] it’s important to learn a second language” (Heather, Interview 1, p. 10). Moreover, she said:

as teachers, we always have to try to encourage them to stay in the program [by] giving them different strategies they can do at home or different ways to enjoy the language [...]
So we really push them and I have seen over the years students who were struggling in the beginning and then when they’re like in Grade 8 or higher grades, they’re happy [...] so it’s really important as teachers to show different ways [of learning]. (Heather, Interview 1, p. 11)

In line with Ministry of Education’s (2008, 2010, 2013a) views on differentiated learning, Heather did what she could to help her students.

Imogene explained that she encouraged students to stay in French immersion by “asking the students exactly what [she] could do to help them” and adapting her teaching to meet those needs (Interview 1, p. 8). In one case in particular, talking with the student and his parent to find out what he was struggling with and what he needed to improve in French class helped Imogene learn about his unique needs and therefore be able to offer him extra support (Interview 1, p. 12). By talking with the student, Imogene learned more about him:

you could tell that he was very sad [...] he felt dumb? Because he knows that he is struggling and he didn’t like the fact that we were having that meeting, so again by giving one-on-one help, [...] by meeting with the mom, that helped a lot because she pushed

him a lot at home as well, she would read at home with him [...] every time they would watch French television she would ask him questions and things like that. (Interview 1, p. 12)

In these meetings, Imogene learned what the student needed in order to help him improve, and could therefore adapt her teaching for him. She offered him regular one-on-one support since she “believe[s] that every child can succeed no matter how academically low they are [...] she] truly, honestly [does] believe that, and that’s why [she does] it” (Imogene, Interview 1, p. 13). Because she believed all of her students can succeed, Imogene took the time to show that one student that she cared about him and that she wanted to support his learning. In this way, Imogene encouraged him to do better and, ultimately, to stay in French immersion. She specified “[h]e’s still struggling, but not as much” because of her extra support (Imogene, Interview 1, p. 9).

Additionally, Marianne suggested that one way in which students can be encouraged to stay in French immersion when they are facing social pressure to leave is by talking with a guidance counsellor or resource person in the school (Interview 2, p. 3). Yet, as Marianne mentioned, there are no guidance counsellors or resource people in elementary schools anymore,

pour les aider essayer de répondre à leurs questions, alors les raisons sociales auraient pu être évitées pour changer de programme simplement en parlant, en trouvant des solutions, ayant du support à l’extérieur du programme parce que des raisons sociales ne sont pas nécessairement liées à l’immersion.

(to help them try to answer their questions, so social reasons could have been avoided to change programs simply by talking, by finding solutions, having support outside of the program because social reasons are not necessarily linked to immersion.) (Interview 2, p. 3).

As Marianne explained, guidance counsellors could help some students who are experiencing social pressures to stay in French immersion because it is possible that the social issues might not be related to the student being in French immersion, and may persist after the student leaves (Marianne, Interview 2, p. 3). What is more, as Marianne argued, if a school board is going to offer a program like French immersion, it should provide the support that students may need (Interview 2, pp. 1-2). Marianne articulated that some students leave French immersion because:

au niveau académique, encore une fois c'est le nombre de soutiens et puis de ressources ... que ça soit des ressources matérielles ou des ressources physiques pour pouvoir donner le même soutien aux élèves qui sont dans le programme d'immersion qui sont en difficulté que dans le programme régulier, ils devraient avoir ça. (at the academic level, again it's the amount of support and resources ... whether it's material resources or physical resources to be able to give the same support to students who are in the immersion program who are having difficulty as in the regular program, they should have that.) (Marianne, Interview 2, p. 1)

However, in response to the call for support resources and materials in French immersion, Marianne elaborated,

[même] si on a plus d'élèves, mais les ressources ne sont pas associées avec le programme et c'qu'on fait souvent est se dire, Mais [c'est] un conseil scolaire anglophone, c'est la réponse qu'on se fait donner constamment ... mais c'est un conseil qui a choisi d'offrir un programme alors il doit avoir les ressources derrière ça pour supporter les élèves.

([even] if we have more students, but the resources aren't associated with the program and what we do often is we say to ourselves, 'But [it's] an English school board,' that's

the response we get constantly ... but it's a board that chose to offer a program so it should have the resources behind it to support the students.") (Marianne, Interview 2, p. 2).

Marianne believed that a school board that offers French immersion, regardless of being an *English* school board, should offer the resources and help for French immersion students "pour s'assurer que s'ils quittent, que tous les efforts a été faits pour essayer de les soutenir dans ce programme-là parce que quand ils quittent le programme, les problèmes sont encore là" (to ensure that if they leave, that all the effort was made to try to support them in the program because when they leave the program, the problems are still there) (Marianne, Interview 2, p. 2). Moreover, as Marianne contended, if students leave French immersion due to some sort of difficulty, that difficulty still exists when the student has left (Interview 2, p. 2).

Encourage to leave. Although Annabelle seemed to believe that an IEP could help a struggling student stay in French immersion, she recalled having a Grade 2 student who "was struggling too much" and did not "understand anything in French," so the student left after two or three weeks (Interview 2, p. 8). Annabelle had discussed the matter with her school administration, and it was decided that the student would be better off in the regular English program in order to have access to support resources (Interview 2, p. 8). Annabelle articulated that she encouraged the student to leave French immersion because she did not want the student to be "lost for one year" in French class when she could "have learned at least something" in the regular English stream (Interview 2, p. 8). Annabelle was conflicted in the decision to have the student leave, saying she,

wanted her to move, [but] at the same time, no [...] if] your mom is helping you at home when you speak French, but you are not able to grasp anything, there is something going on, because you have the support at home from your mom. (Interview 2, p. 8)

It seemed as though this student was struggling too much and it would have been very difficult to overcome her challenges without extra support resources while in French immersion.

Similarly, Imogene also encouraged a student to leave French immersion because he was struggling too much. However, she regretted the move, saying “it’s definitely not something that [she] would do again” because she believed her students “can all succeed” with the right help (Imogene, Interview 1, pp. 17-18). Encouraging that student to leave French immersion was not in line with Imogene’s beliefs that all students can succeed in French immersion (Interview 1, p. 18). After that experience with student attrition, she encouraged all her students to do their best, providing extra support when needed, and helping them stay in French immersion.

Neither Heather nor Marianne described experiences with encouraging students to leave French immersion.

Considering the aforementioned teachers’ experiences with the factors that influence student attrition, as well as how they have changed their approaches and strategies and encouraged students to stay or leave, let us examine how the teachers’ varied past experiences influenced their current teaching practice.

The teachers’ past experiences. Throughout the interviews, the participants reflected on their past experiences as French immersion teachers and with student attrition to provide responses to the interview questions. In this section, the teachers’ past experiences are organized according to three categories: experiences with previous lessons and activities; their education,

training, and professional development; and their own second/foreign language learning experiences.

Experiences with previous lesson plans and activities. Some of the participants discussed their experiences with past lessons and how they presented similar lessons with their current class. For instance, Heather explained that her current lessons are influenced by her past lessons in that she has learned from what she has done in order to improve for the future. Heather explained:

Well, you change, you know, as a teacher, you do a lesson, then you come back and reflect and you see, you always check in, you do warm-up activities and see if the students are actually learn[ing], if the lesson doesn't work you come back and redo the lesson different[ly] [...] so you're constantly as a teacher reflecting and changing your lessons, so you try to motivate your students to what their interests are. (Interview 1, p. 14)

As Heather suggested, teachers reflect on their lessons to think about them, as well as how well the students received the lesson, and what changes should be made for next time (Interview 1, p. 14). Therefore, if the teacher finds that the students did not reach the lesson objectives, the teacher tries to teach it again, but in a different way (Interview 1, p. 14). In another example, when Heather led a lesson that included new vocabulary words that were difficult, she encouraged the students to focus on reading the word, explaining the process:

I make them read it, we read it out loud together, I read it, they read it [...] it might take longer than just my actual lesson, but I push them to read, so they would understand, and then I check back, you know, to see if they understood it. (Interview 2, p. 9)

Heather looked to her past lessons to determine the best course of action for future ones, which may include adapting or redoing them. Moreover, reflecting good literacy practices (Ministry of Education, 2004), she verified her students' learning by checking back with them after a lesson.

Imogene described that she reflected on her past lessons when developing her current ones so she could make them better for her current students. For example, she said,

if it was the lesson that I taught last year [that] I know all my students didn't get, then this year, yes, I do repeat it [...] but I try to break it down into smaller portions for them to understand [...] I guess that goes back to me using different teaching strategies [...] so there's a lot of things that I would repeat or that I do repeat from last year that I would do differently. (Imogene, Interview 1, p. 34)

Like Heather, Imogene adapted her lesson plans based on her experiences with how they went in previous years. By changing her approach in teaching a lesson, Imogene tried to make it easier for her current students to understand. For instance, Imogene elaborated that in a future lesson on rocks and minerals,

instead of let's say using the anchor chart then let's use [...] a YouTube clip [...] let's say, for them to visualize and see exactly [...] what rocks are [...] which is exactly what I'm doing right now, so, little things like that. (Interview 1, p. 34)

Imogene regularly changed her past lesson plans to better suit her current class and their needs, including using different support tools such as multimedia.

Annabelle and Marianne did not discuss their experiences with past lesson plans and activities.

The teachers' education, training, and professional development. As a new French immersion teacher, Annabelle developed her learning about the profession from various sources. She shared her thoughts on this:

as a new teacher you have your own way, but then you learn from here and there, going to workshops and doing this spec ed course, I try to apply, you know, all the strategies I've learned and put it into practice. (Interview 1, p. 34)

Annabelle's pre-service education, as well as her previous experiences as a tutor and teaching assistant, helped shape how she approached her career from the beginning. She had a range of experiences teaching students from elementary school through to university in French and English subjects (Annabelle, Interview 1, p. 1). Regarding professional development sessions or teacher training related to student attrition, Annabelle said, "besides my course in spec ed, I did not have any training [...] teacher ed was just [...] theory [...] but we need practice" (Interview 1, p. 43). Moreover, Annabelle declared, practical "experience will show you what to do and then talking to more experienced teachers, I think it helps you to understand that there are kids who need help and how you can help them" (Interview 1, p. 45). Annabelle gained the most experience and knowledge working as a classroom French immersion teacher and from talking with her more experienced colleagues.

Likewise, Heather said she gained knowledge about her practice on the job more so than from her education and training. She explained,

over the years you learn, you experience, you learn about the students, you learn about different strategies to motivate them, how to deal with the parents [...] so over the years [...] you can learn all different things, and I am far better now than I was, you know, in the beginning. (Heather, Interview 1, p. 17)

Heather learned from her past experiences, including motivating students and interacting with parents, to inform her current approaches (Interview 1, p. 17). For example, in the first few years of her career, Heather taught core French, which she said “was difficult because they were not interested in language” (Interview 1, p. 18). However, she recalled that “even though it was challenging the first year, it was a good experience” (Heather, Interview 1, p. 20). She could reflect on the lessons she gave and the strategies she used to develop her practice in the French immersion classroom (Interview 1, p. 20). Moreover, when she “was offered to teach French immersion [she] was very happy because they like French, they want to learn, so it made [her] become more creative in [her] lessons as well” (Heather, Interview 1, p. 18). Heather’s personal motivation to be a better teacher led her to developing more creative lessons for her students in French immersion, thereby stimulating their learning and encouraging them to learn more, do better, and, ultimately, stay in French immersion (Interview 1, p. 18).

Heather attended one professional development session on keeping students in French immersion, in which they talked about how teachers should try to,

motivate them more to stay in the French immersion program [...] with the new curriculum, with new ideas, they want us to keep the students [...] so in the PD session, they want us to help the students even if they are [at] level 2, try our best like different strategies in class, like [using] technologies for one thing, visual learners, spatial learners, so in our teaching we have to try to incorporate all the different learning [styles].

(Interview 1, pp. 14-15)

In Heather’s experience attending a professional development workshop on student attrition in French immersion, there seemed to be support from her school board regarding this phenomenon. As for how her training influences her experiences as a French immersion teacher,

she received some regarding student attrition from French immersion where she learned techniques to motivate her students (Interview 1, pp. 14-15). It seemed as though Heather's on-the-job experience influenced her more than her past education, training, and professional development.

Imogene attended professional development workshops during her teacher education program and her first year of teaching. She specified that they talked about "how to motivate the students [...] in FSL [...] and] to keep them motivated" (Imogene, Interview 1, p. 15). Moreover, she stated that she would attend and even give professional development workshops on teaching strategies and approaches to address student attrition from French immersion,

because it's an issue, it's a problem [...] it's a big issue, where kids will leave the program or [...] where their teachers would ... you know, have a meeting with the parent [...] and you know, like kind of push them to leave the program." (Imogene, Interview 1, p. 17)

In Imogene's experience, there are some very seasoned French immersion teachers who she said she can tell have "given up on their students, so once they're low academically, they just wanna push them out of the program" rather than taking the time and making the effort to help them (Interview 1, p. 14). It may be because the teachers know that struggling students will get the necessary support resources in the English stream that they may need, but it could also be because of the perception of the kind of student that should be in French immersion.

Alternatively, this push to have some students leave French immersion could be a reflection of an unsupportive school administration or school board when it comes to helping French immersion students stay in it. By offering professional development workshops on student

attrition and keeping students in French immersion, Imogene could motivate her coworkers to take a proactive approach in helping struggling students and encouraging them to stay.

Marianne explained she has not attended any professional development sessions on student attrition from French immersion. She elaborated about professional development sessions on French immersion in general, saying, “il y en a très peu en immersion [...] j’suis déjà allée où les gens parlent en anglais [...] et ensuite on s’est dit, Oh, ben, il y a pas vraiment [de ressources] pour les 7^e et 8^e (there are very few in immersion [...] I went to one where the people were speaking in English [...] and then they said, Oh, well, there really aren’t any [resources] for Grades 7 and 8) (Marianne, Interview 1, pp. 45-46). Marianne found this professional development session unhelpful because there was almost no discussion about how teachers in the intermediate grades can improve their practice and she was unimpressed that other session participants were not speaking in French.

The teachers’ own second/foreign language learning experiences. A consideration to keep in mind about French immersion teachers’ practice is the potential influence that their own language learning experiences have. As mentioned previously, Annabelle grew up speaking French and Creole at home. She learned English “at school” and in daily life around town because in her home country,

all the signs are in English, that’s the thing because we are a British colony, right? So all the signs, everything will be in English [...] when you go to the market, products and all the labels will be written in English or in French or whatever country they will come from, but you will always have English [...] and yeah, computers, everything will be using English words [...] so for me, it’s [learning English] like [...] from kindergarten. (Interview 2, p. 10)

As shown here, Annabelle grew up using three languages between home, school, and daily life. When asked whether her profile as a native French speaker influenced how she taught in French immersion, she said, “perhaps I’m very ... thorough and consistent in some of my rules [...] because I teach French, like, I want them to be good, you know” (Annabelle, Interview 2, p. 10). Learning and using French correctly were important to Annabelle; she believed she needed to share this with her students so they could learn how to use the language properly.

Moreover, since Annabelle’s home country had a lot of French influences throughout many aspects of daily life, she grew up surrounded by them; she tried to share some of these cultural experiences with her students (Interview 2, p. 10). Not only was she teaching them one of her two native languages, but she was also sharing some international French culture with them. She tried getting her,

students to learn things from around the world, in French countries, or learning about French music. We did a song in French, Grade 7 [...] she] wanted them to write how they felt after listening to some French songs [...] And most of them [...] raised their hands saying they couldn’t understand and they don’t even know any French artists [...] that’s sad [...] because you’re [in] Grade 7 and you should at least understand. (Annabelle, Interview 2, p. 10)

For Annabelle, sharing some French culture from international perspectives with her students was important to show them that French exists all around the globe and because “the kids have to be reminded about other countries in the world” (Interview 2, p. 11).

Although the participants mentioned using inter-provincial and international French resources in their lessons, they did not discuss using local French resources.

Heather also explained how her language profile might affect her teaching in French immersion. She stated that she tried to share her experiences of living in various places of the world with diverse cultures, including examples of how people in Quebec and France say certain words or phrases differently. She confirmed:

I lived in Quebec and I also lived in France so I always try to bring the two cultures to them, so when I'm teaching something, I always mention, okay, in Quebec they say that, in Canada we say that [...] in standard French they say [it] like that, so I will try to show them that [...] there's not always one way of saying this when I'm teaching [...] I try to bring my own experiences and tell them what you see in other countries. (Heather, Interview 2, p. 4)

By sharing her personal experiences with different aspects of French culture, Heather encouraged her students to realize that French exists outside of the immersion classroom, and that people all around the world use French in their daily lives. In this way, Heather's past experiences with learning another language were shaping her current teaching practice, including how she incorporated different elements of learning another language. It was possible that these interesting stories and anecdotes would encourage Heather's students to stay in French immersion longer so that they, too, could have such experiences. Moreover, by bringing life to stories of French from around the world, it seemed that Heather was trying to stimulate her students' interest in French, thereby encouraging them to learn more about it and to be able to use it in the future.

Heather encouraged her students to learn about French culture from around the world so as to open their eyes to new experiences (Interview 2, p. 4). For example, she said she tried,

to bring [her] own experiences and tell them what you see in other countries, what is it like, 'cause most of these students, they're born in Canada and they haven't seen the world so they can have another sight of seeing what the world is like, so it helps.

(Heather, Interview 2, p. 4)

For Heather, sharing her international perspectives and examples of French language and culture with her students seemed to be important. Regarding her students learning the French language, Heather explained:

I always try to make things, like easier for them because they're second language learners [...] so I kind of understand 'cause I come from another background, like the same background as them [learning FSL], so I try to give my lessons in a way that, they can understand. (Interview 2, p. 4)

As mentioned previously, Heather's first language was Farsi, and because she "went to a French school" in her home country to learn the language, and to learn *in* it, she could empathize with her French immersion students in their experiences learning FSL (Interview 2, p. 4). These language learning experiences influenced how Heather taught in French immersion (Interview 2, p. 4).

In regards to the influence her language profile may have had on the way she taught in French immersion, Imogene declared that she did not "know if it does, but one thing for sure is [they're] not allowed to speak English in [her] classroom at all" (Interview 2, p. 17). She used a system to encourage her Grade 3-4 class to speak French, explaining that the students had tokens they could "steal" from each other when they hear their classmates speaking English (Imogene, Interview 2, p. 17). Recalling the success of the system, she said:

we started in September, it would happen a lot where they would exchange their [tokens] often, but now everybody keeps their ten [tokens] because they just don't speak English at all, at all and it's amazing. [She] can leave ... a group of kids outside of the classroom and they will speak French and every time [her] principal walks by, [she] feel[s] so great and she tells [her] all the time, she's like, "They're speaking French!" (Imogene, Interview 2, p. 17)

Imogene felt strongly that speaking French in the French immersion classroom was very important to help her students learn the language. Using tokens and having students listen to and learn from each other got them involved in their learning and kept them motivated to continue using French (Imogene, Interview 2, p. 17).

As with Annabelle and Heather sharing their experiences with French culture from around the world, Imogene strove to "implement a lot of French culture [... they] listen to a lot of French music from Quebec 'cause that's where [she's] from" in order to help her students learn and experience authentic French cultural references (Imogene, Interview 2, p. 17). What is more, Imogene's experiences learning English in school helped her understand her students' second language learning experiences. She confirmed,

Definitely, yeah [...] 'cause a lot of times, like I know that when I speak English I may make some mistakes, like grammar or whatever [...] so when my students make the same sort of mistakes, I understand. You know, like I understand, but I try to correct them when I can. (Imogene, Interview 2, p. 18)

Marianne described her language profile and whether it influenced how she taught. She explained that she learned English in elementary and secondary school in Quebec in,

core English ... alors c'était vraiment la base ... je savais que c'était important alors j'ai moi-même fait les démarches pour apprendre l'anglais, donc après à 16 ans, j'ai quitté la maison, j'ai trouvé une famille anglophone, j'ai habité avec eux un an puis j'ai continué mes études en français, alors j'ai continué à l'école secondaire ontarienne en français.

(core English ... so it was really the basics ... I knew that it was important so I myself took the steps to learn English, so after at age 16, I left home, I found an Anglophone family, I lived with them for a year then I continued my studies in French, so I continued at an Ontario secondary school in French.) (Marianne, Interview 2, p. 10)

As for the influence that these language learning experiences had on her practice as a French immersion teacher, Marianne said, “ça m'influence parce que justement je peux partager ces expériences-là, puis j'peux leur dire, Moi, aussi, j'en apprends d'autres langues” (it influences me because I can share these experiences, so I can tell them, I, too, learn other languages) (Interview 2, p. 16). Related to that comment, Marianne told a story in that one day at home she found a cassette tape of a skit that she and some classmates did when she was in Grade 8 learning ESL. She explained that she played the tape for her Grade 8 French immersion class:

je leur ai fait écouter, j'ai dit, Moi, quand j'avais votre âge, puis j'apprenais l'anglais ... c'est comme ça que j'parlais ... puis ils trouvent ça super drôle ... puis je dis, Ah vous-autres parlez en français ... vous sonnez comme ça, mais en mieux et vous êtes encore meilleurs que ça alors imagine, on commence quelque part puis vous m'entendez parler anglais (des fois ils m'entendaient quand j'parle avec d'autres personnes), alors regardez le bond que j'ai pu faire, mais ça pas été un bond, là, ça était un défi, on travaille, on travaille, on travaille pour pouvoir arriver où j'en suis maintenant.

(I had them listen to it, I told them, I, when I was your age, and I was learning English ... it was like that that I spoke ... and they found it very funny ... and I told them, Oh, you speak French ... you sound like that, but even better and you are even better than that so imagine, we start somewhere and you hear me speaking English (sometimes they hear me speak with other people), so look at the jump I was able to do, but it wasn't a jump, it was a challenge, we work, we work, we work to be able to get to where I am now.)

(Marianne, Interview 2, pp. 16-17)

Marianne wanted to share this experience of her learning ESL with her students to let them know that they, too, were working on their second language skills little by little. Furthermore, she was encouraging them to keep working at their language learning experiences to continue to improve their French language skills. The students enjoyed this experience so much that they asked her if they could also do that project, which Marianne agreed to (Interview 2, p. 17).

Generally, the participants' language learning experiences influenced how they taught in French immersion. Moreover, they helped them relate to their students and better understand *their* language learning experiences in the social contexts of their classrooms.

The influence of the social context. The teachers discussed the influence of the social context of the classroom on their teaching practice, as follows. Each participant discussed this topic only briefly.

Regarding whether the social context of Annabelle's classroom affected her experiences as a French immersion teacher, she said that it does, "even within [her] two Grade 7 immersion classes, [she is] different with one group ... because [...] they are more well-mannered [...] they listen, it all depends [...] a teacher [has] different rules, right, they wear different hats and you

adapt” (Interview 2, p. 17). Annabelle’s students influenced her experiences because they cause her to adapt her teaching style depending on the class and their needs (Interview 2, p. 17).

Likewise, Heather changed her teaching style based on the social context of her classroom. She indicated,

yeah of course [...] every child is different, every child has different learning styles [...] when we’re teaching a certain subject, we try to accommodate them with different ways, different activities, you know [...] I have two classes, the two classes are very different [...] there are a lot of strong [ones] economically, some are lower, so you have to change the lessons depending [on] the group, of how you’re gonna approach it. You have to think of all of that [...] every teacher has their own learning style [...] as long as we follow the curriculum. (Heather, Interview 2, pp. 11-12)

The differences between Heather’s two Grade 3 classes influenced how she taught each of them, and, therefore, it affected her learning experiences as a French immersion teacher.

In contrast, Imogene said that the social context of her classroom does not affect her experiences as a French immersion teacher. After a long pause, she articulated, “no? I don’t think so. I don’t think so. I think that whatever I’m doing right now I’d be able to do it anywhere else” (Imogene, Interview 2, p. 27). But in terms of whether her *students* influenced her, she said:

my students influence me, even though I’m teaching 3-4 again [...] I try to do the same things [...] as last year. But, sometimes you just can’t. So yes they do affect my teaching, for sure. [...] Would they affect how I teach? What I teach? [...] yeah, especially how I teach, for sure. (Imogene, Interview 2, p. 27)

Although Imogene stated her social context did not influence her experiences as a French immersion teacher, she did confirm that her students and their diverse needs influenced her, especially her teaching styles and approaches (Interview 2, p. 27).

As for Marianne, she said that the social context of her class influenced her experiences as a French immersion teacher. She explained that, in a classroom,

c'est un microcosme social, une classe, c'est nos élèves [...] c'est vraiment à nous, notre relation qui est une relation qui se forme entre l'enseignant puis sa classe [...] chaque élève est différent [...] chaque prof va influencer sa classe mais chaque classe va influencer le prof aussi.

(it's a social microcosm, a class, they're our students [...] they're really ours, our relationship is a relationship that is formed between the teacher and their class [...] each student is different [...] each teacher will influence their class, but each class will influence their teacher, too. (Marianne, Interview 2, p. 26)

In Marianne's view, the teacher and students influence each other in the classroom.

Throughout this chapter, I described the seven themes of the findings of the present study and provided details from the participants on their experiences with the various facets of teaching in French immersion and addressing student attrition. Many themes related primarily to the influence of the teachers' past experiences on their current experiences within the social context of the classroom.

Chapter 6

Discussion

In this chapter, the discussion of the findings will be presented according to the three research questions of the study, and will be related to the literature. At the end of this chapter are some recommendations as to how interested parties can continue to improve French immersion education in Canada, including addressing the challenge of French immersion student attrition.

The purpose of the present study was to explore the experiences of a group of Ontario elementary French immersion teachers with respect to the factors that influence student attrition. Additionally, the research sought to explore what these teachers may do in the classroom to address student attrition, and whether they encourage their students to stay in it or leave. The findings suggested that the participants' experiences with student attrition were influenced by numerous factors.

Considering the previously-outlined findings of the study, the theoretical model (Figure 1) of French immersion teachers' ongoing experiences that was presented in the Theoretical Framework seems appropriate. The participants confirmed that academic and social factors do influence student attrition, that they changed their approaches and strategies as needed to meet the needs of their students and address student attrition, that student attrition could be influenced by the things they do in class to encourage their students' success, and that all of this takes place in the social context of the French immersion classroom. Moreover, the teachers drew from their past experiences to shape their current practice in terms of preparing the best and most appropriate lessons, continuing to improve as French immersion teachers, and learning about and understanding their students' diverse needs. Overall, the findings of the present study confirmed what the literature says in regards to the reasons for French immersion student attrition.

Research Question 1

The first research question of the present study was: According to a group of Ontario elementary French immersion teachers, what academic and social factors influence student attrition from French immersion?

Academic factors. As for the academic factors that influence student attrition from French immersion, three of the participants, Annabelle, Heather, and Imogene, emphasized that these factors are the most influential ones in students' decisions to leave. It appeared that students who experienced academic difficulty in French immersion had the most trouble keeping up with course expectations and class work. Additionally, for some students, the French language was too difficult to learn and use at that point in their lives. As such, some students continually struggled with learning in French, and therefore had lower course grades, resulting in some students leaving. For instance, some of Heather's students left early French immersion in the junior grades because they were struggling too much and could not keep up with their peers. In a similar situation, some of Imogene's struggling students left, while others stayed, depending on the parents' final decision.

Struggling students leaving French immersion because of low grades and too much difficulty is echoed in the literature by researchers such as Ellsworth (1997) and Quiring (2008). Ellsworth (1997) found that about 82% of the former late French immersion participants in her study reported having lower grades overall because of being in French immersion, and 74% of the participants "had lower grades in FI than in other courses" (pp. 46-47). Likewise, Quiring's (2008) participants "recognized that academically they were behind their peers" (p. 187). Lower grades and academic achievement affected some students' decisions to leave French immersion.

In the present study, Annabelle and Heather specified that some students found learning French to be 'too hard,' and were better off in the English stream where they did not have to 'worry' about it. Likewise, Lewis and Shapson (1989) found that students who had left French immersion had better grades once they were in the English stream. However, as Annabelle and Marianne suggested, it is possible that the student was not ready at that point in time to be in French immersion; he or she could very well be able to learn the language at a later time.

According to Heather, Imogene, and Marianne, in many cases, difficulties can still persist even when a student switches out of French immersion to the regular English stream. This is in line with Bruck's (1978, 1985a) and Genesee's (1978) research on student difficulty persisting after leaving French immersion. Moreover, the data of the present study also revealed that a student's academic difficulty was not necessarily related to learning in French. For example, Heather and Imogene specified that some students could be 'low academically' in French *and* English classes, suggesting that academic struggles are not necessarily related to learning in French. Furthermore, students could continue to struggle even after they have left French immersion. This could support the fact that students should not necessarily be removed from French immersion when they are having difficulty. Bruck (1985a) argued that such academic struggles could have "occurred before the transfer" and did not necessarily go away after the switch (p. 118) (see also Bruck, 1978). These considerations are reflected in the Ministry of Education's (2015) guide on including students with special needs in FSL education. Helping learners with diverse needs and abilities in all streams of education, including FSL, is a current priority for education across the province (see also Mady & Arnett, 2009).

Marianne stated that we in the school community would not let students drop out of school just because they are facing difficulty, so we should take a similar approach when

students are facing difficulty in French immersion. That is, schools should provide students with the necessary support resources to help them in any way needed (see Ministry of Education, 2015). However, as Imogene and Marianne mentioned, there was almost no support in French immersion to help students who are struggling; one wonders how to encourage students to stay in it when many do not have access to the extra help that they need. On this topic, Mady and Arnett (2009) argued that there are barriers to inclusion, such as “the identification practices of learning disabilities,” perceived elitism, and a “lack of research on effectively supporting struggling students” (p. 47). To help their struggling students, Annabelle, Heather, and Imogene described specific ways in which they themselves provided the necessary support, without the assistance of other support resources. However, Annabelle highlighted that this extra support took away from providing enough help to the rest of her students. There seems to be a fine line between helping struggling students and helping all students. This search for balance is not unique to French immersion teachers, as all teachers are required to differentiate lessons and provide extra support to their students as needed (Ministry of Education, 2008, 2010, 2013a). However, because of the lack of human, material, and physical support that the participants of the present study alluded to, one wonders about the extent to which French immersion teachers can satisfactorily address all of their students’ diverse needs without helpful support resources.

The findings of the present study and the literature on student attrition suggested that some students leave because of insurmountable academic difficulty and because of the aforementioned lack of support resources in French immersion. Also in line with the literature, the findings of the present study suggested that some students ended up doing better academically in the English stream, whereas others continued to experience difficulty. It seems as though, while academic factors are influential in students’ experiences in French immersion,

and are very influential in many cases of student attrition, some students can learn to work with or even overcome their struggles with the right support, effort, and time. Indeed, as the data of the present study revealed and as confirmed by the literature, academic factors do influence student attrition from French immersion, as well as teachers' experiences with this issue.

However, this study also revealed that some of the participants' experiences with student attrition were also affected by social factors, while others' were not.

Social factors. Literature on social factors and student attrition confirms that some students are influenced by elements such as personal motivation and interest in learning a language. For example, Morton et al. (1999) and Wesely (2010) described students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to continue in French immersion or to leave it. A student's motivation is related to his or her personal interests in staying in French immersion or leaving it for another stream of education, such as one that does not include French immersion education. Only one participant of the present study, Marianne, claimed that social factors are very influential in her older students' lives and their decisions to leave as compared to academic or other factors. Marianne articulated that students in the later years of elementary school experienced great social pressure to be with their friends. Sometimes, this can lead to students leaving French immersion, especially if they do not have the necessary support, like a guidance counsellor, to help them figure out their best course of action. Annabelle said it is certain students, such as her younger ones who were less invested in learning the language, who left French immersion for social reasons, like wanting to be with their friends who were not in French immersion.

In the literature, Beck (2004) found that some students left late French immersion because they preferred spending time with their friends, although others in his study left because of academic factors; in some cases, social and academic experiences in French immersion are

closely connected. For one of Annabelle's Grade 2 students, the influence of her older sisters led her to act out in class, thereby affecting her academic progress. As Marianne contended, even if intermediate-level students in early and middle French immersion try to do well academically, they can experience difficulty if their friends are not in French immersion. However, Annabelle claimed that her intermediate-level students in early and middle French immersion would leave because of ongoing academic influences; at that point, students should be looking to their futures and considering what programs they would like to enter in high school and beyond. In these cases, intermediate-level students would not necessarily feel social pressure to leave because leaving might not align with their future academic plans. Given the range of experiences shared by the participants of the present study, some older elementary students experienced social pressure to leave early and middle French immersion, while others were focused on their academic goals. As Marianne and Annabelle had students who were in intermediate-level early and middle French immersion in Eastern Ontario, perhaps their reasons for leaving are more closely connected to their personal preferences than because of strictly academic or social factors; this reflects the 'complex' reasons for student attrition that Tinto (1975) described, as well as how each case of student attrition is unique from others. In Marianne's case, the social experiences of her Grade 7 and 8 early and middle French immersion students seemed to play an important role in their decisions to leave, whereas Annabelle stated that social factors would not influence her Grade 7 early and middle French immersion students to leave because they are focused on their academic futures.

In response to the first research question of the present study, the participants confirmed that academic and social factors influenced student attrition from French immersion. Academic factors include students finding course content in French immersion too hard and having low or

even no French-language skills. The participants suggested that some students who were struggling did not understand what was going on in class, especially regarding the teacher's instructions and lessons. Some students had difficulty with the French language, while others were unable to use French at their grade level. Other students had difficulty with the course content and expectations, and were not able to follow along with their classmates. Social factors included students' interests, and friends and family influencing their experiences in French immersion. The participants explained that, in some cases, parents want their child to stay in French immersion despite their struggles, while in other cases, parents want their child to leave French immersion because of their struggles. Some students left French immersion because they wanted to spend time with their friends who are not in French immersion. What is more, it may be that the minority-language status of French in Ontario also influenced some of these students' decisions to leave French immersion. This is possible, even though three of the four participants described their experiences as FSL teachers in Eastern Ontario, which has many Francophone communities and influences. Overall, the participants of the present study highlighted the fact that academic factors were influential in students' decisions to leave French immersion, and, in some cases, social factors were also influential in these decisions.

Research Question 2

The second research question of the present study was: How are this group of teachers' current teaching practices affected by their previous experiences with the academic and social factors that influence student attrition in French immersion, by their personal and professional learning experiences, as well as by their social context?

The participants shared their experiences regarding their current teaching practices in terms of how they changed their approaches and strategies to address student attrition. These

findings were previously presented according to two themes: 1. examples of how they modified their practice; and 2. whether they assigned homework or extra work (see Findings, Chapter 5). In addition, the participants discussed the influence of their past experiences on their current teaching practice in terms of past lessons and activities, their education, training, and professional development, and their own second/foreign language learning experiences. Finally, the participants talked about the influence of their social contexts on their current teaching practices.

Changing approaches and strategies. The data revealed that the teachers followed the Ministry of Education's (2008, 2010) guidelines with respect to teaching the curriculum to meet individual students' needs: when they saw that a student was struggling, they would take the time to talk with the student and provide extra help to ensure that student would not fall behind. It appeared that the desire to help came naturally to the participants, as Marianne articulated; they did it because they were teachers, because they cared (O'Connor, 2008), and because helping students is a big part of being a teacher.

However, according to Annabelle, the extra help for some students should not take away from teaching others in the class, as previously mentioned. This is a challenge that all teachers face (Ministry of Education, 2008, 2010). After the first interview with Annabelle, I reflected on her comment that she felt she was neglecting her other students when providing extra help to a select few. That raises the question about the extent to which any classroom teacher can provide the necessary individualized support to each and every student, especially when some are having academic struggles, while continuing to support the rest of the class. For her part, Imogene articulated examples of how she helped her struggling students because there are no support resources for French immersion. What is more, as Marianne argued, if a school board offers a

program like French immersion, it should make sure to provide all the necessary human, material, and physical resources to help students achieve their best all along the way.

In the literature, the notion of a lack of support resources in French immersion is also documented by researchers such as Arnett and Mady (2010), Betts (2015), and Mady (2013). Notably, Arnett and Mady (2010) contended that teacher education programs should provide pre-service teachers with training in special education as a way to address the issue of students struggling in FSL. Pre-service FSL teachers can learn about inclusive practices and use this training right from the beginning of their careers. This would likely help struggling students and is in line with the Ministry of Education's (2015) guide on inclusive FSL education; however, it makes one wonder about the extent to which this is possible in all cases. For example, in the present study, one of Heather's former students had autism and was struggling a lot in her French immersion class even with an educational assistant to provide one-on-one support. Heather declared she tried her best to help him while he was in her class, but, as she said, learning in French proved to be too much for him, and he therefore left. This particular case seems to be a reflection of Genesee's (2007) study, in which he argued that students who are at-risk should have regular monitoring to decide whether they should continue in French immersion or not. As for Heather's student with autism, he was in early French immersion until Grade 4, at which point it was decided that he should leave for the regular English stream.

Other ways in which the participants of the present study have changed their approaches and strategies include meeting with students and parents to discuss the students' specific needs, just as any classroom teacher would do. All four of the participants of the present study have done this to help their students when they are facing difficulty. In many cases, having open conversations and being proactive about providing extra help ensured that the students could

improve in French class, and therefore stay in it longer than if they continued having too much difficulty. For example, Annabelle taught two of her Grade 2 students how to decode words to help them learn to read in French; this was a skill they should have learned in Grade 1. Heather would send home extra worksheets and post helpful tips and resources on her teacher website for all of her students. Imogene provided one-on-one help in class, encouraging the student to think about the assignment and to keep working even when having trouble. Marianne devised a plan to help a shy student stay in French immersion; however, the plan was never implemented because the student left just a couple days later. In that case, Marianne speculated that the parents' decision to remove their child from immersion was made long before that meeting. In the Vygotskian view of learning and the ZPD, where a more capable person guides the learner through a new activity or concept,

[t]he task for the teacher ... is to figure out a way to put the learner in a situation that meets the following criteria: The student has a desire ... to complete a task, but lacks the cognitive or strategic wherewithal to pull it off. (Prawat, 2002, p. 18)

That is, the teacher plays an active role in determining the best course of action in terms of stimulating the student's learning; the teacher notices the gap in the student's learning and devises a plan to help the student (see also Ministry of Education, 2008, 2010). Furthermore, this sort of Vygotskian guidance "sets the stage for the 'teachable moment,'" in which the student has a 'breakthrough' and learns what the teacher is teaching (Prawat, 2002, p. 18).

Based on the interviews with the teachers in the present study, it seems as though they feel they did their best and help their students as much as possible. Furthermore, it appeared that the teachers' desire to help their students, as shaped by considerations of their students' needs and ongoing reflections on their practice, was what drove them. Such practices are encouraged

by the aforementioned Ministry of Education (2008, 2010) documents regarding its various policies and guidelines on best practices for differentiated learning. In addition to using such practices in differentiated instruction in the classroom, French immersion teachers could also implement local references to French language and culture to help their students make real-world connections to French in their community and region (see Ministry of Education, 2013a, 2013b). It makes one wonder why using such French references was not discussed during the interviews of the present study.

Past experiences. This section contains a discussion of the teachers' past experiences with lessons and activities, their past education, training, and professional development, as well as their personal language learning experiences.

Lessons and activities. The teachers in this study reflected on their practice, including their past lessons and activities, to improve for the future. As posited in the literature, part of being an effective teacher is reflecting on one's practice to review what can be improved for next time (Jaeger, 2013; Norris, 2009). Jaeger (2013) drew from Schön (1983) and his articulations on 'reflective practitioners,' suggesting that they make a plan before doing an action, look to the past to improve for the future, and are even "capable of reconsidering a course of action midstream" (in Jaeger, 2013, p. 89). Likewise, Norris (2009) argued that by engaging in "reflection teachers can gain professional knowledge, personal knowledge, and change or improve teaching practices" (p. 2). This notion is also reflected in the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat's (2010) monograph regarding 'collaborative teacher inquiry' and how these Vygotskian and Deweyan approaches enhance teachers' practice. When teachers reflect on their lessons and collaborate with colleagues, they learn from themselves and from each other.

In the case of the present study, Heather explained that she has taken the time mid-lesson to help students learn new, difficult vocabulary words. Heather said that teachers are always looking at their lessons to see what can be changed for next time. Similarly, Imogene and Marianne used lessons from previous years, but always changed at least something about them to meet the needs of their current students. Additionally, the notion of thinking about something that happened in the past and how something might be done in the future is shown in Dewey's (1971) principles of continuity and interaction in experience. By reflecting on the past, or interacting with experiences, one learns about the best, or worst, course of action for the future. Similarly, Maas (2009) posited "that self-reflection, communication, and situational relevancy are essential components of effective teaching" (p. 16). That is, effective teachers engage in reflection on their practice, as well as communication with their students in their shared "learning community" (Maas, 2009, p. 16).

Past education, training, and professional development. The teachers' education and training provided them with theoretical knowledge regarding teaching in French immersion, but it seems as though their on-the-job experience is what shaped their knowledge and learning the most. As for professional development sessions regarding French immersion and/or student attrition, some of the teachers have attended them and found them helpful, whereas others found them unhelpful or lacking.

In line with the Vygotskian view of learning through the influence of many factors within a social context, Annabelle confirmed that new teachers learn about their practice from various sources, such as their existing knowledge from their pre-service training and previous work experience, their more experienced colleagues, going to workshops, and enrolling in supplementary courses. Over time, new teachers become experienced teachers. In the literature,

Wette (2010) posited that experienced teachers have the “ability to connect learners with the instructional curriculum within a specific configuration of contextual constraints by responding to explicit and implicit feedback about their learners’ developmental and affective needs” (p. 570). Through many years of experience and on-the-job ‘training,’ teachers are gradually more and better able to connect their students and the curriculum in terms of the students’ various needs. Furthermore, experienced teachers’ ‘professional knowledge’ is “a blend of theoretical knowledge and practical experience” that is developed over the years (Wette, 2010, p. 570). Similarly, K. Johnson (2009) contended,

[t]eacher learning and the activities of teaching are understood as growing out of participation in the social practices in classrooms; and what teachers know and how they use that knowledge in classrooms is highly interpretative and contingent on knowledge of self, setting, students, curriculum, and community. (p. 13)

In other words, teachers learn through their interactions with others in the multifaceted social context of their classrooms. Annabelle alluded to these aforementioned ideas, saying that although pre-service teachers learn a lot of theory about education during their initial training programs, teachers need actual practice with their own classes to gain a better understanding, learn more about the practice, and become stronger, better teachers.

As for professional development workshops, Heather found one on addressing student attrition from French immersion to be helpful because she learned different strategies to motivate her students, while Imogene attended a workshop specifically on motivating FSL students. Imogene indicated she would attend and even give workshops on addressing French immersion student attrition because she would like to encourage her fellow French immersion teachers to help their students. In contrast, Marianne found a professional development workshop for French

immersion teachers to be unhelpful because her fellow attendees spoke English during the session, and the session leaders said there are very few resources for intermediate-level teachers to use in their classrooms.

These experiences with past education, training, and professional development have influenced the teachers' current practice to varying degrees. It seems as though on-the-job experience and training are the most effective ways in which French immersion teachers can learn about their job. However, in some cases, professional development sessions can be helpful for some teachers. Moreover, as a form of professional development, teachers can engage in reflection on their practice (Norris, 2009). Based on the responses from the participants of the present study, it seems as though professional development sessions for French immersion and FSL teachers could be beneficial, provided they focus on concrete examples to addressing current issues, and that they are relevant for all participants. As Marianne alluded to, FSL teachers should speak French in professional development sessions because they would be talking and learning about their practice which is done in French. Moreover, perhaps using the target language in these sessions would help foster a sense of FSL teacher community.

Language learning experiences. In terms of the teachers' own language learning experiences, the participants of the present study confirmed that they were better able to relate to their students and understand their FSL learning experiences because of it. Furthermore, these teachers tried to share diverse French cultural experiences and international perspectives to help shape their students' learning about French around the world.

Annabelle and Heather shared their international experiences with their French immersion students. They grew up speaking and learning different languages. Having lived in other regions of the world, they can tell their students about some of the regional differences in

the French language and culture that they have experienced. Furthermore, Heather believed strongly in the benefits of learning another language and shared this with her students. Imogene grew up speaking French in Quebec and began learning English in late elementary school when she moved to Ontario. She explained that she tried to implement French culture from her home province with her students. As for Marianne, she also grew up speaking French in Quebec, and decided to immerse herself in learning English when she was a teenager. Marianne shared with her students about her own language learning, letting them know that she understood their experiences. In the literature, McMillan (2006) discussed the impact that French immersion teachers' beliefs have on their classroom practices in terms of their language use (see also Kim & Elder, 2005). In the case of McMillan's (2006) study, the teachers' beliefs guided their practice, as did the beliefs of the participants of the present study (see also Norris, 2009). Empathizing with one's students based on one's personal experiences may be an effective way for teachers to form connections with their students. Moreover, as demonstrated by the participants of the present study, it helped them see the struggles and challenges that students face when learning a new language.

The teachers' wide-ranging experiences with past lesson plans and activities, their education, training, and professional development, and their own second/foreign language learning experiences influenced their current teaching practices. In the Deweyan view of learning through experience, the participants were looking into their past to shape their present.

Influence of the social context. The data revealed that the teachers in the present study learned about their students' needs and therefore modified lessons and provided extra help as required (Wette, 2010). Furthermore, the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978) posited that teachers guide

students' learning by sharing their knowledge about the world through 'scaffolding,' thereby building on students' previous knowledge and constructing new knowledge together.

All four of the participants of the present study modified their lessons to some extent through conversations with their students, observing students' learning progress, and reflecting on their past experiences. They all have experience adjusting their teaching style and approaches depending on their classes and their students' needs. Annabelle took a different approach with each of her two Grade 7 French immersion classes because the students had different needs, learning styles, and behaviours. Heather indicated that children are all different, so the teacher will adjust his or her teaching to try to meet their diverse needs. As for Imogene, she said that she would be able to take the same teaching approaches with any class, but that her particular students do influence her teaching. Marianne explained that the French immersion classroom is a *social microcosm* and that teachers and students have special, reciprocal relationships in terms of influencing one another.

It is interesting to note that none of the teachers of the present study discussed using local resources or examples of French language and culture, as mentioned previously. As three of the four participants (Annabelle, Imogene, and Marianne) of the present study taught in Eastern Ontario, a geographic region with many French and Francophone influences and communities, one wonders about the perception of the status of French in the community that students may develop. Perhaps through the use of certain, non-local French references, it is learned that the French language and culture are only for the French immersion classroom and are only in other parts of the country and world. It is possible that this reflects a disconnect with the broader social context of French in the local community. It is also possible that the teachers only discussed using French resources with which they were familiar and comfortable. For the fourth teacher,

Heather, who taught in Southcentral Ontario, there are fewer French references in local communities. However, there are Francophone resources in that part of the province, including Francophone culture centres, which could be used in French immersion education. As mentioned previously, perhaps including local Francophone examples in lessons would help students make relevant connections to French language and culture outside of the classroom in their own communities. It should be noted that it is possible these teachers did incorporate local French influences in their lessons, but did not mention them in the interviews.

In response to the second research question of the present study, the participants' past experiences shaped their current teaching practice. Additionally, their various experiences with previous lessons and activities, their education, training, and professional development, as well as their social context all influenced their experiences as French immersion teachers. In the view of learning within a social context (Vygotsky, 1978), the teachers of the present study learned about their 'world' as French immersion teachers through the influence of their students, their classrooms, the curriculum, their past lessons, their own teaching and training, their language learning experiences, their diverse perspectives on learning and the world, and numerous other factors in the French immersion classroom. Additionally, in the view of learning through experience (Dewey, 1971), these teachers reflected on and drew from their past experiences to shape their current experiences and teaching practices.

Research Question 3

The third research question of the present study was: How might these teachers encourage students to remain in or leave French immersion?

Throughout the interviews, the participants described the different ways in which they have encouraged students across the grades in elementary school to stay in or leave French

immersion. For instance, Annabelle believed one of her Grade 2 students should have been in the regular English stream because she was having too much difficulty in French immersion.

Heather and Imogene talked with students and parents to learn about the students' unique needs and to adjust their teaching accordingly, thereby encouraging their students to improve and stay in French immersion. Imogene also had experience encouraging a student to leave French immersion, but she regretted the decision because she believed that all students could succeed in French immersion. Marianne encouraged a student to stay in French immersion, but that student left anyway.

The participants shed light on what it meant to keep students in this stream by referring to the many factors that influence why some students leave, and by explaining that some students experience 'too much' difficulty and therefore should not or 'cannot' stay in French immersion. In some cases, such as those reported by Annabelle and Heather, being in a second language class is too stressful for a student, which leads to him or her having too much difficulty in school, and therefore leaving. In some of these cases, the teacher might encourage the student to switch to the regular English program in order to have access to support resources. It seems that such ideas reflect the perception of who should be in French immersion, and raise questions regarding inclusion in French immersion (see Mady & Arnett, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2015). As previously stated, it makes one wonder about the extent to which French immersion teachers can include students with diverse needs in their classrooms given the lack of support resources, especially considering that it is the responsibility of all classroom teachers to differentiate their lessons to reach everybody (Ministry of Education, 2008, 2010). There seems to be a fine line between the practicalities of helping every student to the extent required, all the while satisfying Ministry policies.

As mentioned previously, Marianne argued that in order to help students who are struggling in French immersion, school boards should ensure that enough human, physical, and material resources are available to students to help them in any way needed, thereby encouraging them to stay in French immersion. It is not only the classroom teacher who should help struggling students. Notably, the Ministry of Education (2013b) outlined that “once students embark on an instructional sequence in Core French, Extended French, or French Immersion, they must be given the opportunity to continue in an uninterrupted program to Grade 8” (p. 16). Given Marianne’s and Imogene’s comments on the lack of support resources in French immersion, it makes one wonder about how the Ministry’s vision for FSL education can be fulfilled. Perhaps with support from the Ministry of Education (2015) regarding including students with exceptionalities, the human, physical, and material resources that Marianne alluded to will begin to emerge in the coming years in French immersion across the province. Over time, this would therefore provide all students with the different support resources they may need in order to achieve their best in French immersion and stay in it as long as they can. Moreover, given Arnett and Mady’s (2010) call for discussions of inclusivity in FSL in teacher education programs, pre-service FSL teachers can learn about this issue, and then be proactive in their practice. As such, it follows that school boards, schools, and teachers should and can work together with students and parents to ensure that students can stay in French immersion as long as possible, despite the challenges that some students may encounter along the way. Perhaps it is the responsibility of the broader community of the student, teacher, parent, and school administration working together to ensure that every student can reach his or her potential.

In response to the third research question of the present study, the participants all had experience encouraging students to stay in French immersion and some had experience

encouraging students to leave. Generally, the participants believed in the benefits of French immersion education, but some said that if a student is struggling too much, switching to the regular English program may be the best option, even though it goes against the Ministry of Education's (2015) policy on inclusion in FSL. This way, the student would have access to support resources that are lacking in French immersion.

Overall Impressions

According to the participants of the present study, many factors influenced how they taught in French immersion. These factors included their students, their classrooms, their students' academic and social struggles in and out of the classroom, parents, homework, the teachers' personal strengths and opinions, the French language and culture, their school board, and even the Ministry of Education and its documents. Other factors included the teachers' reflections on their varied past experiences, as well as the social context of their classroom.

Much of what was gathered from the participants is reflected in the literature, thereby supporting the arguments that academic and social factors influence student attrition from French immersion and that French immersion teachers modify their practice in order to address the phenomenon. This is done to help students achieve their best, and to encourage them to stay in French immersion long-term. By talking directly with four current Ontario elementary French immersion teachers, I explored their experiences with student attrition and what they might do in the classroom to address it.

The following recommendations were inspired by the participants of the present study, as well as by the literature on French immersion education, teacher experience, and student attrition. Four recommendations are for French immersion teachers, and two are for school boards that offer French immersion. I posited these recommendations because I believe in French

immersion education and that we can and should work together to encourage student achievement in French immersion. Readers of these recommendations should consider the many elements of their unique situation when considering them, including a school's point(s) of entry to French immersion, and whether the school is single- or dual-track, which might result in the student having to switch schools if he or she leaves French immersion.

Recommendations for French immersion teachers:

1. **Talk with students and parents to learn about students' specific needs.** French immersion teachers should engage in conversations with their struggling students and their parents to learn about the students' unique needs. Teachers can therefore adapt their teaching as needed, such as by providing extra material to work on, by giving one-on-one support during class, and/or by using alternate tools to present lessons and activities. Communication with students and parents is suggested by the Ministry of Education (2013b), which outlines that "[s]trong connections between the home and the school support student learning and achievement" (p. 13).
2. **Reflect on past lessons to improve them for the future and adapt them to suit the current class.** By reflecting on past lessons and activities, French immersion teachers can determine how well the lessons were presented and how well they were received by the students. Then, French immersion teachers can decide what adjustments should be made for similar lessons in the future. Also, by giving mindful lessons and reflecting throughout lessons, French immersion teachers can adapt their lessons as they are presented. In this way, French immersion teachers are ensuring they are attuned to their students' ever-changing needs, and can adapt and present meaningful, appropriate lessons. This is done to support students' learning and achievement in French immersion.

3. **Encourage students to achieve their best and stay in French immersion as long as possible.** There are many ways in which this can be done, such as by teachers actively talking with students to encourage them to stay. Students should feel supported in their learning and know that they have access to the necessary human and material resources to help them when needed. Leaving French immersion because of academic struggles should not always be the first option. By offering extra help and acknowledging that some students are having difficulty, French immersion teachers can encourage their students to do their best and persevere to stay in it as long as possible.
4. **Use examples of French language and culture from the local area, where available.** Sharing local examples of French language and culture can help students see that French exists not only inside the classroom and in other parts of the world, but also in the community. There are many French communities across Canada from which to draw references and resources to use in the classroom. Showing students practical uses of French in their community helps them make connections between what they learn in class and in the broader sociocultural context, even where French is a minority language.

Recommendations for school boards that offer French immersion:

1. **Talk with French immersion teachers to learn about their experiences, including with students' diverse needs in French class.** In doing so, school boards will get first-hand accounts of what teachers observe in their classes. Teachers are on the frontlines of French immersion education, so it follows that they have a wealth of knowledge and experience to share with other stakeholders. Also, by talking with teachers in a certain school board, that school board will learn about the specific needs of its teachers and students, which are not necessarily transferable between school boards. As the Ministry

of Education (2013a) described, “school boards can take [action] to improve FSL programming throughout the province” (p. 7). Furthermore, because “FSL educators are valued both as experts in second-language learning and teaching and as influential role models for students,” it follows that stakeholders in FSL explore and understand FSL teachers’ experiences in order to enhance FSL education for all learners (Ministry of Education, 2013a, p. 10).

2. **Provide necessary support resources in French immersion.** School boards that offer French immersion can support their students by encouraging them to stay in it for as long as possible. One way in which this can be done is by providing the necessary support resources for students who are having difficulty, such as educational assistants and appropriate and relevant material resources. With the right support, students can stay in French immersion long-term, thereby benefiting from the many advantages associated with French immersion education. Since the Ministry of Education (2013a) confirmed that “FSL educators strive to meet the diverse needs of all students through the use of differentiated instruction and by providing accommodations and/or modifying expectations,” teachers should have the necessary resources at their disposal to ensure they can accommodate and modify their lessons as required (p. 10).

The abovementioned recommendations are proposed as a way to encourage various stakeholders in French immersion to keep students in it as long as possible by supporting their diverse learning needs and encouraging them to achieve their best. There are many benefits to learning an additional language, and French immersion education is an excellent option for students to learn that language in Canada.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

This chapter provides the conclusion to the study, including its limitations, recommendations for future research, and some final thoughts. This study contributes to the discussion regarding French immersion teachers' experience with student attrition. The findings of the study show how a group of Ontario elementary French immersion teachers experienced student attrition, as well as the factors that influenced the attrition. The findings also indicated how these teachers addressed student attrition and students' difficulty with French by changing their approaches and strategies. Moreover, the findings demonstrated how these teachers encouraged students to stay in or leave French immersion.

Limitations

There are some limitations to this study. One is that this study focused on only four participants and their experiences. It is difficult to generalize or transfer the findings to other populations of French immersion teachers and FSL stakeholders with such a data set. Another limitation is that each participant discussed only one or two students leaving her French immersion class. Had some participants had a higher number of students leave, this could have yielded broader, deeper results regarding the factors that influenced student attrition, as well as how the teachers addressed the issue. Another limitation is that this study was limited in time and resources. Had there been more time or resources available, I could have extended the project to include other themes or participants, thereby yielding different or broader findings than what was obtained. Additionally, because the participants and I were familiar to each other prior to the study, it is possible they may have felt obligated to participate in the study, to provide certain answers, or to not share certain experiences. Finally, because we were familiar to each other, I

may not have asked for clarification or posed follow-up questions because of my prior knowledge and our shared experiences.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research on the topic of French immersion teachers' experiences with the factors that influence student attrition could include a broader scale of the present study. For example, it could include exploring the experiences of Ontario elementary French immersion teachers in other regions of the province, of Ontario secondary or post-secondary French immersion teachers, or of French immersion teachers in other provinces and territories. Other studies could include looking at the availability and use of human, physical, and material support resources in French immersion to help students who are struggling, as well as what the teachers consider to be support resources. Future research could also examine how the participants define and understand the term 'experience.' Alternatively, future research could explore professional development for French immersion teachers regarding student attrition, including whether and how they use policies and documents from the Ministry of Education regarding FSL instruction. In addition, future studies could explore the minority context of French in Ontario and its impact on FSL education in that province. Future research could also consider French immersion education at single- or dual-track schools, as well as the points of entry for French immersion, and how those factors might influence teachers' experiences with student attrition. Finally, future research could examine French immersion teachers' use of local Francophone resources to build students' connections to real-world French language and culture in their communities.

Final Thoughts

In the present study, the research objective was to explore the experiences of a group of Ontario elementary French immersion teachers regarding the factors that influence student

attrition, as well as how they might address the issue in their classrooms. Drawing from the social constructivist (Vygotsky, 1978) perspective on learning and development and from Dewey's (1971) principles of interaction and continuity in experience, I showed that learning and development take place within a social context, and that past experiences influence present experiences. From these two perspectives on learning, one can see that learning occurs through experience with the influence of external factors; that is to say, experience shapes learning within a social context.

The findings of the present study are relevant for various stakeholders in French immersion so that, collaboratively, we can continue to make improvements and enhancements to French immersion education across Canada. Given recent Ministry of Education policies and documents, such as the *Framework* on improving FSL education in Ontario (2013a), inclusion in FSL education (2015), the new Ontario FSL curricula for elementary (2013b) and secondary school (2014b), as well as federal government recognition and financial support for minority and second language education across the country, the province of Ontario is poised to encourage more and more students to stay in French immersion, thereby providing them with the space to learn another language and experience the related benefits.

Ultimately, as explained by some of the participants of the present study, parents make the final decision in whether their child stays in or leaves French immersion, regardless of the student's grade, immersion type, or reasons for attrition. The role of the teacher is to do his or her best to teach the curriculum and try to reach all students through differentiated instruction. Teachers, in their daily and direct interactions with students, see first-hand what successes and challenges the students might be having. They strive to do their best as shaped by their professional experience, on-the-job training, pre-service training, and personal learning

experiences in order to determine the most appropriate courses of action for their students. When a student needs extra support, teachers provide additional assistance, such as using alternate formats for lessons or activities, giving extra work, or helping students one-on-one. Similarly, French immersion teachers strive to do their utmost for their students. Given their regular interactions with their students, as well as their expertise and experience in French immersion, it is French immersion teachers who are best positioned to illuminate issues inherent to French immersion and to propose solutions to address these issues. Furthermore, it seemed that the participants of this study believed that their students can all do well, and that all students can succeed in French immersion given the right support network and opportunities. As demonstrated by the participants of this study, French immersion teachers do their best in terms of teaching the curriculum and striving to help their students learn another language and learn *in* another language.

By exploring the experiences of Ontario elementary French immersion teachers with the academic and social factors that influence student attrition, one gains insight into their experiences, as well as the trend of student attrition. The teachers in this study provided insight into the factors that influence student attrition from French immersion in Ontario and how they address the phenomenon in their classroom. With the right support from parents, teachers, schools, school boards, and Ministries of Education, we can work together to ensure the continued success of French immersion in the Canadian context, thereby providing hundreds of thousands of students across the country with a strong language immersion education, and encouraging them to achieve their best. After all, helping students reach their potential should be the goal of teachers, schools, and school boards everywhere.

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Appendix A

Minimum Criteria Questions

1. For how long have you been teaching in French immersion?
2. Have you experienced students leaving French immersion for academic and/or social reasons?
3. Are you available to meet with me [the researcher] during the week of (Month, Date, 2014) to talk more about your experiences with students leaving French immersion?

Appendix B

Letter of Information

Dear Teacher,

My name is Gabrielle Berube. I am a Master of Arts in Education student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa. I am conducting a study on French immersion teachers' experiences with the factors that influence student attrition. I am looking for four to six French immersion teachers with a range of years of experience in that program who may be able to participate in the study.

The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of a group of elementary French immersion teachers with the academic and social factors that influence student attrition from that program. The findings will be used in the write-up of my thesis, and may be used in academic journal articles or conference presentations related to this project.

By developing a better understanding of the experiences of a group of French immersion teachers with the reasons why students leave that program, we can gain insight from the perspective of the teacher about why some students leave French immersion.

Participation in the study includes two individual interviews with me that will last approximately 45 minutes each. Participation is on a first come, first served basis. Confidentiality will be maintained at all times by the use of a pseudonym. If you have experience teaching in French immersion, and with student attrition from it because of academic and/or social factors, and you are interested in participating, please send me an email at [email address] or call me at [phone number] at any time.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Thank you!

Gabrielle

Gabrielle Berube
[email address]
[phone number]

Appendix C

Interview Guide

Hello! Thank you for taking the time to meet me in person (talk on the phone/by Skype)! I would like to learn about your experiences as a teacher in French immersion, specifically with student attrition from the program, the factors that influence the attrition, what you do/did to address it in your classroom, and how your experiences have been shaped by it. Let's get started!

1. For how long have you been a teacher? At what levels? For what subjects?
2. For how long have you taught/did you teach in French immersion? At what levels?
3. Based on your experiences, what can you tell me about the reasons why students leave French immersion?
 - a. In your opinion, what are the reasons why students leave? (Depending on the participants' responses, I may follow up with questions like:
 - i. What about their grades in French class? Or other academic factors, like the difficulty of the course content?
 - ii. What about the influence of their friends? Or other social factors, like perceiving that French "isn't cool"?)
 - b. In your view, what are *academic* factors that influence attrition? *social* factors?
4. With respect to *how* you teach/taught in your French immersion classroom:
 - a. Have you changed (Did you change) anything in your teaching to encourage students to stay in French immersion? Please elaborate.
 - b. Do you think your teaching strategies and approaches (have) influence(d) students to stay in the program? Please elaborate.
5. What do you do/have you done, if anything, in your French immersion classroom to prevent student attrition? Please elaborate.
 - a. What influences/has influenced your decisions about this in regards to students' attrition?
 - b. Can you tell me about a major event related to student attrition that influenced your teaching?
6. Is there anything you would like to add? Do you have final thoughts to share?

(As the interview progresses, I will return to previous questions to ask the participant for further information or clarification.)

Would you be available during the week of Date, Month, 2014, for the follow-up interview?

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today about your experiences! I hope you found this session to be a benefit to you. This information will help me shape my project. Have a great rest of the day!

Appendix C (continued)**Follow-up Interview Guide**

The questions in this interview will be based on the responses that I obtain during first interview.

Hello! Thank you for taking the time to meet/talk with me again! Since we last spoke, I have looked through the information we talked about in the first interview. Today I would like to talk more about your experiences as a teacher in French immersion, specifically about the academic and social factors that influence student attrition. I would like to discuss your experiences further, and get clarification on some points we discussed last time. Let's begin!

1. Based on your experiences, what can you tell me about the reasons why students leave French immersion?
2. In the first interview, I learned that you agree/disagree that academic and social factors are influential in why students leave French immersion. Why? Could you please elaborate further?
 - a. In your experience, do other factors influence why students leave immersion?
3. In the first interview, I learned that you have/have not changed your approaches or strategies in teaching in French immersion. Could you please elaborate? Why/why not? In what circumstances?
4. Have you encouraged students to stay in the French immersion program, or to leave it? Could you please elaborate?
5. Is there anything you would like to add? Do you have final thoughts to share?

(As the interview progresses, I will return to previous questions to ask for further information or clarification.)

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me again today! I hope you found this session to be beneficial. I have learned a lot from our discussion and from your experiences. Have a great rest of the day!

Appendix D

Frequency of Nodes Across all Interviews

Table D1

Frequency of Nodes Across all Interviews

Node #	Node Name	# of Interviews	# of References
1	Attrition general	4	11
2	Attrition parent refusal	5	9
3	Attrition prevention	3	7
4	Attrition process	5	10
5	Attrition reasons	8	48
6	Attrition who decides	3	7
7	Attrition younger vs older	6	9
8	Board or school help for immersion	7	16
9	Difficulty in class	7	21
10	Dual- or single-track school	1	1
11	Encourage students to stay, leave	5	15
12	Extra support, IEP request	7	21
13	Extra-curriculars in French vs English	4	6
14	Framework for FSL	4	7
15	IEP helps student in immersion	5	7
16	IEP need or just a note	3	5
17	IEP to follow	2	3
18	More support in English program	4	7
19	New FSL curriculum	4	5
20	Newcomers entering FSL	1	4
21	Parent involvement	6	12
22	Professional development	3	4
23	Social context of classroom to influence teacher	4	10
24	Student confidence	6	19
25	Student improvement, teacher satisfaction	3	5
26	Student self-motivation to learn French	1	2
27	Success	7	18
28	Teacher changes approach, strategy	8	26
29	Teacher is accessible	2	6
30	Teacher reflection	1	2
31	Teacher's language influence on teaching	4	9
32	Teacher's language profile	4	8
33	Vocab difficulty	4	10
34	Weak skills, bump to next grade	2	4

Appendix E

Coding Comparison Chart

Table E1

Coding Comparison Chart

Node #	Node Name	Participant Name and Interview Number							
		Annabelle		Heather		Imogene		Marianne	
		1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
1	Attrition general	•			•	•		•	
2	Attrition parent refusal		•	•		•	•		•
3	Attrition prevention	•						•	•
4	Attrition process	•	•	•		•		•	
5	Attrition reasons	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
6	Attrition who decides		•	•				•	
7	Attrition younger vs older		•	•	•		•	•	•
8	Board or school help for immersion		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
9	Difficulty in class	•	•	•	•	•		•	•
10	Dual- or single-track school		•						
11	Encourage students to stay, leave		•	•		•	•	•	
12	Extra support, IEP request	•		•	•	•	•	•	•
13	Extra-curriculars in French vs English		•		•		•		•
14	Framework for FSL		•	•		•			•
15	IEP helps student in immersion	•	•				•	•	•
16	IEP need or just a note	•	•						•
17	IEP to follow	•	•						
18	More support in English program		•			•	•	•	
19	New FSL curriculum		•	•	•	•			
20	Newcomers entering FSL	•							

Appendix E (continued)

21	Parent involvement	•	•	•		•	•	•
22	Professional development	•		•		•		
23	Social context of classroom to influence teacher		•		•		•	•
24	Student confidence		•	•	•		•	•
25	Student improvement, teacher satisfaction	•				•	•	
26	Student self-motivation to learn French	•						
27	Success	•		•	•	•	•	•
28	Teacher changes approach, strategy	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
29	Teacher is accessible	•	•					
30	Teacher reflection						•	
31	Teacher's language influence on teaching		•		•		•	•
32	Teacher's language profile		•		•		•	•
33	Vocab difficulty	•	•	•	•			
34	Weak skills, bump to next grade	•						•

Appendix F

Glossary of Coding Nodes

Attrition general – the concept or trend of attrition in general

Attrition parent refusal – when parents do not want their child to leave French immersion; when parents reject the school's recommendation to remove the child from immersion

Attrition prevention – discussing how to prevent students from leaving French immersion

Attrition process – what steps are taken to consider removing a student from immersion; includes discussions with the student, parents, resource teacher, principal, doctors, school board representative and/or other interested parties

Attrition reasons – why do students leave French immersion

Attrition who decides – who makes the final decision to have the student removed from French immersion

Attrition younger vs older – whether it is better for a student to leave French immersion when s/he is younger or older

Board or school help for immersion – what a school or school board can do or does to support French immersion

Difficulty in class – whether a student is demonstrating difficulty in class

Dual- or single-track school – the type of school with respect to whether it offers French immersion; a *dual-track school* offers French immersion and core French concurrently; a *single-track school* offers only French immersion

Encourage students to stay, leave – whether the teacher actively encourages a student to stay in or leave French immersion

Extra support, IEP request – whether extra classroom teacher or resource teacher support is required for the student to stay in French immersion and/or whether an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is requested (and developed)

Extra-curriculars in French vs English – if the school offers extra-curricular activities, whether they are conducted in French and/or in English

Framework for FSL – a document from the Ministry of Education in Ontario which outlines a province-wide action plan on improving French as a Second Language (FSL) education for all students

Appendix F (continued)

IEP helps student in immersion – how an IEP helps a student in French immersion

IEP need or just a note – whether the student needs an IEP for French immersion or a note in their student file regarding their French immersion progress for future French immersion teachers to consult

IEP to follow – whether the student has an IEP in French immersion or other subjects

More support in English program – the English program offers more educational support for students who are struggling; students are transferred from French immersion to the English program to access this support

New FSL curriculum – the Ministry of Education in Ontario released a new FSL curriculum in 2013 to be implemented beginning in the 2014-2015 school year; the previous FSL curriculum was from 2001

Newcomers entering FSL – when newcomers to Canada enter FSL

Parent involvement – whether parent involvement in their child's school experience has an influence on how they perform

Professional development – professional development for teachers related to teaching in French immersion and keeping students in French immersion

Social context of classroom to influence teacher – whether the social context of the teacher's current classroom has an influence on how s/he approaches teaching

Student confidence – whether a student's level of confidence affects their success in French immersion

Student improvement, teacher satisfaction – teachers feel satisfied when students improve

Student self-motivation to learn French – whether a student's self-motivation to learn FSL has an impact on their learning

Success – how a teacher considers success; includes notions of a student improving, a student trying his/her best, and a student achieving his/her potential

Teacher changes approach, strategy – whether the teacher changes how s/he approaches teaching FSL, including the planning and preparation of a lesson, as well as teaching the lesson

Teacher is accessible – whether the teacher is available before, during, or after school, including during recess and lunch, so that students may visit him/her regarding their school work

Appendix F (continued)

Teacher reflection – whether a teacher reflects on how s/he teaches, including reflecting on individual lessons, and what follow-up or changes may occur

Teacher's language influence on teaching – the influence of the teacher's language profile on how s/he teaches in French immersion

Teacher's language profile – what language(s) the teacher speaks; what is his/her native language

Vocab difficulty – whether the student is experiencing difficulty with learning and/or using vocabulary; it could be general vocabulary for every day conversations or subject-specific vocabulary related to a certain lesson or unit

Weak skills, bump to next grade – whether a student demonstrated weak French language skills and was passed to the next grade; the student's file may or may not include a note from the previous teacher indicating his/her progress