

**FROM THE MARGINS TO THE FRONTLINES: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE
EXPERIENCES OF QUEER, TRANS, AND/OR NONBINARY FRENCH AS A SECOND
LANGUAGE (FSL) TEACHERS IN CANADA**

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Abstract

French as a second language (FSL) teachers in Canada have been marginalized within the teaching profession for decades (Arnott et al., 2023; Kissau, 2005; Masson, 2018). These feelings of marginalization are exacerbated when we consider students' negative reactions to learning and being in FSL classes (Arnott, 2019), couched within teaching a traditionally gendered and binarized language in a school system that maintains and perpetuates the logics of cisheteronormativity (Coda, 2023; Grant, 2022; Hakeem, 2024; Masson et al., 2024). While a single published study has looked briefly at the experiences of queer FSL teachers in Canada (Hakeem, 2024), missing from this research is how queer, trans, and/or nonbinary FSL teachers navigate and negotiate their schooling environments and relationships with others in the building and engage in a queer pedagogical approach to their FSL teaching.

Set against this backdrop, this thesis-by-articles reports on a narrative inquiry (NI) with twelve ($n = 12$) queer, trans, and/or nonbinary FSL teachers across two Canadian provinces to unearth their experiences in the FSL classroom over a twelve-month period (2023-2024). Grounded within queer theories, drawing specifically on the concepts of cisheteronormativity, power and discourse, and gender performativity, data were collected through three-rounds of semi-structured interviews and photo elicitation methods (Brett, 2024). Like other narrative inquirers (Barkhuizen et al., 2025; Xu & Barkhuizen, 2025), data were analyzed via thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and narrative analysis (Barkhuizen, 2022) to find emerging themes relative to participants' experiences.

Throughout this thesis-by-articles, I present four articles that delve into different avenues pertaining to the ways in which queer, trans, and/or nonbinary FSL teachers move through – and negotiate – their teaching environments. Together, findings shed light on the complexities of individual queer FSL teacher experiences, both in light of constraints and possibilities. Indeed, while queer FSL teachers face curriculum-based queer erasure, hostility, and isolation within their profession, they simultaneously leverage curriculum vagueness to develop innovative queer pedagogical approaches. These approaches include implementing gender-inclusive French language (such as "*iel*" pronouns), incorporating intersectional resources and language materials, and disrupting normative thinking through activist pedagogical practices. The findings also highlight significant gaps in initial teacher education programs, including lack of support, resources, and mentorship for queer pre-service and early career FSL teachers navigating the

intersections of their identities with FSL teaching, community expectations, and educational policies. Implications point to the need for enhanced collaboration among stakeholders, improved inclusivity in teacher education programs, and recognition of how FSL curricula can serve as both sites of exclusion and tools of resistance against cisheteronormative assumptions in FSL education contexts.

Intersections of queerness and FSL teaching and research are largely absent from the literature (Boland, 2021; Hakeem, 2024). This study helps to fill this gap by spotlighting queer FSL teachers' experiences to ascertain both their affordances and constraints as queer people in the language classroom. Ultimately, this study highlights how queer, trans, and/or nonbinary FSL teachers navigate structural barriers while simultaneously creating transformative educational spaces that challenge linguistic binaries and cisheteronormativity, underscoring the critical need for systemic support and recognition of these educators' unique contributions to gender inclusive FSL education.

Preface

As per the University of Ottawa' Academic Regulation C-7, I declare that I am the sole author of Articles 1 and 2 in this thesis. I co-wrote Articles 3 and 4 with a participant from this study and with a colleague, Dr. Cameron Smith, who interviewed me as part of this study. Authorship was discussed and negotiated as appropriate. For example, in Article 3, I wrote the majority – and had the support from my co-author to weave in their experiences and perspectives. For Article 4, I wrote all sections of the article. My co-author supported in conceptualizing, revising and editing. While the names of two co-authors do indeed appear on these articles, I must acknowledge that throughout each writing phase, my writing has never been an individual endeavour. Feedback on drafts was generously provided by my supervisor, committee, and anonymous and peer reviews from corresponding journals. Despite the range of support offered, I take full responsibility for any mistakes in this thesis.

The research for this study received approval from the University of Ottawa Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board (S-11-23-9552; see Appendix A). This study also received funding support from the Ontario Graduate Scholarship.

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This dissertation could not have been completed without the love, care, guidance, and support of my wonderful supervisor, Dr. Stephanie Arnott. Steph, I'm so grateful for the time you've funnelled into me. From the early moments you carved out to chat with me about prospective B.Ed programs in my time as a DLS student (swaying toward uOttawa, of course!), to our long threads of emails contemplating doctoral studies, to our walking phone chats about all things life, research, and teaching. I always leave our conversations and meetings feeling energized and inspired to write, think, and continue. With all of the ideas we've generated together, I think we have enough research potential to last a lifetime. Steph, you have a magnetic energy, and make everyone feel like they're the only ones in the room. I'm so grateful for your mentorship and your dedication for creating opportunities for your grad students. From the beginning in my first year, you paired Adam and I together to work on the Ministry project, which culminated in not only teaching experience, but conference presentations and article dissemination. These experiences carried on throughout the degree and have made me a better thinker and writer as a result. I will forever praise you for giving all of your graduate students the best PhD experience possible and cultivating arguably the best grad student group yet (#squadgoals).

I couldn't have finished this thesis without the love, time, dedication, and support of #squadgoals. Adam – what a joy ride we have had throughout our thesis times! From our European adventures to our Montréal conferences, we always have the best times when we're together! You've been a mentor and friend throughout this program – I look up and respect you wholeheartedly. I'm looking forward to our many more future travels and collaborations.

Amanda – you are such a source of joy and light in my life (and everyone's around you!) Thank you for being a sounding board through every step of this thesis journey. You taught me the importance of checking (and reading – thoroughly) my emails, taught me to take life slow

and enjoy the small moments (especially when the beach and/or water is involved), and taught me that we can get anything done with a tight deadline and consistent coffee breaks. From our 25 minute voice notes, endless texts, to visits in random cities we find ourselves, you have become a lifelong and forever friend. I'm excited that you've added Natalie into the mix – and I can't wait for your family to grow so Dave and I can keep being the best guncles you've ever had! There are not enough words that I could write to describe my gratitude and love for you. I'm eternally grateful for you!

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Sam – thank you for being such an inspiration throughout this whole program. I have always been inspired by you completing this journey in French – and crushing every single step of the way! Your work ethic and dedication is unparalleled, and your thirst for adventure is infectious. I remember talking to you early on in the program about how I may not want to pursue academia after graduation, and you kept reminding me that life is so much more than just a job or career. I take this conversation with me and try to slow down because of it. Thank you!

I also want to thank my committee members who have been alongside me throughout this journey. Dr. Nicholas-Ng-A-Fook – thank you for being such a dedicated and passionate mentor. I remember taking your EDU 8105 course and walking away feeling relieved and excited to begin writing the comprehensive exams. You intertwine humility and excellence together so remarkably well; I hope to embody these dispositions in my own teaching.

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made the class come alive. You made Friday morning lectures fly by – and inspired all of us to become better educators and people. I consider myself extremely fortunate to have benefited from your collaboration and expertise! Thank you!

Alongside my committee members, I'm eternally grateful to my external, Dr. James Coda. I remember reading your work throughout my master's, and then into the PhD, and walking away with new ideas and thoughts about how to approach L2 teaching. I am indebted to you for agreeing to meet me for coffee at AAAL in Denver back in March 2025. Both you and Matt were incredibly kind and warm, and took Dave and I under your wing for that weekend. It was also during that weekend that you motivated me to apply for a university position. I felt wholly underqualified, but I threw my name in the hat because of your support and guidance. I wouldn't be here in this position today without you!

To ma chère Mimi, I couldn't have asked for a better friend and mentor to introduce me to the ropes of grad school. From the very beginning, you showed me an unparalleled level of kindness and care, and mentored me throughout virtually every step of the degree. You supported me crafting a findings section of a research paper (sorry about the very messy first draft of our JLD paper), slowing down and waiting for questions and comments (as your TA for a DLS course), applying for conferences (ACFAS), advocating for myself, etc. The list really could go on and on. You've been a guiding light throughout this program and have provided me with endless opportunities: conference presentations in Bordeaux, France, while staying with your family, our CDA project with Shawna and Eric, our CASLT work. The writing, friendship, and conversations will forever continue – and I'm so grateful for that! Above all, I'm elated that we've become such good friends. I'm looking forward to all our future adventures together!

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and understand the profession. The dedication, time, and stories you shared all made this project possible, and I hope they support the field in a critical – and positive – way moving forward. I'm looking forward to our continued collaboration and work in the field and beyond!

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Glossary of Terms

The following is a list of key terms that I employ throughout this thesis. The definitions provided guide my conceptual thinking. While several definitions may exist for each term, I have attempted to prioritize up-to-date thinking as per existing empirical and theoretical literature alongside the relevance of definitions to the context of my study (i.e., French as a second language education in Ontario, Canada). The definitions listed here are not meant to represent a static view of these concepts, but rather to provide a clear positioning for readers.

2SLGBTQ+: This acronym refers to Two-spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Plus.

Cisnormativity: Cisnormativity (or cisnormative) is the underlying belief that “the most normal gender identity is cisgender – meaning that a person’s lived gender matches the sex they were assigned at birth based on physical sex characteristics” (Marshall et al., 2023, p. 2).

Cisheteronormativity: This term brings together cisnormativity and heteronormativity to understand how the collective terms exist as a single oppressive force (see Moore et al., 2024). Following Knisely (2024), it also “entails assumptions about how people should do gender (i.e., in specific, cisgender ways that can be neatly mapped onto binary frameworks of gender) and how they should do sexuality (i.e. in certain heterosexual ways). Cisheteronormativity presents ‘cisgender, white, monogamous, reproductive, able-bodied straightness as natural, normal, and desirable’ [Knisely & Paiz, 2021, p. 28]” (p. 653).

Closet: This term refers, metaphorically, to the idea that without disclosing one’s sexual identity or sexuality, their sexual orientation defaults to heterosexual, remaining “in the closet.”

French as a second language (FSL): FSL refers to the study of French as a second language in English-language school boards. In the context of the study (i.e., Ontario), FSL is a mandatory course in Ontario from Grades 4-9 (OMOE, 2014).

Gender expression: Woolley and Airton (2020) defined gender expression as “How one chooses (whether consciously or unconsciously) to dress, walk, talk, accessorize, etc., in a way that expresses one’s gender identity” (p. 306).

Gender identity: “Refers to an individual’s sense of self as a man, woman, transgender, genderqueer, [nonbinary] etc. This is often shaped by one’s assigned sex and the gender in which one is raised” (Woolley & Airton, 2020, p. 306).

Gender non-conforming: “When a person’s gender expression varies from that which is traditionally expected of a person of their gender identity or assigned sex” (Airton & Meyer, 2018, p. 318).

Heteronormativity: The beliefs and assumptions that heterosexuality is the only ‘normal’ sexual identity, while other identities are considered abnormal, and thus, inferior or lesser than their heterosexual counterparts (Mayo, 2007).

Heterosexism: The acknowledgement or belief that being straight is normal (Nelson, 1993).

Homophobia: The distain or fear of people whose sexual orientations deviate from heterosexual orientations (Coda, 2020).

Narrative inquiry: Narrative inquiry is a methodology that involves hearing, telling, and retelling the experiences of people. The goal of narrative inquiry is to trace, unpack, learn from, and create space for people to share their stories of experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Transphobia: The distain or hatred of people whose gender orientations deviate from cisgenderism.

Queer: The term *queer* is used throughout this thesis proposal as an umbrella term for all identities and sexualities that fall outside of the realm of heterosexuality, including 2SLGBTQIA+ (Airton & Koecher, 2019; Liddicoatt, 2009).

Queer theory: Queer theory is an epistemological theory derived from poststructuralism that aims to question, challenge, disrupt, and investigate power hierarchies, specifically related to non-normative sexual identities (Halperin, 2003) and explores “how gender and sexuality are produced and how they impact people, identity, and everyday life” (Woolley & Airton, 2020, p. 5).

Table of Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>Glossary of Terms</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Table of Contents</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Chapter 1: Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
Literature Review	11
What is the relevance between ‘queerness’ and L2/FSL learning?	12
FSL programs in Canada.	12
Cisheteronormativity in educational contexts	14
Cisheteronormative textbooks and curricular materials	15
Cisheteronormative classroom activities and dialogue	16
Student experiences and responses to cisheteronormativity.....	17
Challenging cisheteronormative language materials	18
Queering the second language classroom	19
Queer L2 teachers.....	21
Theoretical Framework: Queer Theories	23
Queer theories	24
Anti-oppressive educational frameworks	34
Methodology	35
What is narrative inquiry?	36
How does narrative inquiry differ from other qualitative methodologies?	39
Epistemological roots of NI	41
Limitations and affordances of NI.....	41
Ethical considerations	43
Research contexts and participants.....	45
Participant profiles	47
Field texts.....	53
Data analysis	57
Trustworthiness	60
Overview of the thesis-by-articles	61
<i>Chapter 2: Article 1 – Queer, trans, and nonbinary French as a second (FSL) language teacher negotiations with curriculum to enact a queer pedagogical approach</i>	<i>80</i>
<i>Chapter 3: Article 2 – Experiences of queer second language (L2) teachers in Canada: (Un)preparedness, (dis)comfort, and (re)actions</i>	<i>111</i>
<i>Chapter 4: Article 3 – Beyond the binary: Queer and trans activism in Ontario French as second language (FSL) classrooms</i>	<i>130</i>

Chapter 5: Article 4 – Voices of experience: Queer language teachers’ advice for new second language educators	141
Chapter 6: Conclusion	166
Responding to the research puzzle	167
Wonderings from this thesis	170
Multiple marginalization for queer, trans, and/or nonbinary FSL teachers	170
A trans and nonbinary perspective in FSL: What does this bring to the field?	174
Me as researcher-participant in this narrative inquiry	175
Implications	178
Implications for queer theories	178
Implications for narrative inquiry	180
Implications for pedagogy and curriculum policy	181
Implications for future research	184
Limitations	186
Appendix	198
Appendix A: Certificate of Ethics Approval	198
Appendix C: Research Protocols	257
Interview Protocols	257
Recruitment Poster	261
Statement of Informed Consent	262

Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation is a thesis-by-articles manuscript. In it, I present four articles written both individually (articles 1 and 2), and collaboratively (articles 3 and 4) on the experiences of queer French as a second language (FSL) teachers in Canada. Each article addresses and presents a unique portrait of the experiences of the participants in this study. It is noteworthy here that participants' experiences cannot be generalized for all teachers. Their social, political, and cultural worlds respectively shape their experiences in schools as queer people. The articles are anchored in my broader theoretical framework (queer theories, discussed in the subsequent articles in greater detail) and my chosen methodology (narrative inquiry, discussed below). Although the articles differ in their form and content, each one contributes its own piece to the following research puzzle: What are the experiences of queer, trans, and nonbinary French as a second language (FSL) teachers as they navigate cisheteronormative discursive regimes in their educational contexts?

In the following sections of this introduction, I map out the need for this current research, my motivation to conduct it, and the purpose and problem. My positionality is woven throughout with its own dedicated section. After I set the scene for the need for this research more holistically, I provide a specific review of relevant literature and outline the framework and methodology used to guide this study. I end by sketching out an overview of the four articles of this dissertation.

Before entering into discussions about the need of this research, I must acknowledge the lands on which I write, read, interact, and live as a settler. At the time of conducting this study and writing this thesis, I was working on the traditional land of several territories, such as the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples. At the end of my doctoral studies, I relocated to Kelowna, British Columbia, where I worked on the lands of the Sylix Okanagan people. This land has nourished me in ways I didn't know I needed: the proximity to the water and mountains have given me clarity about the importance of movement, kindness, and reciprocity.

I benefit tirelessly from stolen lands which I occupy. It was through learning about the lands and reading Indigenous scholarship, most recently Jo Chrona, that I have learned about the

power that reflection, action, and relationality hold as promising grounds toward reconciliation. As Chrona writes, being in relationality means,

being aware that we are shaped by more than the content of any learning environment; we are also affected by the way we interact with one another and how we move through the world in relation to each other. (p. 8)

Acknowledging the lands we occupy as settlers is an important step to understanding how settler colonialism is entangled in many layers of our educational system, structures, and thinking. Similar logic forms the basis for this study, in that the ways in which queer bodies live, manoeuvre, and navigate within the school system are important areas for much-needed inquiry.

The need for this current research

As it will become clearer in the literature review section of this introduction chapter, the need for queer, trans, and/or nonbinary inclusion in second language (L2) spaces generally, and FSL in particular, is paramount for innumerable reasons (Grant et al., 2024; Paiz, 2020). Not only is it because FSL is a mandatory course in Ontario, and many other provinces (Masson et al., 2024), but also because FSL provides students with access to new cultural and linguistic opportunities (Ontario Ministry of Education [OME], 2013, 2014). With these opportunities, students can learn to express themselves, discuss their likes (and dislikes), and talk about their friends, families, and futures in another language (Paiz, 2018). Generally speaking, these speaking and learning points do not present any issues for students. Consider how in FSL classes, we typically envision how students learn key vocabulary, sentence starters, grammar, cultural elements, and then use all of this acquired knowledge in discussion with one another. However, if we dive a little bit deeper, this optimistic perspective begins to blur under close scrutiny, since research tells us that L2 classrooms globally are fraught with cisheteronormativity (i.e., the privileging of cisgender and heterosexual people – see Moore et al., 2024, and later sections of this introduction).

The power of cisheteronormative discourses means that daily questions, routines, and general L2 activities are enacted with a crystallized cisheteronormative lens, which prioritizes cisgender and heterosexual people (Moore et al., 2024; Nguyen & Yang, 2015), thereby excluding all other learners who do not align with this oppressive regime (Bollas, 2021). A simple question like ‘What did you do on the weekend?’ has the potential of holding what Nguyen and Yang (2015) termed ‘heteronormative frames,’ precisely because it leaves students

feeling as though they need to “come out” or lie about their lives (Milani & Cashman, 2024; Moore, 2016). Through this framing, I am reminded that if students do not see themselves represented, feel as though they cannot access the language, or do not feel as though the language is useful to them, their motivation is stifled, and their interest in the language(s) plummets (Knisely & Paiz, 2021; Knisely, 2023; Spiegelman, 2022). What remains are disengaged and uninspired students in FSL spaces across Canada.

Here, it is crucial to pause here and remember that many teachers in the profession often do not go into the field thinking that they are going to (re)produce cisheteronormative discourses. In fact, when I first began my teaching career in 2019 in Australia, I remember uncritically using pedagogical resources that were passed along to me that reinforced normativities, and by extension, held assumptions that people in my class did not have connections to queer identities, treating everyone as a homogenous group of people. Of course, I did not think I was going to be a teacher that was uncritical when I entered the field. I entered thinking I was going to change lives and create positive, warm, and caring environments. While I took partial responsibility as an individual teacher, I also needed to consider (especially thanks to brilliant scholars like Freire [1970] and Kumashiro [2000, 2002]), that schools are purposefully and intentionally created (and maintained), often with the goal of producing (un)critical and (un)inspired people. I peruse and dissect this thinking deeper in the theoretical framework of this study. In the meantime, let’s return to why this research is needed. While it is important to better understand the level of queer-inclusive access that queer, trans, and nonbinary students hold, queer-inclusivity does not just impact students. It impacts everyone, including teachers – and certainly queer teachers. Plenty of scholars have rightly pointed this out (Nelson, 2006). Centering and spotlighting the experiences of queer FSL teachers is crucial. To borrow from Tarrayo and Potestades (2023), much of the research to date has only looked at the experiences of cisgender and heterosexual teachers to examine what their realities and experiences of queer inclusion resemble in the classroom. A missing piece to this seemingly gigantic puzzle is that of queer FSL teachers.

When I began this research, I had some people ask me questions to the effect of, “but aren’t queer people ‘good’ now?” or “why are you studying queer people in FSL? I thought they didn’t really experience homophobia or transphobia anymore?” Such questions brought me a little bit of panic. I admittedly thought that maybe I was overstepping and leaning into a topic which did not warrant (any) investigation. But two thoughts kept recurring: 1) two years before

embarking on my PhD journey, I was a full-time FSL teacher, and I experienced homophobia. I was questioned by students and other colleagues. I was the ‘token gay’ teacher in the school. Parents dismissed my efforts to embed inclusionary discourses in my classes and the wider school community. I felt the ‘weight’ of being a queer teacher holding me down, and 2): when I started my PhD, the only three pieces of Canadian, queer, and FSL specific literature I could find were from Boland (2021), Couture (2017), and Dalley and Campbell (2006). After reading their work, a nagging question prevailed: What is it like to be and work as a queer FSL teacher in Canada? Since then, while some research has been undertaken to explore their experiences (see Hakeem, 2024), I decided to dive deeper into examining why queer FSL teachers come to the profession, how their gender and sexuality impacts their teaching, how (and if) they use any queer pedagogical approaches in their teaching, and finally, to identify some of their specific needs. Essentially, I hoped to be clearer in my response to the pervasive question “why is this important?” that people in my academic, personal and professional lives continue to pose.

To demonstrate the importance and relevance of this question, consider the following example emanating from a student evaluation I received at the end of a graduate course I taught during my time at the University of Ottawa. The course was titled “Social and Political Issues in L2 Education” (the course name is important). To provide a bit of context, in this course, I dedicated one module to social diversity and inclusion in L2 spaces. I also had two readings on queer inclusion and representation in L2 material. At the end of the semester, a student left me feedback on the official university evaluation form that read: “The topics and theories presented in this course revolved around issues of sexuality, trans identity, and queer theory. I do not see any of these ideas as valid or appropriate in a *masters* or *for the classroom*” (emphasis added). Such a denigrative comment left me feeling like I did something wrong by exposing my (mostly practicing K-12 teachers) to what I saw as a social and political issue of responding to the various needs of students with non-normative genders and sexualities in their classes.

A second example further illustrates why this research is essential. In early 2022, while teaching a mix of FSL and English in an affluent Toronto school, I shared an office with several FSL teachers. One day, I overheard a colleague expressing intense frustration about a student who wanted to use neopronouns in French – something they had already begun doing in English. The teacher was visibly upset, not because the request was linguistically impossible, but because it challenged her beliefs. What stood out was not just her resistance to a single pronoun, but her

anger at being asked to support a student's gender identity. This moment laid bare how something as seemingly small as a pronoun can spark outsized emotional responses in teachers – responses that signal deeper tensions around inclusion in FSL teaching and learning.

This and the previous example demonstrate how the question “why is this important” is one being contemplated in the field of teaching generally, and in FSL teaching specifically. These two small examples clearly show how homophobic and transphobic discourses transpire and traverse educational spaces. I also need to (re)orient to the fact that such interactions occurred in large(r) cities in Ontario, Canada. While this province is rife with antiqueer and antitrans discourses for both teachers and students alike, especially with protests and parades aiming to “protect children” (e.g., Million March for Students), I would be remiss not to acknowledge the polarizing discourses around queer, trans, and nonbinary people in schools in other provinces, like Alberta. Plastered across news reports and outlets at the beginning of 2024, it was common to read and hear headlines such as “Alberta unveils three sweeping bills affecting trans and gender-diverse youth” (Bartko, 2024), or “Amnesty International Canada condemns ‘appalling’ anti-trans policy changes in Alberta” (Amnesty International, 2024). Although I did not have any participants in this study who currently live in Alberta, a few of them have roots there. In our interviews, we discussed the tremendous amount of emotional labour required to be a queer teacher in Alberta, given how their provincial government is trying to actively erase queer, trans, and/or nonbinary people entirely. To that end, the need for research on the experiences of queer, trans, and/or nonbinary FSL teachers in Canada is as relevant as ever.

Not only is this research topic pertinent in Canada, but it also transcends these borders within language education. Specifically, there are mounting injustices occurring in the United States (U.S) under President Donald Trump’s administration (see Back et al., 2025), especially related to gender and sexuality. Within the first month of his second term, the Trump administration mandated legal documents to solely reflect a person’s sex assigned at birth (Holland & Knight, 2025). These political enforcements magnify the concrete, invisibilizations of trans and nonbinary people globally. Alongside legal documents, maintaining cisgender and heterosexuality is reinscribed under the Trump government through sports. Indeed, an executive order he signed prohibited athletes assigned male at birth to compete on women’s sports teams (NCAA, 2025). These two examples show how gender and sexual minoritized people are in constant backlash because of their very existence. Providing an outlet for their voices to be heard

is thus a critical vantage point of this study, and part of the ontological impetuses of this study, as discussed next.

Personal motivation to conduct this research

I am a queer FSL teacher born on the unceded and unsundered First Nations' land, specifically, the Anishnaabeg lands, in what is now known as 'Canada.' In my elementary school days, I despised learning French. I thought it was monotonous. However, my interest pivoted in high school. I remember being enchanted by learning new grammar points, working through different grammatical rules, and encoding sentences together to eventually coalesce like a puzzle. I didn't think much of it at the time, in hindsight though, every grammatical rule we learned and activity we engaged in was framed through the lens of cisgender and heteronormative dominance. For example, when we did role-play activities, we were always grouped as cis-gender males and cis-gender females. When we learned grammatical points, like adjectives or pronouns, we were only ever given two options: male and female. Although I didn't necessarily mind at the time, I have spent the last four years reflecting on the ways that the classroom could have felt less "frigid" (Paiz, 2020, p. 143) if there were less rigid, tight, and confined rules around and within the language.

Given my interest in becoming a French teacher, I logically went to the University of Ottawa to study *Didactique des langues secondes (Second Language Teaching)*, which was my first official classroom-based immersion experience. I loved the program, connected well with my peers and professors, and was eager to complete the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) to then become a certified teacher. When deciding whether I would attend the University of Ottawa or The University of Toronto for my B.Ed, I remember going to my now supervisor (Dr. Stephanie Arnott's) office in the Lamoureux building at the University of Ottawa. This building was new to me, since I had spent the bulk of my time in various other buildings on campus. I remember wandering around – feeling quite lost – when she suddenly met me at the door. She had graciously carved out time to discuss the prospects of both programs and universities with me. I sought her advice for many reasons, but mainly because of vast experience in FSL education, she had attended the University of Toronto for her educational journey, and I knew she was a good human who wanted the best from all of her students. Although the University of Ottawa was clearly the most fashionable choice given the immersive experiences the city offers, I was drawn to the University of Toronto's Master of Teaching program. I was under the assumption that it

would enable me to complete subsequent doctoral studies, if I chose to do so. This option paid off in the end!

When I was at the University of Toronto, I had the most phenomenal mentor teacher for my FSL practicum course. She was intelligent, warm, and had a humanistic approach to teaching. She cared deeply about the French language and went above and beyond in helping her students embody this same level of interest and care. I was excited to emulate her teaching style within my own classroom. After graduation, I received a teaching position in Brisbane, Australia, and my partner and I moved there. I taught French (from kindergarten to Grade 10) at a private school in an affluent suburb of the city. I had a fantastic time. The resources were endless, the students were wonderful, the administration and staff alike were superb.

My partner and I ultimately returned to Canada at the onset of the global pandemic, and I quickly secured a job teaching Grade 8 French immersion in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). It wasn't until I started at this school that moments of my queer identity began to intersect (and more acutely, interfere) with my teaching. I remember some of my colleagues were warm and welcoming toward me, while others remained quite hostile. While certainly more covert, I surmise that their hostility was due, in part at least, because of my sexual orientation. With my Grade 8 students, my queer identity did not seem to play much of a role at all – except when queerness was explicitly mentioned. I remember having a conversation with students closer to the month of June about Pride and what it means for all of people – but especially the queer community. I was met with a bit of resistance. I had some students who were forthcoming with their homophobic responses, so much so that they said they did not want to learn about *anything* related to the queer community. During one of the Pride events in June, I had a handful of parents tell me that their children would not be in attendance for the events preplanned by the school, citing their discomfort with their children learning about “these things.” It felt hurtful, but I tried my best to talk through students’ discomfort with them.

While teaching Grade 8, I was also enrolled in a course-based online Master of Education (M.Ed) through the University of Ottawa. It was during the program that I was first introduced to the idea of ‘queer language learning.’ After reading scholars like Cynthia Nelson, Joshua Paiz, James Coda, and Ashley Moore, I was thirsty for more. I felt like a light had been cast on an area of my life that had previously been in complete darkness. I remember thinking: *I’m queer, so how have I never thought about the intersections of queerness and language learning?*

With each reading, I felt a growing tension. On one hand, I was enthralled by the different ways to approach teaching queerly. On the other hand, I began to reflect on how, in my (albeit early) career, I might have done a disservice to my students by not considering these intersections sooner. Those tensions sparked a commitment: I wanted to create more inclusive spaces for my students in FSL. At first, I equated inclusivity with representation – and assumed that doing so would mean I had achieved my inclusive “goals.” As I read and learned more, I realized inclusivity needed to dive much deeper than mere representation. Still, it was from this (over)simplified understanding that I developed the early versions of my doctoral research proposal. Indeed, I had initially planned to examine FSL materials used in FSL classes, hoping this would serve as a springboard for designing more inclusive language resources and materials – especially given this dearth (Arnott et al., 2023). I imagined returning to the classroom equipped with activities, questions, and conversations that honoured and validated queer identities. While my career trajectories have slightly shifted, my initial aspirations dovetail with my current goals in creating critical (and practical) language classes.

Positionality

My positionality begins before my entry to the field as an FSL teacher. I attended a Catholic elementary and secondary school in my hometown. Just like other researchers have shown (see Callaghan, 2018), these spaces are sites of hostility for queer people. From a young age – before I knew what gay meant – I knew I was different. I preferred more ‘typically’ feminine-oriented activities. My sisters dressed me up in dresses and they painted my nails. I thought this was way better than playing sports or video games (although I did try to like those activities without any luck, unfortunately). My dad was angry because of this. But, I digress – that’s a story for a different time. This difference I felt between myself and other boys my age was much more pronounced when I got to elementary school. As early as Grade 3, I remember being called a fag, repeatedly asked if I was gay, and being asked when I’m going to come out of the closet. These comments and questions together shaped my experiences in school and instilled both a hyper awareness to anticipate such questions, while at the same time, armed me with a sense of automaticity to dictate these rehearsed responses that I had recited in my head every day. I passed through every phase of my schooling experience with these responses in mind, longing for a time they would stop.

While my experiences at school were not always pleasant, I must also recognize that I am also a white settler, cisgender male. Combined, these identity markers carry immense privilege that, without a question, shape my thinking and the ways I navigate this world. My whiteness is a shield that protects me in a lot of ways – and ones on which I continue to reflect as I navigate in both my personal and professional world. These are also privileges I wrestled with in conducting this research – especially given that the majority of my participants were white men.

Purpose and problem statement

Queer, trans, and/or nonbinary FSL teachers navigate a unique intersection of marginalization in Canadian schools, facing challenges both as sexual and gender minorities, and as FSL educators. Building on this understanding, I argue that queer FSL teachers' experiences are shaped both by their cisheteronormative schooling contexts and by the subject they teach. To address the former, queer teachers contend with homophobic and/or transphobic comments and discourses in their schools that impact their level of safety, whether they can be 'out,' or how they engage with queer-related discussions, if at all (Campbell et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2015). In fact, Taylor and colleagues (2015) conducted a survey with over 3000 Canadian teachers with the goal of unraveling the state of queer inclusion in Canadian schools. Their findings showed that one third of queer teachers "had been warned not to come out at school by family, friends, and other educators ... [because of] opposition from school administration, trustees, or colleagues" (Tompkins et al., 2019, p. 388). This fear of 'coming out' shuffles queer teachers back into the figurative 'closet,' and masquerades pieces of their identities in favour of remaining 'neutral' or performing cisheterosexuality (Coda, 2018; Tompkins et al., 2019; Sedgwick, 1990). Of course, this situation is problematic, both for the teachers themselves, but also for the students who are now void of any queer representation and/or role models, which can lead to physical and verbal harassment from students (Taylor & Peter, 2011). Indeed, Taylor and Peter (2011) have shown via a survey that almost 90% of trans students "were more likely to report hearing negative gender related or transphobic comments daily or weekly from other students" (p. 52), likely due to the lack of queer inclusivity in schools. Investigating how queer teachers navigate within these homophobic and transphobic spaces is thus critical.

The invisibility of these challenges is especially pronounced in Canada, where much of the research focusing on queer teachers' experiences generally occurs in other countries, like Australia, Thailand, or the U.S (Paiz, 2020; Ulla & Paiz, 2023; Unwin et al., 2024). This dearth

of research could be explained by the perception that Canada is “immune from the effects of ... anti-trans and racist discourses” (Martino, 2022, p. 7). Yet as Martino (2022) has recently unveiled, right-wing governments have paved the way for protestors and convoys to become emboldened within our society, leading to an increase of anti-queer and anti-trans hate in schools. This rise in hate has undeniably impacted the ways in which both queer teachers, and their students, collectively navigate teaching – and being – at schools.

Beyond the challenges of navigating their queer identities in school spaces, FSL teachers face an additional set of structural and institutional barriers specific to their subject area (Masson, 2021). On a macro level of chronic issues faced by FSL teachers generally, FSL teachers are often known to be marginalized in their schools, where their subject is depreciated compared to others, like math or science (Jack & Nyman, 2019; Kissau, 2005). On top of a depreciated subject, their physical presence is also devalued, since FSL teachers tend to travel around with pedagogical materials stacked in a cart and are not given a concrete space or place in the school to teach (Lapkin et al., 2006). FSL teachers are also known to report feeling devalued in their roles. Specifically, they experience a lack of material and human resources within the program (Arnott et al., 2023), a lack of initiatives focused on equity and diversity (Arnott et al., 2019), and a lack of mentorship (Jack & Nyman, 2019). Collectively, this creates feelings of isolation and disconnection among FSL teachers within their schools (Masson, 2018; Smith et al., 2023).

On a micro level, queer FSL teachers also need to contend with a gendered and binary language in French, which often presents challenges for nonbinary and gender-queer people to use the language authentically (Kosnick, 2022). Spiegelman (2022) captures this tension well by highlighting that “[g]ender as a social and grammatical construct emerges as a contested territory among languages, as the possibilities for self-expression in the target language and the dominant school language(s) may not align” (p. 2). Such misalignment has the potential to create either a virulently harsh reality for both queer teachers and students alike, or a safe(r) space for all depending on how these interactions unfold. In addition to teaching a gendered language, several scholars have indicated how language learning materials are rife with cisheteronormativity (Bollas, 2021; Grant, 2022a; Paiz, 2015; Saunston, 2018), which creates environments where it is “virtually impossible for a queer student to participate” in language activities (Cashman & Trujillo, 2018, p. 134). Taking these two intersecting layers of hostility together, learning about

the experiences of queer FSL teachers is imperative to glean how they navigate these cisheteronormative discursive regimes and the extent to which they collide with – or subvert – these discourses to support themselves and their students. I sought to understand how queer FSL teachers resist or subvert cisheteronormativity in their teaching practices, materials, and conversations, and how this resistance or subversion impacts them in their daily lives and in their schools.

Research Puzzle

It is noteworthy that narrative inquiries are framed around larger wonderings of people's individual and collective stories of experience, rather than a concrete research question with solid definitions and precise answers to present in tidy, neat, and clean packages – or dissertations (Bruner, 2002; Clandinin, 2013). This idea can be summarized eloquently by Bruner (2002) who posited that narrative inquiry is “deeply about plight, about the road rather than about the inn to which it leads” (p. 20). This framing suggests that rather than searching for and responding to research questions, narrative inquirers commonly use the term ‘research puzzles’ (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013), which carries a “sense of a search, a ‘re-search,’ a searching again ... [a] continual reformulation” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124). At the same time, this dichotomy between questions and puzzles “creates reverberations as it bumps against dominant research narratives” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 43). And yet, ‘research puzzles’ help distinguish narrative inquiry from other methodologies. Taken together, I entered the midst of this narrative inquiry inspired to learn about the experiences of queer, trans, and nonbinary FSL teachers – my research puzzle, then, examines:

1. How (have and) do queer, trans, and/or nonbinary French as a Second Language (FSL) teachers in Canada navigate their cisheteronormative discursive regimes?

Literature Review

In the following sections of this literature review section, I situate this doctoral study within broader and ongoing research anchored in the experiences of queer L2 language teachers generally, and queer FSL teachers specifically. First, I delineate the relevance of queerness in the landscape of L2/FSL learning. Then, I show how cisheteronormativity subsumes and suffuses across all levels and areas of L2 learning and teaching, which has led to scholars arguing for a

queered and critical approach to L2 teaching. I end deliberately by discussing research on queer L2 teachers before pivoting to my theoretical framework in the subsequent section.

What is the relevance between ‘queerness’ and L2/FSL learning?

The exploration between the links of queer, trans, and nonbinary identities and L2 learning began in the United States (U.S.). These conversations were spearheaded by Cynthia Nelson (1993) during a conference presentation (Paiz, 2020). In it, she eloquently exposed the invisibility and silence she – and other queer people in the field – have experienced as a result of their nonnormative identities (Nelson, 1993). Such a novel discussion mushroomed into the proliferation of discourse around where queer identities lived – if at all – in L2 spaces (Nelson, 1993; Vandrick, 1997). Much of this research sought out to expose the hidden identities, both of students and teachers, that make up L2 classrooms (Moore, 2016; Vandrick, 1997). Researchers in the U.S. saw the detrimental implications of these homogeneous learning spaces, urging a shift to viewing L2 classes as a “multisexual space” (Nelson, 2006, p. 2), precisely because queer, trans, and/or nonbinary people are in every class (Moore et al., 2024). Moving toward creating a “multisexual space” paramount for two key reasons. First, one of the goals of L2 teaching is to also teach about culture and queer culture is part of the very fabric of target language culture (Paiz, 2020). Second, while teaching an L2, “we are showing our students the realms of possibility of living, being, acting, and communicating in and with cultural and social others” (Paiz, 2020, p. 12). Attending to all learners in the L2 classroom, then, means attending to queer, trans, and/or nonbinary people. However, much of the research exploring the makeup of queer L2 classrooms, including the people inside them, has been done within the context of the U.S. Fewer studies have been done in Canada. Before diving into queer FSL research, I contextualize the FSL program and the realities of teaching within it.

FSL programs in Canada. The French language is widely spoken worldwide and in Canada. Specifically in Canada, French holds a bilingual status (e.g., with English and French as its two official languages). As such, several provinces require that students learn one of the two languages as a second or additional language, such is the case of Ontario. Here, students are required to learn French as a second language (FSL) from Grades 4-9 (OME, 2014). However, the program pathway offers flexibility. For example, students have the opportunity to take four different paths within the FSL program: Core French (CF), French Immersion (FI), Intensive

French (IF), and Extended French (EF) (see OME, 2014 for an explanation of these programs). Regardless of the paths they take, students follow a curriculum designed by the Ontario Ministry of Education. This curriculum focuses on four strands of language learning: reading, writing, speaking, and listening (OME, 2013, 2014). The introductory sections of the curriculum cement the need for inclusionary language practices and actions throughout. In the description of overall and specific expectations, the document offers teacher prompts and instructional tips to teachers on what to teach – and possibilities of teaching it.

It is in these moments of the curriculum that researchers have begun to be skeptical about its links to inclusion. Indeed, some scholars have argued that its inclusionary discourses are mired by a lack of equity (Carroll et al., 2025), that it has an oversaturation of whiteness (Kunnas, 2023), and that it reinforces a binary gender system (Grant et al., 2024). Together, these studies show that the curriculum needs to be viewed with a critical gaze. Shifting to British Columbia (another province where three participants in this study lived), French is not a mandatory subject; however, an additional language in this province is required. Of the available choices, many students do take FSL from Grades 5-9 because of the availability of other courses. In this context, little research has been conducted around the curriculum itself. However, a cursory overview shows that their curriculum is divided into Big Ideas, Curricular Competencies, and Content, many of which overlap with the general and specific expectations found in the Ontario curriculum. As a settler in British Columbia, my own experiences navigating the teaching of this curriculum is similar to that of my time in Ontario: rife with ambiguity.

Despite the program or province, researchers have long shown that FSL programs in Canada – especially CF – devalue teachers, especially relative to other subject teachers (Kissau, 2005; Turnbull & Lawrence, 2003). This depreciation typically stemmed from a lack of classroom space, resources, support from colleagues, and an overall adverse attitude towards FSL (both the subject and the teacher) from the wider school community (Lapkin & Barkaoui, 2008). Such precarious environments create a dichotomy of hierarchies between FSL teachers and other teachers in the school (Kissau, 2005), fossilizing the notion that FSL “compared with other subjects like math and science, is one of second class status ... [and] students ... understand it to be a subject of lesser value” (Kissau, 2005, p. 18). Couched amid negative teaching environments, isolation, and marginalization in schools, FSL teachers must also reckon with teaching a binarized and gendered language (Kosnick, 2022; Knisely, 2020; Spiegelman,

2022), often without full support from provincial or federal guidance on how such thoughtful implementation resembles outside of the masculine/feminine binary, certainly in terms of following prescribed curriculum that guides our instruction (Grant et al., 2024).

Since inclusion of gender-inclusive language and gender inclusive representation (e.g., queer, trans, and/or nonbinary identities) are not embedded within the FSL curriculum in Ontario (Grant et al., 2024), research outside of Ontario shows how some teachers eschew these conversations altogether (Rhodes & Coda, 2017) in favour of more “sanitized topics” (Coda, 2018, p. 75). This regulation and policing of certain identities, in turn, contributes to upholding and maintaining cisgenderism and heterosexism, existing as a “very real [form] of systemic, cisheteronormative oppression” in teaching and learning spaces (Knisely, 2024, p. 644). Not only are schools in Canada sites of homophobia (Callaghan, 2018), but the FSL class in particular may exacerbate this homophobia because of attitudes toward French being too ‘feminine’ (Kissau & Wierzalis, 2008) and because the content is grounded in authentic language use (Faez et al., 2011), paving the way for identity-centred topics to be discussed. As such, FSL teachers are in unique situations as marginalized members of the school community and subject-teaching community, which tends to be rife with cisheteronormativity, discussed next.

Cisheteronormativity in educational contexts

Cisheteronormativity is ubiquitous in both society and schools (Warner, 1991). Conceptually and pragmatically, it exists as a tool to control and position cisgender and heterosexual people as 'normal' (Bangeas & Evripidou, 2021), while positioning all other people (e.g., queer, trans, etc.) as “deviant” or “abnormal” (Bollas, 2021). Within educational spaces, cisheteronormativity ensures that students and teachers comply with gender expectations and norms (Rodriguez et al., 2016), that sexuality and desire are regulated and consist solely of straight representation (Murray, 2014), and that everyone adheres to and maintains "compulsory heterosexuality" (Cashman & Trujillo, 2018, p. 133). Zooming in even deeper to L2 classes in particular, cisheteronormativity reinforces itself while only learning about cisgender and heterosexual culture, usually by "adopting a superficial, uncritical approach to addressing topics like relationships, families, and hobbies" (Evripidou & Çavuşoğlu, 2015, p. 71). As Nelson (2006) rightly cautioned, a bulk of the research on queer L2 scholarship unveils how L2 classes

are places "in which straight people – albeit from various national, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds – were interacting only with other straight people" (p. 109).

This general pattern of cisheteronormativity in L2 contexts manifests specifically in FSL settings through textbooks (Grant, 2022b), school environments (Hakeem, 2024), and via the fabric of many FSL classes¹ – perhaps as a corollary of the Ontario FSL curriculum (Grant et al., 2024). The research on cisheteronormativity in FSL in Ontario is scarce but rapidly growing. Some work has examined these intersections (Boland, 2021; Grant, 2022a). For example, Dalley and Campbell (2006) asserted the need to examine issues of heteronormativity in schools, while Grant (2025) offered examples of how to counter such cisheteronormativity in the classroom.

While not focused solely on cisheteronormativity, a growing number of scholars in the Canadian FSL contexts are examining the implications of addressing nonnormative genders and sexualities with students (Hakeem, 2021, 2022) and with queer teachers – especially to investigate their experiences in these spaces (Hakeem, 2024). Beyond experiences, research in Canadian FSL settings is also delineating a myriad ways to bolster inclusivity for gender diverse and queer people (see Lebrech et al., 2024; Masson et al., 2024).

Cisheteronormative textbooks and curricular materials Cisheteronormativity also presents itself in various L2-focused language activities and accompanying curricular materials. Teachers rely heavily on textbooks and their accompanying language activities to present these lessons, even though such textbooks default to a cisheteronormative standard, and in turn, silence queer and trans students (Gray, 2013, Paiz, 2015; Shardakova & Pavlenko, 2004). Bolas (2021) offers seemingly mundane and trivial ways that such cisheteronormativity manifests in L2 materials. Reiterating Bolas (2021), consider for example how learners might read and act out fairy tale stories (often where a princess is seeking the help of a prince) or where dialogue is presented where someone asks a man the name of his wife because they see his ring. Not only does this cisheteronormativity present itself in such outright ways, but Bolas (2021) also sketches out that textbooks often take a cisheteronormative stance given the overwhelming use

¹ For example, a typical poster on the wall of an FSL classroom in Ontario is the mnemonic “Dr. Mrs. Vandertramp” to help with irregular verb conjugation in French; however, it is worth noting that the ‘Dr.’ refers to a cisgender male, and the ‘Mrs.’ refers to a cisgender female. Students in FSL classrooms are also meant to spend a significant amount of time mastering normative gender adjectives, “reinforcing that they must agree in gender and number with the noun they modify” (OMOE, 2014, p. 63) – even if they don’t match a students’ gender expression or identity.

of fixed gender categories and pronouns (e.g., always referring to he/she, boys/girls, men/women).

Pivoting to textbooks, it is not uncommon for L2 teachers to use textbooks, paired with additional material they create. Yet given how L2 textbooks have been scrutinized in the past for their lack of queer inclusivity (Grant, 2022b; Paiz, 2015; Spiegelman, 2021; Sunderland, 2018), it is undeniable that textbooks are a "salient source of vetted identity options for language learning students" (Paiz, 2019, p. 270). Here, textbooks indirectly articulate to students who uses the language – and in what ways. Paiz's (2019) main fear is that novice teachers may latch onto these textbooks as a crutch, using them throughout their tenure as teachers because they are the only source of structure available to them, then continue to replicate these themes, ideas, and identities throughout their practice. Such replication means "the erasure of LGBTQ+ identities and the political silencing of LGBTQ+ student voices may persist even in the classroom of mid- and advanced career teachers because of the scaffolding role of textbooks" (Paiz, 2019, p. 270). A synthesis of the main findings from scholars who have examined various levels of cisheteronormativity in language textbooks culminates with the understanding that generally, queer people are absent or invisibilized in commercially published textbooks (Grant, 2022b; Gray, 2013; Motschenbacher, 2011; Paiz, 2015, Shardakova & Pavlenko, 2004; Sunderland, 2018). In FSL specifically, some textbooks have discussed queer topics, but were presented in a way that showed queer people as having illnesses or diseases as a result of the AIDS epidemic (De Vincenti et al., 2007). These conversations crystallize that identities outside of the cisheterosexual realm do not warrant discussion or investigation (Coghill-Behrends, 2019).

Cisheteronormative classroom activities and dialogue These material-based issues are compounded by how cisheteronormativity exists in L2 classrooms that are rooted in authentic and communicative approaches, channeling L2 teachers to hold dialogue around students' interests, likes, and desires (Coda et al., 2024; Nelson, 2009). Consider also how students learn about discussing personal relationships and families (Curran, 2006), how to communicate their daily routines (Nemi-Neto, 2018) in their L2, as well as how to introduce themselves to others in the class (Coda et al., 2024). Offering a practical, and arguably common example, Coda (2018) presents a dialogue from a classroom experience as a Spanish teacher: "*Ok, class. Does everyone understand the directions for this activity on family? After you choose who will be your husband/wife and children, then you must write a brief script for your performance in front of*

us" (p.74; italics in original). The dialogue shows how the teacher groups a male-identifying student and female-identifying student to emulate a 'traditional' family. It is within these moments that the starkness of cisheteronormativity illuminates. On one hand, these conversations and discussions equip learners with the tools to discuss themselves and families. On the other hand, if teachers do not validate queer identities and acknowledge their existence, such as is the case with Coda (2018), Liddicoat (2009) and Spiegelman's (2022) research, then language learning is curtailed because students cannot learn in an environment where they do not feel included (see Bollas, 2021). Or perhaps worse, "conditions a response to students' implicit coming out not as the self-disclosure of a minority sexual identity, but rather as a problem of linguistic competence" (Liddicoat, 2009, p. 199).

Indeed, Liddicoat (2009) discussed how teachers equate not using the "proper" pronouns or adjectives to describe one's partner to committing a "linguistic failure" (p. 191). This pattern reflects broader teacher attitudes, where despite research showing that students enjoy learning about queer content and representation and find it as valuable and relevant to their language learning experiences (Nelson, 2015), teachers are not always prepared or equipped to follow suit (Rhodes & Coda, 2017). If teachers' eschew these important topics, however, they signal that only certain ways of languaging exist (see Knisely, 2024).

Student experiences and responses to cisheteronormativity The impact on students described above creates particularly challenging situations for queer learners. The idea that students are committing *linguistic errors* or lack linguistic competencies (Liddicoat, 2009) has made other scholars, like Milani and Cashman (2024), predict three potential ways that queer students confront this quandary. For one, queer students can "pretend to be heterosexual and thus be deemed as a successful learner by the teacher" (Milani & Cashman, 2024, p. 634). Two, students can strategically deviate the question, but which results in intentionally hiding pieces of their identities (Milani & Cashman, 2024). Or, three, students can oppose a teacher's question or comment head on – with what Moore et al. (2024) have termed 'queer breaches' – but could result in backlash from both teachers and students (Milani & Cashman, 2024). Queer students in particular here are at virulent crossroads of how to act, what to say, or what to do. As Cashman and Trujillo (2018) have rightly pointed out, the cisheterosexual assumptions that teachers and other students hold in the L2 classroom "make it virtually impossible for a queer student to participate" in language learning activities (p. 134).

Similar findings have emerged from research in Brazil (e.g., Moita-Lopes, 2006) and the U.S (Knisely, 2024). For the former, students in an ESL class expressed interest in learning about queer topics while discussing different forms of prejudices. However, the participating teacher felt that conversations about different sexual orientations, and specifically romantic partners, was not appropriate for the L2 class. Rather than exploring issues of sexual orientation and differing identities, the teacher avoided the conversation altogether – much like participants in Liddicoat's (2009) work. Inevitably, this serves to silence queer students (Moita-Lopes, 2006). However, defaulting to a cisheteronormative framing of language learning is not practical for queer students, and may cause them to avoid pursuing the language (Gray, 2013, Moore, 2016). In the case of Knisely's (2024) work exploring students' attitudes and experiences engaging with 'trans linguacultures,' his findings underscored that students learning French were keen to learn. The few reservations that were present in this study were "couched in affective considerations, either feeling overwhelmed by the importance and perceived complexity of trans lingacultures" (Knisely, 2024, p. 652). Taking these two studies together, the impetus for including inclusive, transgender, nonbinary (TGNB) forms of language are paramount and necessitate an inclusion in L2 courses to trouble cisheteronormative discourses about language.

Challenging cisheteronormative language materials. Despite the proliferation of cisheteronormative discourses in L2 spaces, innovative approaches are emerging in an effort to challenge such hegemonic logic. For example, in Lebrech et al.'s (2024) recent study, they showed how teaching nonbinary pronouns in French, such as *iel*, can be grassroot strategies to create classrooms centered around belonging rather than merely feeling excluded. Their research also delved into queering FSL teacher resources "in order to support finding their [students'] agency when speaking in French and how collaborative work with students is an efficient way to adopt such an approach" (p. 73). For example, their research team created a graphic novel in French to be used in a university-level course on the experiences of a trans/nonbinary student who navigates the complexities of their identities. Such an approach has shown that students respond well and are in need of language materials that depart from normativities. Similar findings are also found in the work of Nelson (2015) who highlighted that students in particular enjoy learning about queer content and representation and find it as valuable and relevant to their language learning experiences. In this way, finding ways to queer the language classroom, as discussed next, is a helpful starting place to support all language learners.

Queering the second language classroom

From the early 2000s, as Paiz (2020) pinpoints, a bulk of scholarship related to queer L2 language learning and teaching examined intersections between queer theory and L2 spaces, ways to bolster inclusivity, and moments of troubling normativities in the classroom (King, 2008; Liddicoat, 2009; Nelson, 2002, 2009). In keeping with Paiz' (2020) genealogy of queer L2 research, he denotes that that from 2010-2019, a bulk of the literature in queer L2 research has been nestled within “curricular considerations, teacher attitudes and training, programme development, and student identities to queered classrooms” (p. 13). A dearth of research exists on practical, hands-on applications of queering the classroom (Paiz, 2020). A part of this dearth may be because of a difficulty in discerning what a queer approach looks like in the L2 class. In this light, Paiz (2019) offers a definition, sharing that it encompasses creating “spaces where dialogue and critical discussions around *all* identities, sexual or otherwise, and their sociocultural relevance can be carried out in a manner that is respectful of all identities and subjectivities” (Paiz, 2019, p. 2; my emphasis). Queering the L2 classroom is crucial since it gives learners the tools to engage meaningfully with “communicative competence” (Paiz, 2019, p. 268). That is, it provides learners with the tools to engage in the following:

Being able to perform one's own sexual identity in linguistically appropriate ways in their L2; helping students to communicate with LGBTQ+ individuals in their daily lives in a way that is understanding and respectful; ... help[ing] students to parse the LGBTQ+ identities that they might encounter in popular media and their daily lives. (ibid.)

These competencies have been fruitful for learners in research (King, 2008; Nelson, 2010; Nguyen & Yang, 2015). For example, Pablo, an ESL learner in Nelson's (2010) study, shared that he felt compelled to learn English because he “considered migration a pathway to gay liberation, and English the passport to a cosmopolitan gay life” (p. 458). Queering the L2 classroom, then, opens avenues for queer learners to have equitable access to the language and its benefits, including becoming more socially just and empathetic learners (Biel & Esleben, 2025; Crosbie, 2014; Semaan & Yamazaki, 2015).

Some scholars have documented what their queered approaches resemble in various contexts – largely in postsecondary (Lawrence & Nagashima, 2021; Ò'Móchain, 2008; Paiz & Zhu, 2018; Ulla & Paiz, 2023, 2024). For these thinkers, there is a focus on a diversity-focused approaches (Bollas, 2021), using specific and pointed queer texts (Paiz & Zhu, 2018), employing methodologies like Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (Cahnmann-Taylor et

al., 2022), engaging with life-history narratives in a Japanese L2 classroom to explore (mis)understandings of gender and sexuality locally (Ó'Móchain, 2006), or emphasizing the differences between grammatical and social gender (Nemi-Neto, 2018). Little research has explored how K-12 educators implement and engage with questions of sexual identities and genders, specifically those that fall within the periphery of what is considered 'normal.' This thesis responds to this gap.

Growing in tandem with – and sprouting from – research on queering the L2 classroom also emerges queer inquiry (Nelson, 2006; Moore, 2020) and queer pedagogy (Britzman, 1995; Luhmann, 1998; Nemi-Neto, 2018). Nelson (2006) has long argued for the need to question, destabilize, and critique *all* genders and sexualities in the L2 classroom. From her view, L2 classes are multisexual spaces – and by “acknowledging that sociosexual meanings infuse language, social interactions, and public discourses,” then we will improve L2 spaces altogether (Nelson, 2006, p. 4). The goal of a queer inquiry-focused L2 space is to think through how questions of gender and sexuality are interlaced within society (Nelson, 2006), certainly to unearth how “sexual matters (identities, norms, relationships) within everyday patterns of thinking, speaking, learning, and working” shape our understanding of the world – and who is normal (or not) within this world (p. 7). While some scholars have critiqued a queer inquiry approach, such as Moore (2020), typically for its centrality on debate, others, like Curran (2006) and Paiz and Zhu (2018) showed how this approach invites a reframing and rethinking of questions related to (normative) genders and sexualities, encouraging a deeper understanding of queer people.

Queer pedagogies, on the other hand, have emerged in L2 scholarship as a way to impugn the typical categorization and binarization of genders (and sexualities) that crisscross through many L2 classes (Hakeem, 2021; Lütge & Merse, 2020; Merse, 2017, 2025; Nemi-Neto, 2018). It is noteworthy that scholars in the field have argued how emphasizing certain identities (e.g., queer in this case) can reify normativities (e.g., Bollas, 2021) and therefore lead to pedagogies of tolerance (Hakeem, 2024) or concepts of homotolerance (Røthing, 2008). In contrast, others attest how queer pedagogies trouble all identities, and perhaps more importantly, offer a platform to critically reflect on educational and societal injustices so as to disrupt and interrogate privilege and dominance (see Lütge & Merse, 2019). I agree with other queer pedagogical scholars that such an approach should be employed in L2 classes (Merse, 2025), because it “works to question

situations of apparent normality in the classroom and concerns itself with the social production of what is learned” (Nemi-Neto, 2018, p. 591). If our goal as educators, especially in Canada, is to create globalized and critical thinkers (OME, 2014), then equipping students with the tools to question the status quo and typical understandings of normalcy is needed. Before understanding how to destabilize the status quo, investigating the experiences of queer L2 and FSL teachers is needed, as discussed next.

Queer L2 teachers

Queer people – teachers and students alike – are in every school (Malins, 2017; Moore et al., 2024; Paiz, 2019). Queer teachers are crucial to have in the classroom, because they can help disrupt normative thinking and ideologies and can also help promote critical thinking for students if conversations around their sexual orientation occur (see Nelson, 2009). However, queer teachers are not always celebrated. Some queer teachers feel as though they need to hide their sexual identities for fear of negative repercussions (Coda, 2018, 2019) or because they may culminate in being ‘Othered’ in cisheteronormative spaces (Kumashiro, 2002). As a result, some teachers perform a balancing act of being ‘in’ and ‘out’ of the closet (Connelly, 2015; Endo et al., 2010; Grant, 2025), which positions their identities as teachers as being separate entities from their sexual identities (Brockenbrough, 2012). For example, in Connelly’s (2015) research with gay and lesbian teachers in the classroom, they found that some teachers separate their queer identities from their professional identities, braid these two identity categories together, or quit the profession altogether.

It is often through the continuous (re)invisibilization of queer teachers and through cisheteronormative discourses in schools that lead teachers to flee the field. For instance, some queer teachers are told to remain in the closet or hidden (Taylor et al., 2015); however, heterosexual teachers are free to openly share aspects of their straight lives with their students without any adversity. Even if there are moments when queer teachers’ identities and sexual orientations are championed, it is often so that they can serve as social justice advocates and figureheads (Tompkins et al., 2019). What is more, heterosexual teachers are absolved from engaging in this work because their sexuality is socially accepted and deemed as ‘normal’ (Dills, 2023; Warner, 1991), leaving this type of work to the already oppressed queer teacher. Consequently, queer teachers, their identities, and their gender expressions in schools can

experience precarity and can incite a certain level of caution, certainly depending on their context. Learning about the links between identity and pedagogical approach, however, is important.

Indeed, language teacher identity is a “crucial component in determining how language teaching is played out” (Varghese et al., 2005, p. 22) because our identities shape how, what, why, and with which materials we teach (Lander, 2018). Others have made links to this as being viewed as the ‘pedagogy of the personal’ (Coda, 2020; Connell, 2015) or identity-as-pedagogy (Morgan, 2004). Queer L2 teacher identity first emerged in the 1990s, again, via research by Nelson (1993) discussing heterosexist attitudes in English language teaching, and what this meant for queer teachers at the time. Since then, research has ranged from issues of whether queer L2 teachers should ‘come out’ to their students (Nelson, 1999, 2004) (and how this secrecy plays a role on an L2 teachers’ identity in the classroom), to how queer L2 teachers grapple with cisheteronormative teaching materials (Paiz, 2015) and exclusion in the classroom (Tran-Thanh, 2020). Queer L2 teachers’ identities exist against the backdrop of their social, political, and cultural environments (Coghill-Behrends, 2019) and fluctuate based on the experiences they have in their institutional settings (Lander, 2018). That is, research has shown that positive experiences and interactions between administrators, colleagues, and L2 teachers reinforce a more nurtured, developed, and free expression of queer identity, while negative experiences restrict such fluid identities from being seen in favour of more normative (e.g., cisgender and heterosexual) underpinnings of identity (Coda, 2018, 2019).

In addition, Coda (2023) has recently called attention to the fact that little attention has been paid to queer teachers’ identities in world language education (WLE) generally. The dearth of research that is available raises questions about the meshing of professional and queer identities in the classroom (Lander, 2018; Lin et al., 2020). For Lander’s (2018) three gay-male teacher participants, he found that despite homophobic comments within participants’ schooling contexts, his participants nonetheless felt that their gay identities and L2 teacher identity co-existed “with ease” (p. 89). Lin et al. (2020) and Hakeem (2024) corroborated that queer L2 teachers experienced resistance in schools because of their identities. They also acknowledged that queer teachers tend to toy a fine line between professional and private lives, and in their words, puts queer L2 teachers awkwardly “in a double-bind dilemma” (Lin et al., 2020, p. 1067). On the other hand, some research has also documented how queer teachers in schools hold

promise in disrupting the (re)production of dominant thinking of gender and sexuality, moving toward resistance and social justice within schools (Gray et al., 2016; Reimers, 2020; Ulla, 2020).

As the first documentation of queer FSL teacher experiences in Canada, Hakeem (2024) indicated that queer FSL teachers contend with many overlapping factors that shape their experiences at school, including the resistance of queer teaching efforts, an emotional toll between professional, personal and antioppressive teaching stances, and a lack of training on ways to integrate queer perspectives in the classroom. My doctoral research extends these findings by examining how queer FSL teachers enact a queer pedagogy (Grant, under review), navigate the complexities of their workplace (Grant, 2025), and how queer educators can create more inclusive and equitable spaces (Grant & Allister, accepted; Grant & Smith, 2025). In the following section, I introduce my theoretical framework (e.g., queer theories), providing definitions and orientations to its use in my conceptualization of the data generated from this doctoral dissertation.

Theoretical Framework: Queer Theories

This dissertation has been framed conceptually by queer theories to examine the experiences of queer, trans, and/or nonbinary FSL teachers in Canada. Queer theories flow as an overarching guiding framework, cascading across each article in this thesis. Embracing the flexibility of this thesis-by-article format, I “[flirt] with the possible,” engaging various strands of thought in queer theories to toy with different orientations to understanding participant data (Mayo, 2008, p. 198). For example, articles 1-2 relies on queer theory, while article 3 is guided by tenets of queer theory, but given the restrictiveness of the entry (2,000 words maximum), full queer theoretical elaborations were scant. Article 4 relies on antioppressive frameworks, which have their roots in critical, feminist, and of course, queer theories (see Kumashiro, 2002; discussed below). This section first provides several definitions of queer theory, while also tracing its genealogical roots (McCann & Monaghan, 2020; Sullivan, 2003). I explore three main concepts woven throughout the entirety of this thesis: cisheteronormativity, gender performativity, and power and discourse. I finish by unravelling the queer entry points for an additional framework used in this study for the fourth article: antioppressive educational frameworks.

Queer theories

Queer theory emerged from the roots of postmodernism and poststructuralism, specifically in the conceptualization that identity is fluid, multiplicitous and influx (Coda, 2020; Davis, 2004; Sunderland, 2019). In addition to conceptualizing identities as fluid, poststructuralists also sought to uncover power imbalances among marginalized groups, thinking both about these imbalances and “the hidden and implicit structures that support imbalances, oppressions, and aggressions among humans” (Davis, 2004, p. 140). Such (im)balances tend to emerge as a result of an essentialist understanding of ‘truths,’ wherein certain discourses about heterosexuality, for example, are taken and viewed as the only valid form of sexuality. Yet poststructuralists reject these claims entirely (Baker & Scheele, 2016), suggesting that ‘truths’ do not hold a single definition. In addition, some scholars have encountered difficulties deciphering between postmodernism, poststructuralism, and queer theory (see McCann & Monaghan, 2020). However, nestled between the dissecting of identities and an exploration of power imbalances emerges queer theory/ies. For McCann and Monaghan (2020), “queer theory’s original ties to questions of sexuality are the defining element that distinguishes it from simply being another name” of either postmodernism or poststructuralism (p. 8).

We’re thus left stuck with the following question: so, what is queer theory/ies, anyway – and, should we define them? It is first important to describe that defining queer is antithetical to its approach. However, like Paiz (2020) argued, pinning down critical terms can hopefully culminate in action from educators and activists. Second, it is important to unpack the term ‘queer’ – specifically since it was initially a derogatory way to refer to the Two-spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, and Questioning/Queer (2SLGBTQ+) community (Halperin, 1995; Mizzi & Stebbins, 2010). Indeed, it was used to pathologize and harm those viewed as ‘different,’ typically those with nonnormative genders and sexualities (Coda, 2020; Halperin, 1995; Sullivan, 2003). The term was eventually reclaimed because of activism that occurred in the 80s and 90s (Pinar, 2009), certainly during and after the AIDS epidemic (McCann & Monaghan, 2020) and shortly after blossomed further to academic discourses. Initially, the term ‘queer theory’ was used as a catalyst to depart from “gay and lesbian” studies (Sullivan, 2003). Indeed, Teresa de Lauretis was given credit as the figurehead who first coined the term at a conference (McCann & Monaghan, 2020), which, since then, brought forth a rush of the use of queer theory in many disciplines. For de Lauretis, though, queer theories emerged as a

mechanism to resist labels and categories that inherently dictate who someone is, who they should be, and what they should do. In her words, queer theories seek to “avoid all these fine distinctions in our discursive protocols, not to adhere to any of the given terms, not to assume their ideological liabilities, but instead to both transgress and transcend them – or at the very least problematize them” (de Lauretis, 1991, p. v).

Since queer theory/ies inception, the term has been used as both a noun, adjective, and verb (Trinh, 2024). Despite its multiple layers and uses, a concrete definition of queer theory has been purposefully hard to define to resist essentialist categorizations – especially in relation to identity – and to avoid pinning it down to a singular entity (Jagose, 1996). In keeping, this difficulty, as McCann and Monaghan (2020) illuminate, is also because queer theory has traversed fields and disciplines, emerging “in reflection on/conversation with prior theories of sexuality and gender, as well as histories of thinking around race, embodiment, ability, affects, and more” (p. 6). McCann and Monaghan provide a glimpse – and metaphor – into the many buckets that have filled the “queer theory cup,” including lesbian feminism, trans activism and theory, lesbian of colour theory, among others. In this line of thinking, fully defining queer theories proves challenging, because it is not a one-singular mode of thought that derives from one or two philosophers or thinkers. Instead, it is an ever-growing and ever-evolving theory that changes, grows, and adapts with time based on new discourses and critiques from the community of people it serves. As McCann and Monaghan (2020) unravel:

[a]s queer ideas continue to transgress, infect, pervert, challenge, critique, and question – and perhaps most importantly, *be* questioned – queer theory offers a multiple of powerful intersections with other bodies of work. (p. 209; emphasis in original)

A continuous exploration of these intersections, subsuming other bodies of work and modes of thought help to make queer theories into what they are today (Sunderland, 2018). This line of thinking has also challenged users of ‘queer theory’ to exist in the plural. This plurality exists, precisely because “there is no ‘queer theory’ in the singular, only many voices and sometimes overlapping, sometimes divergent perspectives that can be loosely called ‘queer theories’” (Hall, 2003, p. 5).

Against this fluid backdrop, it is worthy nonetheless to trace differing operationalizations of the theory. Some scholars have used it to critique the inherent cisheteronormativity pervading both institutions and individuals (Warner, 1991), to understand and fight against rigid gender

binaries (Butler, 1990; Jagose, 1996), and to challenge what has historically been viewed as normal (Allen, 2015; Sullivan, 2003). In an academic setting, queer theories can be defined by its “liberatory and positive influence on the way schools work” (Meyer, 2007, p. 15). The liberatory influence of queer theory extends to how other scholars use it in the classroom. Consider for example how Kumashiro (2002) used threads of queer theory to tie together an antioppressive framework that impugns the concept of ‘normalcy’ vs ‘Other.’

Allen and Rasmussen (2015), on the other hand, see queer theories less as “resisting norms” (p. 687) and more so how it affords new positions from which to examine the privilege or power of people, events, and places. Other scholars define queer theory in terms of its ability to deconstruct identities (Mizzi & Stebbins, 2010), while paying close attention to the intersectionalities (Ferguson, 2004). For example, acknowledging that the “heteropatriarchy [is] both heterosexual and [includes] male supremacist ideologies [that] work hand in hand to maintain capitalist, colonist systems of oppression” (Robertson, 2019, p. 12). Despite the multiple layers and dimensions of these definitions, I follow Halperin’s (1995) definition of queer theories:

Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. ‘Queer,’ then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative. (p. 62)

Queer theories thus emerged as a way to resist normativities that are imposed upon people through categorization, binaries, and hierarchies (Foucault, 1978; Pinar, 2009). Sunderland (2021) spotlights the utility of queer theories within language research and education, because it affords space to zoom into “how gender and sexual identities and normative ideologies are *constructed* – partly through language” (emphasis in original, p. 18). For example, if we consider how masculine presenting male students use “male” pronouns, then they are contributing to constructing certain language and ideologies about themselves through language.

Queer theory, as Coghill-Behrends (2019) contends, “seeks to destabilize mainstream and normative notions of sexuality and gender, and interrogate their function in the creation of identity as they mediate cultural practices” (p. 19). The idea of destabilizing normative notions of sexuality and gender is key to my doctoral work, because queer, trans, and/or nonbinary FSL teachers’ experiences are shaped by the ongoing undercurrent of normative beliefs forced upon them in their institutions. A queer theoretical approach is used to analyze how queer FSL

teachers' experiences are shaped by their non-normative identities and how their very essence of being aims to destabilize ideas of normalcy for what a teacher is at school.

Queer theory has also been widely used as a theoretical framework in several L2 studies and dissertations (Cahnmann-Taylor et al., 2022; Coda, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2023; Coda et al., 2024; Coghill-Behrends, 2019; De Vincenti et al., 2007; Lander, 2018; Nelson, 2002, 2009; Nemi-Neto, 2018; Paiz, 2017), further cementing its relevance as a theoretical framework for my study. Early work by Nelson (1999, 2002) stressed the need for queer theory in L2 teaching because it affords us space to theorize sexual identities as “acts rather than facts,” problematize all sexual identities, understand how sexual identities are significant to anyone – not just queer folks, and to examine how certain identities are positioned in society within a binary: normal vs. abnormal, for example (p. 47). Here, queer theory has shifted to examine, question, and critique such norms, especially in the ways they contribute to the regulation of gender. Butler (1990) unpacks this notion through their theory of performativity, discussed in the subsequent section. In addition to Butler's theory being a critical impetus to the creation of queer theories, in what follows, I also discuss the poststructuralist philosopher Michel Foucault's work to frame three key concepts of queer theories that underpin its theoretical perspective: cisheteronormativity, performativity, and power and discourse.

Cisheteronormativity. Apart from destabilizing normative identities relative to sexuality and gender, queer theories also bring attention to issues of cisheteronormativity. Critical scholars in applied linguistics, such as Moore et al. (2024), drew attention to the pervasiveness of both cisnormativity and heteronormativity in L2 spaces that shape our perceptions of who should be included, what we should talk about, and how we should act and behave in L2 contexts. These scholars emphasized that, together, cisnormativity and heteronormativity act as a looming ideological tool, where they “co-occur and prop each up to such an extent that we can refer to them as a single oppressive regime: *cisheteronormativity*” (Moore et al., 2024, p. 1; emphasis in original). This oppressive regime has widespread implications for both learners and teachers alike, as addressed above. Queer, trans, and/or nonbinary people are mired as they navigate within a structured system that has been purposefully designed to label them as deviant. Queer theory has the goal of exploring, critiquing, and challenging the inherent cisnormativity and heteronormativity that pervades both institutions and individuals to understand why heterosexual and cisgender people are inherently privileged, and to challenge why heterosexual ideologies

have historically been viewed as normal (Allen, 2015; Sullivan, 2003). Britzman (1995) helped us understand the rigidity of heteronormativity, suggesting that heteronormativity is ‘dominant’ or ‘accepted’ via the normalized knowledge and discourses we continuously produce in society. Given the pervasiveness of cisheteronormativity in society generally, and the language classroom more specifically, Cahnmann-Taylor et al. (2022), Coda (2018), and Coda et al. (2024) invited us to (re)think our teaching practices to move farther away from embracing ‘normal’ discourses in schools. Britzman (2015) later elaborated on this idea stating that cisheteronormativity has become more than just a dominant discourse in society, but rather, a problem of our own culture and thought that shapes our thinking, how we act, and how we behave.

In education specifically, cisheteronormativity defines structures and orientates people toward an uncritical conceptualization of ‘normal’ relative to performing gender and enacting sexualities in school contexts (Coda, 2018, 2020). A tried and true example of how cisheteronormativity permeates education, especially in language education, is through “the representation of ‘ordinary’ family units comprising a ‘mother’ and a ‘father’ and where alternative family arrangements are either not represented, or are depicted as a deviation from this norm” (McCann & Monaghan, 2020, p. 11). This unit, and many other heterosexual norms and expectations learned at school, elucidates how cisheteronormativity is defaulted as the norm. And yet, queer theory necessitates that we take apart these cisheteronormative practices to further examine how they enact oppressive structures. Extending this thinking, Pascoe (2007) argued that queer theory provides an avenue to examine and question the “taken for grantedness” that heterosexual power holds over all other identities – and does so in a way to regulate and control people (Foucault, 1978). This argument is pivotal to framing all aspects of the study, since the cisheteronormative nature of schools inherently privileges heterosexual teachers (Airtton, 2013), which plays a role in how queer FSL teachers navigate their school experiences, and in turn, shapes the research investigating their interactions and practice.

Gender Performativity. The theory of gender performativity has been credited for helping to create and cement the notion of queer theories (Butler, 1990). Butler takes a poststructuralist approach to identity, suggesting identity is “a contingent construction which assumes multiple forms even as it presents itself as singular and stable” (Saliah, 2004, p. 2). In this light, they critique the inherent understanding that identity markers and gender operate solely as a binary – for example man/woman, heterosexual/homosexual, normal/abnormal. Butler

(1990) argues quite the contrary. For Butler, genders are “unstable productions, dependent upon socio-cultural regulation to exist” (McCann & Monaghan, 2020, p. 125). As Butler (1990) destabilizes the views of gender and identity, and the gender binary, they ultimately argue that identity is (re)constructed through our expressions and is performed through our acts and interactions with others.

Central to queer theories, Butler makes the claim that gender is not something that someone has or is born with. Instead, gender is “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeals over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (Butler, 1990, p. 44). This framing is important in unearthing that gender manifests as acts that bodies (re)produce, but are not biological facts about how this gender constitutes a person (Butler, 1990). Echoing Sunderland (2018), this means that “one simultaneously constructs one’s subjectivity and gendered identity and conceals the means by which that identity has been constructed so that it appears as though it has not been constructed at all” (p. 19). Here, certain gender performances are normalized and privileged (e.g., males presenting masculinity are read as normal) without ever having their gender performance questioned.

Following Coda (2020) in the L2 realm, I understand gender performativity not as a “a mask that a subject can take off at will, but rather [as something that] constitutes the subject” (p. 76). Gender constitutes the subject because of the ways it is (re)produced discursively. In this framing, “[g]ender is thus a set of power relations; it is the reason that we think of a sex as a binary” (McCann & Monaghan, p. 124). Taken together, queer theorist scholars have endeavoured to show that our gender expressions or gender identities do not constitute the ways in which we act or behave. Instead, “we attain that identity through those behavioural patterns, which sustain gender norms” (Spargo, 2000, p. 56-7). Butler’s theory of gender performativity bled into queer theories because of this focus on the ways in which people act, and how these performances are marked as *either* normal *or* abnormal. Trying to disrupt this binarized logic is central to queer theories.

To put another way, when we think of a sex in this binary, and think of this binary as natural, then Butler argues we culminate with the “heterosexual matrix” (2008, p. 7). The ‘heterosexual matrix’ is composed of a trifecta: sex, gender, and desires that adhere to gender binary (Butler, 2008). For example, the ‘heterosexual matrix’ assumes that sex is either male or

female, that gender is either masculine or feminine, and that desire is only the opposite sex (Butler, 1990). As McCann and Monaghan (2020) posit, “when we see this pattern repeated over and across a sustained period of time, we come to see it as natural and normal” (p. 122). Thus, for those who do not follow “normal” gender performances or for those who do not engage in the ‘heterosexual matrix,’ they are labelled instead as deviant. Coda (2020) argued that not only are deviant labels bestowed upon these people, but that they experience various levels of “social policing” (p. 24) as a result of their gender performances.

This social policing is an important facet to consider with queer FSL teachers, the participants in this study. In the K-12 context in Canada, cisgender and heterosexual individuals are accepted and recognized when they perform their cisgender and heterosexual expressions to ‘fit the mold.’ Fitting this mold occurs, for example, through “dress codes or gendered lessons, or through the hidden curriculum [that are] seemingly invisible, often leading to self-policing by individuals who feel they do not fit within these binary expectations” (Brett, 2024, p. 3). In contrast, those who relegate from status quo gender performances become problematized (Brett, 2024), where their identities become viewed as a “site of power” (Jackson & Mezzei, 2012, p. 77).

This site of power, “where who gets to be recognized ... is governed by social norms ... the choice to be recognized (or not) within the constraints of normativity is a condition of agency” (Jackson & Mezzei, 2012, p. 77). The very individuals who create and dictate who can be recognized are the same that seek to oppress and surveille our queer youth and teachers so as to ensure they do not deviate from societal notions of normalcy. Take, for example, how the Canadian government – across many different provinces in the aforementioned example – is striving to have teachers disclose to parents of queer youth aspects of their child’s identity, even though their children may strategically hide it from their parents. In this sense, the government acts as a site of power over teachers and students alike, veering away from recognition, and instead, acting as a “form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being” (Taylor, 1994, p. 25).

Here, if a queer FSL teacher does not align their gender expression with the normative and socially accepted belief systems of teachers, they risk facing turmoil among their colleagues, students, parents, or administration for not fitting the mold (Campbell et al., 2021). It is through

these understandings that gender performativity is viewed as a tool to analyze the experiences of queer, trans, and/or nonbinary FSL teachers.

Discourse and power. Within the realm of queer theories, the notion of discourses explain how, through words, actions, and social events, knowledge is produced (Foucault, 1990). Indeed, for Foucault, discourse is akin to “social *practice*,” helping to mold the ways in which we view, see, experience, and understand the world (McCann & Monaghan, 2020, p. 24; emphasis in original). Discourses are relevant for queer theoretical thinking, because they help to shape what people in society believe to be true (Foucault, 1976). If we think about the discourses that have undergirded our ideas of sex, for example, Foucault explains how, during the 1800s with the Victorian era, discussions of sex were halted and conversations of “sexuality [were] carefully confined” (Foucault, 1978, p. 3). This silence of sexuality led Foucault to delineating a “repressive hypothesis” in his foundational text touted with framing much of queer theories: *The History Sexuality, Volume 1*. His repressive hypothesis attests to the ways in which discourse around sex needed to be silenced and controlled; indeed, repressed, to maintain control of the society. Consider how Foucault (1978) describes this hypothesis:

Calling sex by its name thereafter became more difficult and more costly. As if in order to gain mastery over it in reality, it had first been necessary to subjugate it at the level of language, control its free circulation in speech, expunge it from the things that were said, and extinguish the words that rendered it too visibly present. And even these prohibitions, it seems, were afraid to name it. Without even having to pronounce the word, modern prudishness was able to ensure that one did not speak of sex, merely through the interplay of prohibitions that referred back to one another: instances of muteness which, by dint of saying nothing, imposed silence. Censorship. (p. 17)

The illusion of “censorship” within the repressive hypothesis offers a paradox for Foucault. On one hand, there was a looming censorship around discourses of sex that made it impossible to talk openly about. This form of censorship, for Foucault (1980), exists as a mechanism of power. For example, within this form of concealing what we say, “power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes, and everyday lives” (p. 39). This form of silence is inveterated within “the social body, rather than *from above* it” (p. 39). On the other hand, he contended that within this censorship and silence, a “veritable discursive explosion” of sex and sexuality were in fact produced (Foucault, 1978, p. 17), which has transformed sex into discourse. Operating with this thinking, McCann and Monaghan (2020) alleged that the linkages between “discourse,

knowledge, and power ... [are] actually part of a bigger transformation in the organization of power” (p. 26). This organization of power has come to see people, sex, and sexuality as something that is “managed, inserted into systems of utility, regulated for the greater good, [and] made to function according to an optimum” (Foucault, 1978, p. 24).

Following this conceptualization of sex and sexuality as regulated entities, queer theories draw attention to society’s desire to regulate and control all sexualities and genders, thereby creating “sexual scripts” (Connelly, 2015, p. 7) to which individuals need to adhere. These scripts, as Connelly argued, are “instruments of power that organize and regulate sexual behavior and sort us into hierarchies” (Connelly, 2015, p. 7). Such behaviours and hierarchies have created binarized categories, necessitating that in order to be accepted within societies, people need to fit within the ‘right’ side of the binary. To give an example, Connell (2015) draws on Gayle Rubin’s work, and highlights the binaries of good versus bad sex, where “‘good’ sex [equates to] married, monogamous, procreative, vanilla) [while] the outer limits of ‘bad sex’ [equates to] for example, homosexual, casual, commercial, kinky” (p. 7). Foucault (1978) and Sedgwick (1990) contended that these harmful binaries are intimately connected to power:

For queer theorists, what is especially pernicious about these sexual binaries is how they control and limit people. What’s worse, they are enforced not only externally but internally: we use them to interpret ourselves and then behave accordingly. The ability to regulate from within as well as without is what makes discourse such a potent – and dangerous – instrument of power. A significant task of queer theory, then, has been to deconstruct discourses as mediums of power and control. (Connell, 2015, p. 8)

Insofar as a queer reality, there are often moments of invisibilization, control, and oppression because of adverse discourses illuminating queer people as abnormal, deviant, or inferior relative to their heterosexual or cisgender counterparts (Sullivan, 2003). Such discourses are dangerous, both on a macro and micro level, since they attempt to police – and as such – minimize, regulate, and/or remove queer people and their existence. Consider, for example, how on a macro level, these discourses infringe upon queer peoples’ lives, so much so that they are advised to avoid traveling to their neighbouring country because of anti-queer laws being passed (see Coda, 2023). In the U.S., a proliferation of states are prohibiting the use of the word ‘gay,’ denying the lived realities of trans people, and are punishing those who carve space for discussions around sexuality and gender in schools (see Coda, 2021 with reference to Southeastern USA contexts).

This blatant avoidance and policing contributes to the states' desired discourse of eliminating queer people and openly invites potential harm to ensue for queer people.

Given that discourses of normalcy, surveillance, and censorship are at the fore with queer theories, it is helpful here to define the concept of discursive regimes. Discursive regimes exist when discourses produced around a group of people – usually those who are marginalized or racialized – become dominated or controlled by a regulating body (Foucault, 1975). Some examples include educational institutions, which act as discursive regimes that aim to control, police, and regulate what teachers do, say, teach, act, and wear. Governments in Canada are also beginning to exert more control via discourses and policies that exclude the human rights of certain children (see Latimer, 2023 for such an instance happening at present in Saskatchewan). Such discursive regimes also exist both on a micro and macro level. On a micro level, for example, political discourses around the necessity of disclosing youth's preferred names and pronouns proliferated across Canadian schools (DeClerq, 2023). While the focus of policing and disclosure are presented by the Ministry of Education as a way to “protect” children and “inform parents,” in reality, these laws are harmful and, again, serve mainly to control and police queer people (Barker & Scheele, 2016). In this way, it becomes clear how schools are framed around discursive regimes that work to normalize cisheteronormativity and punish those who fall outside of these normative landscapes.

Not only do such macro and micro-level discursive regimes mandate non-normative gender expression exposure, but the same governments who enforce anti-queer regulations are also often responsible for creating and revising our curricula. In the case of FSL, the FSL curriculum that participating queer FSL teachers of this study are mandated to use (i.e., OME, 2014) – is rife with vague inclusionary statements for all students, often lumping various identity groups together and pledging to include them all (Grant et al., 2024). Yet, the OME's inclusionary declarations are far from promoting inclusivity. Instead, the document promotes cisheteronormative use of the French language. For queer FSL teachers, such discursive regimes from the outset of the government may also prevent them from ‘coming out’ or fully performing their gender expressions in classes, with their students and colleagues.

These discourses are so intimately connected to power, and in turn, silence or monitor individuals (Barker & Scheele, 2016; Foucault, 1978). It is important to highlight here that power is not something one person, government, organization, school, or hospital possesses.

Power is not divided “between those with and without power (Halperin, 1995), but rather, in power relations” (Coda, 2020, p. 21). That is, power “is not something acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations” (Coda, 2020, p. 94). Following this logic, power is everywhere, and at the same time, everyone possesses power. For Foucault (1978), power is not merely for those typically in power, such as is the case of a “top-down approach.” But instead, all people have power – and can exercise power – in myriad ways. Indeed, in some instances, queer FSL teachers may feel the need to hide their identities, because of a widespread sentiment that they are being policed or patrolled by students, other colleagues, parents, or administrators. This impacts not only their overall experiences in the classroom, but queer FSL teachers may also feel like they are under surveillance if conversations around non-normative genders and sexualities arise, which Foucault (1975) characterized as being like a panopticon. In this sense, these discourses and power reign over sexuality and impose norms that heterosexuality is the only possible avenue for success in life. Notions of discourse and power are central to queer theories, and this study in particular, because it provides a framework for validating the experiences of queer FSL teachers that are upheld by false discourses relative to their sexualities, and explaining how potential power from members within their school community alter or shape their experiences at schools. Next, I explain how I have used anti-oppressive theories that were born from queer theories.

Anti-oppressive educational frameworks. The fourth article in this thesis – a collaborative undertaking between myself and Dr. Cameron Smith – uses a slightly different theoretical framing than the other articles in this thesis: anti-oppressive frameworks (Kumashiro, 2000). While I was briefly introduced to anti-oppressive education frameworks in my B.Ed program, I came into much closer contact with it while in my doctoral studies working with Dr. Mimi Masson and Dr. Shawna Carroll. Together, they pushed my thinking to consider the vast implications of systemic structures on marginalized bodies and voices through the domination and oppression enforced by – and maintained through – colonial and cisheteropatriarchial logics (Carroll, 2018, 2021; Kumashiro, 2000, 2002; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). This reorientation is important to consider within and among the experiences of queer FSL teachers, since the systems they navigate have been intentionally created to cast all marginalized identities in schools as “Others” (Kumashiro, 2002). Deviating from being white, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied,

middle-class, and so on, queer FSL teachers are subsumed into systems and systemic conditions that alienate and oppress them. Antioppressive frameworks, as we have used them in this thesis, were developed by Kevin Kumashiro and have roots in critical pedagogies, queer, and feminist theories (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002), which helps to link this theory to my broader usage of queer theories in this thesis. The linkage between antioppressive and queer theories abounds, but one clear entry point lies in the use of discourse. Indeed, oppression is found within discourses, framing “how people think, feel, act, and interact ... oppression is the citing of harmful discourses and the repetition of harmful histories” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 40).

Within antioppressive frameworks of education, then, educators are invited to (re)think their practices in an effort to challenge harmful discourses about marginalized people. Such troubling is needed to work “against traditional ways of thinking and acting, teaching and learning,” which are needed if we hope to “imagine different possibilities for working against oppression” (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 9). Although Kumashiro (2002) delineates that his four approaches to antioppressive education (e.g., education for the Other, about the Other, education that is critical of privileging and Othering, and finally, education that changes students and society), these collectivities are not meant to be an overarching panacea to the deep-seated issue of oppression in schools. Instead, using this framework can serve to question, challenge, and critique oppressive practices woven into the fabric of schools. In this way, queer theories and antioppressive education dovetail to help illuminate the challenges of cisheteronormativity in schools for queer FSL teachers.

Methodology

Throughout this doctoral thesis, my objectives have been rooted in learning about the experiences of queer, trans, and nonbinary FSL teachers, specifically in the ways they exist, navigate, resist, or subvert cisheteronormative discourses in their schools. To do so more thoroughly, I rely on the qualitative research methodology narrative inquiry (NI). It is important to begin by highlighting that many journal articles have confined – and tight – page and space limitations. Because of this, it was difficult to fully engage and integrate a thorough review of NI as a qualitative methodology within each article, consistent with other doctoral candidates who have used NI in thesis by article formats (see Cao, 2023 for an example). In response, this section of the introductory chapter is dedicated to flushing out NI. In what follows, I define NI,

discuss its difference from other qualitative approaches, flesh out some limitations, before ending with ethical considerations. After setting the scene and fleshing out the possibilities and affordances of narratives, I outline research participants, context, and methods, and data analysis procedures.

What is narrative inquiry?

Narrative inquiry (NI) is a qualitative research methodology that aims to learn about a particular phenomenon through peoples' stories of experience that they tell and live (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Within the educational landscape, NI, as we know it today, and as a methodology, first entered academic discourse via Connelly and Clandinin in 1990. In their seminal piece, they highlighted the connections between experience and stories, suggesting that "education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and other's stories" (p. 2). Although NI was first associated and defined by Connelly and Clandinin, the roots of narratives run much deeper than this. Elements of narrative were seen across several fields and disciplines. For example, researchers have used the idea of 'narratives' in narrative units (MacIntyre, 1981), within narratology works (Mitchell, 1981), as well as in variations of narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995). Above all, I cannot overlook that oral storytelling and sharing of stories in general have long – and deep rooted – connections to Black and Indigenous communities and their ways of knowing and mobilizing knowledge that need to be addressed as an initial starting place for NI in general educational research (see Humes, 2016; Iseke, 2013).

Taken together, the proliferation of narratives in educational and social science research have gained traction because of how it folds in "theoretical ideas about the nature of human life as lived to bear on educational experiences as lived" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 3). Researchers have clung so tightly to the appeal of narratives because stories have been told since the beginning of time (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). These stories, then, offer a window into *real people's* lives. Rather than having hierarchies and categorizations between 'researcher' and 'participants,' relationality is built and intertwined within the NI experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Focusing on the stories of experience of real people also benefits others engaging with these stories of experience. For example, there is an opportunity to learn from peoples' stories, grow from them, empathize with them, and enact

meaningful change with them (Caine et al., 2018; Callaghan, 2018). Johnson and Golombek (2002) goes so far as to argue that narratives have a transformative power to conceive and enact practical change for teachers through teacher inquiry and professional development as they collaboratively think through on their teaching experiences. This transformative potential emerges specifically through the process of storytelling, where participants and researchers together engage in telling, retelling, living, and reliving experiences to make sense of how these experiences have been shaped across time, space, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These learning experiences from stories, coupled with an unearthing of their assumptions, occurs within NI through “examin[ing] their [peoples’] stories and becom[ing] aware of the underlying assumptions they embody” (Bell, 2002, p. 207).

There have been some confusions about whether “stories” count as research (see Bell, 2002). Barkhuizen and colleagues (2025) recently fleshed out this quandary by offering a concise example:

A fairy tale is a story and a person who tells a fairy tale is a storyteller, but telling fairy tales is not research. The same may be said of stories about language teaching or learning, but here the issue is more complicated, because much depends on how the stories are produced and what we can learn from them. Narrative inquiry brings storytelling and research together as a tool for data analysis or presentation of findings. (p. 6)

Operating within this logic, then, it is important to explain how scholars have conceptualized stories – and how these conceptualizations have been enacted within this doctoral study. For some, stories are viewed as “a portal through which a person enters the world and by which [their] experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477). Others, like Kramp (2004), view stories in a way that “assist humans to make life experiences meaningful. Stories preserve our memories, prompt our reflections, and connect us to our past and present, and assist us to envision our future” (p. 107). Drawing on the work of Medgyes (1994), Barkhuizen et al. (2025) outline a few different – but prominent – features that narratives embody: 1) they are spoken or written; 2) they are told by people with stories to share; 3) they are situated within time and place; 4) they involve some variation of development over time; 5) they contain structures that correlate to the describing developments; 6) they share a main message; 7) they have a purpose.

Throughout this thesis, I use the term NI to refer to the general methodology, and use “story” and “narrative” in reference to the ways in which participants have voiced and described their experiences throughout their experiences in – and outside of – schools. For this study, I align with with Clandinin and Connelly (2000) comprehensive definition of NI as:

A way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, relieving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people’s lives, both individual and social. Simply stated, narrative inquiry is stories lived and told. (p. 20)

This definition showcases many facets of NI. For instance, the ways in which collaboration of stories, through different social contexts, places, and times, contribute to understanding peoples’ experiences – the ones that foreground their lives, who they are, and who they want to become. Research has shown how, unfortunately, the window into queer L2 teachers’ lives is often closed shut (Coghill-Behrends, 2019; Lin et al., 2020), leading to a foggy and pixelated understanding of who these teachers are. Neglecting to hear, listen to, share, and reflect with queer L2 and FSL teachers may contribute to them remaining “in the trenches” (Endo et al., 2010, p. 123). Therefore, it's crucial to figuratively (and perhaps literally) dig them out of the trenches by unpacking their experiences, who they are in these schools, how the confines of their four walls shape them, and perhaps, who they want to become.

In addition, many queer scholars in various subfields have used NI to explore the participants’ experiences (see Coghill-Behrends, 2019; Endo et al., 2010; Lin et al., 2020). I bring this claim to light, because NI is not ‘inherently’ queer – nor does it fit neatly under the paradigm of queer methodology in educational research (e.g., Browne & Nash, 2016). At the same time, in tracing the roots of NI – a methodology that has fought tirelessly to enter the field and to be seen as “valid,” “true,” and “acceptable” – many parallels are drawn between its genealogy and that of queer theories (Zacharias, 2016). Using NI *queerly* then is purposeful to leverage the lack of hierarchical power dynamics between participants and researchers to unearth lived experiences, the lack of rigid structure in analytical processes within the methodology, as well as the lack of typical thesis dissemination (e.g., a manuscript on its own) to use this methodology.

Since NI focuses on the “stories lived and told” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20), we also come to learn that within leading these storied lives, our lives are “filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 17). These narrative fragments are embroidered within peoples’ lived experiences. As narrative inquirers, we work together to stitch these fragments into a cohesive story. Thus, we collaborate with participants to learn and digest what their experiences could mean in light of their social and political context and place, with the goal of seeing how these experiences may impact their future experiences (Barkhuizen & Hacker, 2008; Johnson & Golombek, 2002). While this collaborative, temporally-oriented approach shares some features with other qualitative traditions, NI is distinguished by several key characteristics that make it particularly suited to this study of queer FSL teachers’ experiences.

How does narrative inquiry differ from other qualitative methodologies? As many scholars have acknowledged (see Barkhuizen, 2022; Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Benson, 2014; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), NI does indeed share roots to other qualitative methodologies (Kim, 2016). However, NI differs from others like case study, phenomenology, and ethnography, because of the “centrality of *story* in the conceptualization, design, and implementation of any narrative study” (Barkhuizen, 2022, p. 6; emphasis in the original). Learning to “think narratively while embracing the big picture of the research standards” (Kim, 2016, p. 89) is thus one key framing that separates NI from its qualitative counterparts. However, some confusion arises with what it means to “think narratively” like both Clandinin (2013) and Kim (2016) so eloquently describe.

To mitigate such concern, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) coined “a three dimensional narrative inquiry space” (p. 54) – or the three commonplaces of NI – which include temporality, sociality, and place. Temporality makes reference to time, but goes farther than this simplistic idea to underscore that people – or events – are in “temporal transitions” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 479). In other words, people often tell their stories through a framing of their past, present, and future; their experiences are not static, but are constantly influx as they reflect on their nonlinear experiences. Temporality is important because, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) have articulated, “we tell remembered stories of ourselves from earlier times as well as more current stories. All of these stories offer possible plotlines for our future” (p. 60).

Sociality, on the other hand, refers to peoples' personal and social and stories of experience. Personal conditions encompass peoples' "feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480), whereas social conditions consider how these personal stories are enveloped, understood, and framed by – and through – social, cultural, familiar, institutional, and linguistic implications (Clandinin, 2013). Within the dimension of sociality lives the understanding that peoples' stories, then, cannot be divorced from their social contexts – these contexts are always at play in shaping the trajectory of their stories and their experiences (Kim, 2016). The dimension of sociality carries particular significance for this inquiry into queer FSL teachers' experiences. These educators navigate complex intersections of identity, where professional, linguistic, sexual and gender identities converge within educational institutions. Their narratives are inevitably shaped by the multiple social, cultural, institutional, and linguistic factors (Clandinin, 2013) – from cisheteronormative school environments to broader perceptions of queer identities in schools. Attending closely to sociality then reveals how these multiple social layers are enmeshed in their experiences at schools.

The third dimension, place, was a new addition to Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) NI framework. In her 2013 book, Clandinin shares a story that the idea of 'place,' either geographically, (meta)physically, or environmentally, seemed to be isolated from temporality and sociality. Clandinin (2013) acknowledges that there is an interconnectedness between place and space that shape people's stories of experience. For this inquiry, queer FSL teachers' experiences are all shaped by their institutions – and the systems of which they were apart – from their early years in school, all the way to high school, university, and now back into the same institutions. However, participants' stories and experiences were shaped by more than just these institutions – participants' home lives, upbringings, and travels (among others) all impact(ed) their lives, helping to mold their stories as they've experienced them. Diving into the midst of the inquiry with an emphasis on place helps to better contextualize peoples' experiences.

The three-dimensional framework elucidated by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) is one way that sets NI apart from other qualitative research. Buddel (2014), Caine et al. (2013), and Clandinin (2013), among many others, delineate that NI's epistemological and ontological commitments also play a role in the distinction, discussed next.

Epistemological roots of NI Many scholars agree that NI is grounded epistemologically in John Dewey's understanding and conceptualization of experience (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Dewey's rationale for the use of 'experience' – especially in an education context – lies in the idea that real learning occurs through experiences (Dewey, 1938). He argues that people are not passive or static. Instead, they need to experience the world as it is: enveloped in their respective and fluid contexts (Caine et al., 2022; Clandinin, 2013). Central to this argument is the idea that experience is also reality – indeed, it is “inexpressible not because it is so remote and transcendent, but because it is so immediately engrossing and matter of course” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 38). In line with this, Dewey argues that experience has two criteria for experience: interaction and continuity (Clandinin, 2013). For Dewey, experience occurs because of interactions with other people, oneself, and environment, leading to new experiences to grow out of the previous (Clandinin, 2013). These experiences conjure new knowledge that can be validated through means of storytelling and narrative (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). His latter criteria, continuity, has been aptly clarified by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) as they describe continuity:

the idea that experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences. Wherever one positions oneself in their continuum – the imagined now, some imagined past, or some imagined future – each point has a past experience base and leads to an experiential future. (p. 2)

Indeed, experiences happen continuously and are constantly in flux, but also work to shape future experiences (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). These two criteria of experience (e.g., interaction and continuity) have formed the basis for NI's three dimensional narrative framework (Caine et al., 2013; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Clandinin, 2013), which also help to cement NI from other qualitative approaches. In the following section, I describe some of the limitations and affordances of NI.

Limitations and affordances of NI Despite the widespread acceptance of NI, scholars have struggled to accurately pin down and define it (Barkhuizen, 2014; Barkhuizen & Hacker, 2008; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This difficulty in finding a linear or 'clear-cut' definition exists, in part, because of the interchangeability of the terms “narrative,” “narrative research,” “story” (Barkhuizen & Hacker, 2008), which have culminated in friction in terms of concretely delineating its methodological approach. I respond to such limitations by offering my allegiance to the term 'narrative' and 'story' as seen above. It is also noteworthy to highlight how this

tension dovetails with queer theories and perspectives, certainly in the ways that scholars who use queer theory resist definitions and categorizations (Sullivan, 2003).

Another limitation of NI stems from its inherent fluidity within the idea of an “inquiry,” because not all inquiries will unfold or operate in the same way (Clandinin, 2006). NI departs from positivist and reductionist thinking that qualitative research needs to be so prescribed (Barkhuizen et al., 2014), and instead, aims to “empower the groups and individuals ... highlighting the experiences of marginalized groups outside of the academy” (Barkhuizen et al., 2014, p. 3). At the same time, these indefinite inquiries can be seen as unsatisfactory within academia (Barkhuizen et al., 2025). Such discourses have led some scholars, like Clandinin (2013) to highlight how, “final research texts do not have final answers, because narrative inquirers do not come with questions. These texts are intended to engage audiences to rethink and reimagine the ways in which they practice and the ways in which they relate to others” (p. 51). Much like the first limitation presented, I find comfort in understanding that NI departs from linear-fashioned thinking and doing.

Time and vulnerability also present challenges for NI. Building rapport with participants requires sustained engagement (Bell, 2002), which raises concerns about the emotional demands placed on both researchers and participants (Khau, 2009; Taylor & Coia, 2014). While some caution against this, others (e.g., Phillion, 2006) argue that vulnerability is essential to NI. Indeed, it requires “purposefully making oneself vulnerable to not knowing; it is about surprise, bewilderment, and dilemmas, and learning with and from them” (p. 23). In this light, vulnerability is not viewed as a limitation – even if vulnerability can impinge on certain researchers and participants. Similarly, critics like Atkinson (2005) and Thomas (2010) worry that NI overemphasizes authenticity, but I contend (as do others; see Caine et al., 2022; Clandinin, 2013) that this relational trust is fundamental to understanding participants’ lived experiences meaningfully (Caine et al., 2022; Clandinin, 2013).

A final critique with which I have been wrestling is the idea that NI imposes too much coherence and, in doing so, runs the risk of “deforming those very persons, those very lives, it is thought to disclose” (De Fina and Georakopoulou, 2015, p. 24; see also, Sartwell, 2006; Vásquez, 2011; Watson, 2007). However, I argue that NI dovetails flexibility and cohesion to create meaningful stories and texts participants and researchers collaborate – and agree – upon.

This level of collaboration, thus, demands I reflect on ethical considerations of this NI, discussed next.

Ethical considerations

This project began directly after receiving ethical clearance and approval from the University of Ottawa's Office of Research Ethics and Integrity (file number 2-11-23-9552). Before proceeding with the research, I ensured that each participant in this study signed and returned their consent form. This form outlined that their privacy is of utmost importance and that their information will be kept confidential, unless otherwise noted through future collaboration. Throughout the research, I made sure to anonymize the names of participants, often by letting them choose their own pseudonyms. While working with transcription data, I also removed any identifying pieces of information, such as if they mentioned the names of schools or colleagues with whom they worked. When I sent transcripts to participants to review, I encouraged them to ensure it met their anonymity queries. Throughout the process, I informed participants that their data was stored on a password-protected laptop.

For each phase of the study (e.g., interviews 1, 2 and 3), I also had all participants review each of their narratives I (re)storied. This process, for me, validated that participants had understood – and agreed with – the ways in which their experiences were presented. This was an important piece validating their voices.

In addition to honouring participants' stories, I also contended with how some stories shift and change as participants engage in this inquiry – all nested within their own social, cultural, and political contexts (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). For example, I was curious about how the write-up of this data given conversations with participants might fluctuate as they moved from one interview to the next, especially from one or several months to the next. In this moment, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) reminded me that “we need to be aware of the possibility that the landscape and the persons with whom we are engaging as participants may be shifting and changing. What once seemed settled and fixed is once again a shifting ground” (p. 175). This idea of changing narratives came into play, largely after the inquiry was “finished.” It was through conversations with participants after the formal recording was complete that they divulged new information about their experiences as queer, trans, and/or nonbinary FSL teachers came to the fore. They did not want me to write about these experiences – but instead, they told

me as their friend and accomplice. I mention this ethical concern here, while concomitantly understanding that their experiences will always inherently evolve.

Narrative inquiry as a queer methodology?

There is a paradox at the juncture of the terms ‘queer’ and ‘methodology.’ This paradox exists because queer (theories) are inherently fluid and multiple; they seek to “capture the messiness of desire, sexuality, affect, body, identities, and all that is felt” (Milani & Borba, 2022, p. 200). Methodologies, however, operate in a way that reifies coherence and prioritizes unison “that ultimately tidy up the social” (Milani & Borba, 2022, p. 200). The overlap between queer and narrative exists then because of its desire to distance itself from the idea of a universal truth (Clanidinin & Connelly, 2000). There is a rupture for some scholars when they realize that the goal of narrative inquiry is not to provide a solution or a final response to a question (see Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Instead, the goal is to understand how their experiences unfold in the context of their social, political, cultural, and ideological landscapes to help make sense of these experiences (Barkhuizen et al., 2025). Narrative inquiry can thus enter in the flurries and proximity of being a ‘queer methodology when we consider how stories are propped up against questions, such as “[h]ow has this normality come into being? ... and how has this normative become normative? In whose interest? And ultimately, who and what is presented as sexually aberrant and abnormal” (Milani & Borba, 2022, p. 196).

With this thinking established, this narrative inquiry methodology was completed in ways that aligned with queered approaches to methodology in several ways (Browne & Nash, 2010). First, the binary opposition between researcher/participant was challenged, especially as participants and I engaged in reciprocity through the sharing of time, thoughts, lessons, workshops, and writing, which fostered a co-construction of knowledge between participant and researcher.

Second, queer methodologies have been known to refuse coherence (see Browne & Nash, 2010). The use of the thesis-by-articles format for this thesis responds to this dearth of coherence. While the articles do fit together contextually, each article responds to a research question differently and has taken a different direction than what could be considered to be a ‘traditional’ manuscript.

Third, following tenets from a queer scavenger methodology (Browne & Nash, 2010), this study also troubles the idea of queer time and space (Thraser, 2019), which coalesce with

Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional framework for narrative inquiry. I worked through this idea of queer time and space through ongoing involvement and learning with participants beyond the scope of the study. Although we were brought together because of the study, our relationships have blossomed since then, transcending 'bounded' time and space. As I have alluded to earlier, participating queer FSL teachers and I have stayed in contact through personal and professional means.

And finally, this narrative inquiry was queered through what Pitcher et al. (2016) described as creating pathways to justice and making visible the wafts of oppression. For instance, through stories of experience as queer FSL teachers in schools, participants mapped out the moments where oppression lived in their schools. Exposing these moments can equip others with the tools to impugn homophobic and transphobic discourses that lead to oppression (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Through these narratives, readers may glean into the ways people in their school buildings are engaging in the (re)production of normativities that lead to oppression for queer people. It is my hope, however, that these narratives build empathy and arm readers with the tools to engage in anti-homophobic and anti-transphobic work.

Research contexts and participants

With a central impetus of learning about the experiences of queer, trans, and nonbinary FSL teachers in Canada, this study recruited 11 FSL teachers across two different provinces in Canada: Ontario ($n=8$) and British Columbia ($n=3$). In addition to the 11 participants, given my autobiographical interest in this study in line with NI (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I was also a participant in this study, as summarized in Table 1.² Indeed, I completed three semi-structured interviews with the help of a queer FSL teacher, researcher, colleague, and friend. While I had hoped that all participants could engage in three-rounds of semi-structured interviews, three participants were to commit to a third discussion together (e.g., Jason, Yannick, and Vi).

I primarily recruited participants through an open call on X (previously Twitter), a Facebook group designed for Core French and French Immersion teachers, as well as through professional contacts (see Appendix C for poster). At the outset of this project, I had initially conceived to interview only queer FSL teachers in Ontario. However, several queer FSL teachers

² In order to obtain demographic information accurate and authentic to each participant, I sent them a Google Form. In it, I asked participants to write their name, gender, sexuality, pronouns, among other information. All information about participants appears exactly as they had written in their form.

from British Columbia had responded to the open call and were keen on discussing their experiences. After revisiting my ethics application and discussions with my supervisor, we found it appropriate to consider out of province queer FSL teachers.

The final number of participants ($n=12$) aligns well with the quantity needed for a NI study at the doctoral level (Barkhuizen, 2022). A leader in the field of NI, Gary Barkhuizen, responded to ‘ten tricky questions about narrative inquiry,’ targeted at helping students in particular unravel the complexities and intricacies of the methodology. In his response about a suitable number of participants, he shared that “between 8 and 12 participants is about the norm” for doctoral studies (Barkhuizen, 2022, p. 14).

Seeing the interest in the project and learning more about each participants’ unique story was the most valuable piece of this journey. True to NI, I sketch out participant profiles, weaving in many of their own words about their experiences as queer FSL teachers to capture their voice and intonation. Moreover, since NI pays attention to “scene” and plot,” I have also intentionally embedded these elements in the retelling of my participants (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 9).

Table 1

Participant Overview

Name	Gender	Sexuality	Pronouns	Teaching stream/division	Province	Years of experience
Alex	Non-binary	Queer	he/him they/them	Core French, Immersion	British Columbia	4
Angela	Female / gender queer	Bisexual / pansexual	she/they	Core French	Ontario	10
Ay	Female	Lesbian	she/her	French Immersion	Ontario	7
Caleb	Gender queer	Gay	he/they	Core French, French Immersion	Ontario	4
Elm	Trans, non- binary	Queer	they/them	French Immersion, Core French	Ontario	7
Isabella	Female	Queer / pansexual	she/her	French Immersion	British Columbia	10
Jade	Female	Asexual	she/her	French Immersion, Core French, Extended French	Ontario	4

Jason	Male	Gay	he/him	French Immersion	British Columbia	10
Pryor	Gender fluid	Queer - gay (bi-leaning)	he/him they/them	French Immersion, Core French, Intensive French, Extended French	Ontario	10
Rob	Male	Queer	he/him	Core French, French Immersion	Ontario	3
Vi	Female / non- binary	Queer	she/they	Core French, French Immersion, Intensive French	Ontario	3
Yannick	Male	Gay	he/him	French Immersion, Core French, Extended French	Ontario	20

Participant profiles

In an effort to spotlight each individual participant – as well as their invaluable time, generosity, and stories – I dedicate the following section to presenting each one narratively. Each participant has read, changed, and confirmed their introduction.

Alex

Teaching FSL in rural British Columbia, Alex has a few years of teaching experience. Although they reflected on it later, Alex’s interest in becoming a French teacher was because of their role model teacher – who also happened to be queer. Within their stories, Alex shared how “I mean, I hadn’t enjoyed a French class for the French until I had her as a teacher. And definitely the way I teach *sciences humaines* is very based on like, her teaching style and like doing it through theme and even the I came to teaching Français langue and Core French.” Alex’s queer role model French teacher exposed them to different social justice entry points and diverse perspectives, which worked to strengthen his learning and thinking, and ultimately interest in the subject. In their school, Alex is extremely well perceived by his students and colleagues and overall, describes having a good experience teaching FSL, despite some pitfalls that emerge.

Angela

Angela has been an FSL teacher for the past 10 years, with her career mapped across three major programs: Core, Immersion, and Extended. Angela identifies as queer and is out with her students and her school community, although they note that “I’m more out when I’m in my GSD with my queer students and I. I know we’re all safe.” At the time of this study, Angela taught FSL in a rural setting, and despite being in an inclusive schooling environment, noticed the persistence of discrimination toward the queer community for their students in their larger community. Such thinking was illuminated in the way she described some students in their community: “there are students in the community who experience a fair amount of discrimination. Sometimes overt. I feel like it's getting less overt as we get a little bit louder about not tolerating it, but it's still there.” The idea of “getting a little bit louder” reverberates across Angela’s practice, specifically in the ways that she fosters inclusive spaces. She makes sure to intervene when anti-queer dialogue is said in her class, holds space for critical conversations around genders and sexualities, and is a safe person for all of their queer students in the school community. Her safety was quickly understood, since many of their students come back to visit with updates on their (queer) lives and since she goes out of her way to show support through community in many different ways, such as with fairs and raising money for queer crosswalks.

Ay

When we first met, Ay was an elementary FSL teacher in Ontario. She learned French both in school and because of her surroundings. Ay knew that she always wanted to become a teacher, and since she enjoyed French, decided to continue within this realm. However, she did find a lot of potholes and issues within French classes and spaces. For example, she was “often the only racialized person in the class ... [she] didn’t really see [herself] a lot in the curriculum” which has shaped the way she now interacts with the curriculum and her teaching in general. As she began her career, she felt like it was a conscious decision to stay in her same community, since “French immersion is a lot more white than other subjects and it’s very common to push racialized and Black and Indigenous students out of the program” and she wanted to be a safe person for them – even if this notion of safety isn’t always extended for her. Indeed, Ay stressed that within her school(s), “I’m not out at my school because it’s not safe for me to be out.” She recalled a few stories about both affirming interactions with principals and educational leaders,

but also some “really awful reactions” in response to her queerness, which has restricted her openness in being out. For example, she had “some like really gross experiences of certain schools where I’ve had principals make jokes about how it’s a lifestyle.” Thinking back to her initial teacher education program, Ay also recalled that there was no queer FSL training “at all,” which also decreases safety in school for queer, trans, and nonbinary people.

Caleb

Caleb’s an FSL and social science secondary school teacher in Ontario, and an FSL learner himself. While learning French, Caleb didn’t recall making any specific connections between their sexuality orientation or gender with French. However, they were drawn to the language because of their natural talents and proficiency, as well as the cultural and travel opportunities that came with learning French. Such opportunities contributed to Caleb “awakening.” Smiling, they added that “I think I always knew I was queer well before that time, but I think maybe like that itch for like a bigger city and like a vibrant community that includes us LGBTQ people was directly related, I guess, now that I’m thinking about it.” Reflecting on their interest in learning French, Caleb delved into what it was like learning French as a queer child. Even though Caleb didn’t have any queer FSL teachers or role models growing up, they do recount how many of their teachers were “always very supportive and very vocal and very like, disruptive, even for, you know, a small town in the early 2000s ... like a lot of the pedagogy that we’re talking about now they were doing. It’s like I feel really, really grateful for that.” These moments seemed to have harnessed their desire to become a teacher, and have shaped their pedagogical ideologies as they entered the field.

Elm

Certified to teach K-12 FSL in Ontario, Elm has been teaching for almost a decade – “eightish years,” all within the elementary panel across several boards at the time of our first meeting in 2023. Not only do they teach in both major FSL programs – e.g., Core French and Immersion – but they also have held instructional coaching positions for early literacy screening training within their board. Elm grew up around the French language because of their bilingual family, and enjoyed learning French because of its communicative purposes. They recounted how they loved their French teacher because they “were speaking, ... reading books, ... talking, ... went out into the community, ... did field trips, ... did like a big scavenger hunt at a mall.”

While teaching, Elm mirrors these communicative approaches in an effort to instill a love of French, and at the same time, encourages inclusivity to their students.

Isabella

Coming to this study from Western Canada, Isabella has a fourfold experience interlaced within the FSL world: learner, teacher, administrator, and program coordinator in. Isabella is a lifelong learner and is always interested in improving her language teaching and pedagogy. When beginning to learn French in elementary school, Isabella stressed that “it was awful. Like totally awful. I remember starting in Grade 5, and I just like, listening to a tape and filling in sheets ... And so there was like no part of me that wanted to learn French.” She alluded that Core French was meager because, looking back, the teacher may not have had a thorough proficiency of the language, translating to less engaging classes. She began to love the French, though, as she entered the Intensive French program in Grade 6. Soon after, she realized how beneficial it was to learn the language when she was travelling, specifically to Québec. These experiences further ignited her passion for wanting to speak and use French.

Jade

Jade was a queer secondary FSL, history, and civics teacher in Ontario when we first met. When tracing Jade FSL learning herself, she expressed how much of the content in the FSL classroom (e.g., books, representation, discussion etc.) didn’t include any marginalized groups (e.g., BIPOC and/or queer, among many others). Indeed, she shared: “it is very much the same stories day in and day out that weren’t really diverse.” Jade described how this limited her understanding around the idea of who French was really for. Moreover, when learning French, Jade indicated how learning other languages (e.g., German) helped to further illustrate the rigidity of French, since German has gender neutral pronouns and adjectives. For example, she explained how, in French, it’s “a lot more rigid, so I very much ... find it’s like hétérosexuelle, homosexuelle, asexuelle. There’s not really these short form terms that we have now that better represents peoples’ identities. It’s almost clinical in its use. And I also found that within my time learning French and trying to find a more inclusive language, for example, like learning more about neo-pronouns, that French was still far behind in developing it as it’s such a gendered language.” This rigidity shaped her experience learning, engaging with, and therefore teaching French.

Jason

Jason was a gay elementary music and French immersion teacher in British Columbia. During our meetings in 2023-2024, Jason taught FSL and music, and has a passion for both subjects. Interested in FSL, Jason recounted his experiences in the FI program, where he felt compelled to hide, seal, and mask his identity. Usually, this hiding manifested in working incredibly hard in school and actively seeking out leadership roles in his community (like through his local church, summer camps, and later with music education). Jason attributed these hard working attributes to his queerness and hiding. Indeed, he described how “I put so much pressure on myself, and I also felt very, very behind compared to other music students ... I constantly felt inadequate. And then that was compounded by my internal dialogue of wanting to not be seen as a gay.” Not wanting to be seen as gay was a result of the negative discourse around queerness that percolated within our society growing up. Even though Jason understood the crucial need for representation when he was younger in hindsight, he remembered going to an event “where they had a queer gay man come in and talk about coming out... Like I remember sitting and listening to that and well, I’m never gonna do that, like I’m gonna, it’ll be helpful staying in the closet.” As Jason got older, however, he realized the importance of coming out and being his true, authentic self.

Pryor

With over a decade of experience in education in both the public and private sectors, Pryor has found themselves teaching French across all three major FSL programs: Core, Immersion, and Extended in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Out and proud throughout most of their high school experience, Pryor recounted how they have always been viewed as the “token queer gay.” This tokenism shaped their experience in high school, undergrad, and in teacher’s college, often being called on to respond to queer-related issues, teach about queer-related content, and provide formal and informal training to non-queer folks. While Pryor tended to agree to invest in the queer community and teach others about queer joys and pitfalls, he laughed while highlighting that “there should be reparations” for such teaching.

Rob

Rob is a queer FSL teacher (among other subjects, like English, ESL, photography, and co-operative education) in the Toronto, Ontario area. He has taught CF, FI, and EF (although the

latter was more brief). At the time of the study, Rob had about three years of teaching experience – two of which were in French. He had spent his first year teaching FSL in Australia, where he felt he connected well with his students and made sufficient strides to equity-focused work. Returning to Ontario, homophobic and transphobic rhetoric was widespread, enmeshed within the religious and cultural schooling setting in which he worked. He remembers having troubling conversations with both staff and students about his queer identity, often where he felt pushed to the side in the school year – except when he was put on a pedestal in June to lead Pride month events.

Vi

Vi was a third year French as a second language (FSL) teacher in Ontario at the time of this study. Vi has taught in both the Core French and French Immersion programs at the secondary level. Growing up in the Catholic system, Vi recounted how FSL had little impact on shaping or forming their queer identity. They shared how “I feel as though that was never really, like a thing that was part of my life in high school. I just liked French. I was okay at French, and I kind of just kept going with it.” When asked whether they received any queer-related instruction while learning French, however, they laugh, nodding that “When I was learning French? No. Not at all! ... That was not really a thing!” Without any exposure, Vi concluded that their queer identity wasn’t necessarily a driving force for becoming a French teacher. Instead, they “kind of just fell into it.” Falling into teaching FSL, though, led them to think more about the language itself and how it coalesces with their identity.

Yannick

Yannick is a language enthusiast, speaking English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and German and has taught each of these in Toronto public high schools. He’s also a language educator and leader with almost 20 years of teaching experience. Alongside secondary teaching, he is also a guidance counsellor, university instructor, curriculum developer, and language board member. As a product of the core French (CF) program himself, Yannick is proud to teach in these programs, as well as in immersion and extended French as a second language (FSL) programs.

Field texts

Narrative inquiries are designed with a narrative-form in mind. Like Clandinin and Connelly (2000) earlier shared, narrative is not an ‘add-on’ – something that researchers later decide might fit within their particular research puzzles. Instead, NI is intentional. One point of this intentionality is that the field texts correspond to tenets of NI. In the next section, I delineate the data collection instruments used throughout this thesis (e.g., semi-structured interviews, photos, and researcher journal) and end with an explanation of my data analysis procedure (e.g., analysis of narratives).

Research interview as field text. The majority of this thesis relies on the use of semi-structured interviews, or, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) posit, “research interviews as field text” (p. 110). For them, interviews are one of the most commonly used methods within NI to zoom into a person’s life. Such interviews have the potential to unearth their experiences as they live and tell their stories across time, place, and space, aligning with their three-dimensional inquiry space. Leaning on the work of Cao (2023), while wholly unstructured interviews may have increased the “sense-making” of participants’ experiences, semi-structured interviews “with both prepared and real-time interview questions ... centralize my participants' experiential knowledge in the data collection phase” (p. 40). To set the scene of how these semi-structured interviews unfolded, I was initially drawn by the way that Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described the role of the researcher: “the way an interviewer acts, questions, and responds in an interview shapes the relationship and therefore the way participants respond and give accounts of their experience” (p. 110). Before engaging in the interviews with participants, I wanted to create an environment where participants felt comfortable to share their experiences. I did so through sending an initial welcome email, outlining my gratitude for their interest in partaking in this study, by using warm language (and emojis!), and by accommodating any time or space requests or constraints they had.

All interviews were conducted during the 2023-2024 year. The interviews for this study coalesced with three overarching themes that, I hoped, would best illustrate the experiences of queer FSL teachers: *becoming a queer FSL teacher, navigating teaching as a queer FSL teacher, and performing gender expressions as a queer FSL teacher* (See Appendix C for interview guidelines). While I have mapped out a plan of themes and ideas to ground my study, at the heart of NI lies the understanding that research questions and directions of conversations can never be

fully predetermined ahead of time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Fraser, 2004). This is because “research interviews normally have an inequality about them ... governed by the interviewer” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 110). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) go so far as to caution narrative inquirers to avoid creating standardized interview questions altogether, since the direction of interviews needs to be relationally constructed. Accordingly, the themes and protocols presented here were merely used to spark conversation that will eventually lead to conversations – and stories – relative to each overarching theme.

This first round of interviews were conducted in December 2023, directly following my approval of the Research Ethics Board (REB) in November 2023. I began the first interview with relatively informal dialogue about myself and the study. I invited the participants to tell me more about themselves in a casual manner. They described, for example, their demographic information, what led them to the study, and some initial thoughts and feelings relative to being a queer FSL teacher. For example, with my first participant, Angela, she immediately warmed up after my introduction, going so far as to tell me that “we just bought a house and needed to move closer to home” (Interview #1). The beginning moments of the first semi-structured interview were very much akin to what Ngo (2018) called “unstructured interviews” to “make the participant feel more comfortable and willing to open up” (p. 83). While I had prescribed questions (as per the nature of semi-structured interviews; see Appendix C), we often deviated – even from the start. For example, the first question on the protocol after demographic information was “in what ways would you describe your journey of becoming a queer FSL teacher?” However, with her earlier comment of moving homes, we immediately veered to the interplay – and differences – of teaching in an urban context versus a rural one. This example followed suit in the majority of the interviews with participants for the remainder of the study.

The second round of interviews with my participants was conceived to unearth their experiences teaching in cisheteronormative schooling environments. I ultimately wanted to know more about their experiences navigating teaching a gendered language, how their pedagogy and activism – if at all – shaped the interactions they had with their students, colleagues, parents, and other educational stakeholders. I asked questions, such as “tell me a story about how you work around discussing gender and sexuality in your FSL classes, if at all?”

Finally, the third interview shed light on the relationships between how participating queer FSL teachers perform their gender expressions in schools and in their FSL teaching, and

what impacts their gender expression plays on their teaching, if at all. It is important to note here that this was the shortest rounds of interviews. The shortest lasted about 20 minutes in length. One participant did not participate in this interview, indicating that they felt like they did not have anything else to share.

All interviews took place either on Zoom or Microsoft Teams, with the exception of one interview that took place at a local café. All interviews lasted between 45-60 minutes. Given the time and vulnerability inherent in sharing stories of experience, I compensated my participants with a \$50 gift card of their choice at the end of the third interview.

In terms of transcription, after each participant interview, I relied on Zoom or Microsoft Team's pre-generative transcript as a point of departure. However, much of the original transcripts had flaws: formatting, word choice, missing words, and the use of the French language, which all had to be rectified. To mitigate this, I followed along with the pre-generated transcript while listening back to the recorded interview at 0.5 speed. This way, I was able to make adjustments to the transcript as participants spoke. One interesting error that recurred, as I highlighted in Article 1, was that Zoom had difficulties in writing the word "queer." Often, this word was replaced with "care" or "career" – or some variation. As I went along with the transcript, I also made spacing edits to distinguish between such pauses as when my participants had started new paragraphs or to break up when my participants and I spoke.

Once I deemed the transcripts as representative of the recordings, I sent each participant a Google Doc version to their e-mail with 'Suggesting' mode enabled. In the email to participants, I requested that they re-read to ensure the transcription embodied an authentic and reflective representation of our time together. I also encouraged them to make any necessary changes they deemed necessary. Many participants approved the transcripts in their original form, while some made slight changes. For example, Ay made sure to remove identifiers, such as the name of her city. Other participants removed utterances and filler words, such as "uh," "uhm," and "like." Once complete, I began the analysis procedures, discussed following this data collection section.

Photo elicitation. Drawing on scholars engaging with visual methodologies alongside narratives (e.g., Brett, 2024a, b; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Harper, 2002) to further delve into the embodied knowledge and experience of teachers, I chose to rely on the photo elicitation method. The goal of photo elicitation in this viewpoint is to "provide the interviewer and interviewee with more than one symbolic means of expression: language and image" (Latz,

2017, p. 75). Specifically, Brett (2024a) delineates that photo elicitation can “capture the embodied and material manifestations of sexuality and gender which can be difficult to articulate and uncover through more traditional methods such as written or talk-based” (p. 5). For participants who were interested in sharing their photos in this study, I presented the option to bring photos to each interview that represent the theme of that particular interview. During each interview, we discussed these photos, and I probed participants to offer stories in relation to their photos. In total, five participants consistently shared their photos throughout each of the interviews. To do so, before each of the interviews, I sent an email to all of my participants with the general theme of the upcoming interview, paired with a few photo prompts that they could bring. However, I reiterated that these prompts were purely there as a means to guide their thinking and that they could bring any photo that best encapsulates their experiences being a queer, trans, and/or nonbinary person in school.

Reflective journal. As an intimately autobiographical process, I lean on how Clandinin and Connelly (2000) conceptualize the importance of journals. It is through these journals that I can further note my own experiences and wonderings relative to the research questions and interactions with my participants. My research journal for this study held 35 entries; however, it is important to note that many of the entries did not always ‘fit the mold’ of what I imagine a traditional researcher journal has. I initially thought this researcher journal would be a useful space to describe situations or interactions that occur during the study period, trace my own thoughts about teaching and school spaces, explain resources or materials I have found or used, or write down ways I may have disrupted or conformed on a particular day. While I did indeed engage in these activities, I also found myself writing short thoughts, bullet points, and rough ideas that could be helpful to serve for conference presentations and article writing. I continued to go back to this research journal through many phases of data collection, since I found it housed many of my raw thoughts and initial wonderings about my participants’ experiences. For example, an excerpt from Monday, December 11, 2023 is shown below:

Monday, December 11th, 2023:

- *First meeting with second participant (Pryor)*
- *So many great points! Some key ideas: out and proud, he’s been told that queer people don’t exist; performativity is KEY!*
- *He stands up for himself and other queer kids*
It’s been a slow progression -- not everyone is into it, but he puts his best effort into it.
- *Creates a curriculum of exploration (e.g., the clothing meeting)*

- *He's the token gay in his school and community*
- *Intersectionality piece*
- *Dislike for catholic schools – it would be interesting to get that perspective*
- *Didn't initially want to be a French teacher, wanted to teach math, but then landed with it*
- *French is so restrictive for expression*
- *Had no role models in queer FSL*
- *Teacher's college -- he was always made to be the facilitator*
- *Such a fierce personality!*

Importantly, before each interview with each participant, I (re)read my research journal before to make sure I did not want them to expand on any stories from the previous meeting. I end this data collection section with a quote from Clandinin (2013) that summarizes the interplay of entering – and leaving – the midst of participants' lives:

Even though our lives meet in the midst as we begin the inquiry together, and, even though we leave in the midst as final research texts are composed, we realize that the relational space of telling and retelling stories has shifted who we are as we continue to relive and retell our stories long after the inquiry in the field ended. (p. 51)

Data analysis

Within the wheelhouse of NI lives two dominant approaches researchers use for their analytical processes: analysis of narratives or narrative analysis (Barkhuizen, 2022; Polkinghorne, 1995). The former tends to replicate typical content or thematic approaches, where researchers code transcripts, categorize these codes, and solidify and name the themes that emerge from this process (see Barkhuizen, 2022). The latter involves producing a story – or a narrative – that have emerged from themes. In other words, narrative analysis “involves configuring or re-storying the data (which may or may not be in story form) into a coherent whole; i.e., the outcome of the story” (Barkhuizen, 2022, p. 4). For this thesis-by-article format, given its relatively restricted word limitations set out by journal publishers, I have followed suit of other narrative inquiries who have published their narrative inquiries (see Cao, 2025; Xun & Barkhuizen, 2025) and used Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) six-step thematic approach to analyze the data. Important to my roots as a narrative researcher, however, and the centrality of stories, I also engaged in narrative analysis creation. I describe both below.

Analysis of narratives. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach involves the following: 1) familiarizing with the data, often through and beyond transcription; 2) generating codes throughout the entire transcription(s); 3) searching for themes and ensuring they align with

the previous codes that were created; 4) reviewing these themes; 5) defining and naming each of the themes; and finally, 6) finalizing and producing the report, aiming to provide “vivid, compelling extract examples” of participant data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). I followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) approach throughout each of the articles for this thesis.³

In an effort to bolster the validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of this study, I will provide a brief example of how I engaged in Braun and Clarke’s (2006, 2021) six-step thematic analysis, specifically in article four since this article has been accepted for publication. To begin, during the final interview with participants, I asked each one a question to the effect of: “Do you have any advice for inspiring or new queer FSL teachers?” or “What would you tell yourself if you had to restart this teaching process?” I reread the entire third interview transcript of all of my participants, and began generating codes based on some of their responses. Some example codes that generated, for example, were “policies,” “representation,” “mentorship,” “tools,” and “allies.” After codes were generated, I began to search for themes based on these codes. Some initial themes that came to the fore were “the need for administration to support,” “an increase of queer representation,” and “the need for more resources and tools for queer FSL teachers’ success.” It was at this stage that I collaborated with my co-author, Dr. Cameron Smith, to review these themes. Together, we discussed how some of the themes could have been more pointed. For example, instead of “the need for administration to support,” we decided on “the power (im)balances between administrators and queer FSL pre-service teachers.” We continued this process for the remainder of the themes presented in this article (see Grant & Smith, 2025).

Narrative analysis. Given that many journal articles have tight and restrictive word counts (Ghanbar et al., 2024), as mentioned above, I chose to use analysis of narratives (largely thematic analysis) for each of the articles. However, as a narrative inquirer, it is important to highlight that I also engaged in a (co)construction of participants’ narratives throughout the entirety of this thesis in the form of narrative analysis (Barkhuizen et al., 2024). Narrative analysis is defined as “an approach to data analysis that involves narrative writing itself ... the data in narrative analysis are typically non-narrative in form and it is the analyst’s job to construct narratives from them” (Barkhuizen et al., 2025, p. 118). To illustrate, after each interview with a participant, I transcribed the interview, sent them a clean version of this transcript, and then wrote a one or two page narrative vignette that encapsulated each of the main

threads of the participants' individual stories. I sent this file via Google Doc to my participants with full editing privilege, allowing them to clarify, alter, nuance, or delete anything written. I used these individual vignettes, coupled with thematically coded transcripts, largely in response to my research question. Like Chik and Benson (2008), I later created "short narratives of critical incidents with the data as core elements ... written up in story form" (p. 158). To provide more direct context of how this process unfolded, after grouping and coding participants' individual transcribed interviews, I (re)read these codes and created general themes that emerged from participants' stories. For example, in the case of Elm, some themes emerged including their urgency to disrupt normative thinking in the classroom, as well as traditional teaching and navigating a cisheteronormative schooling context. I used these two themes as a basis to form their narrative analysis, especially with a queer theoretical lens. I began, for example, by retracing who they were as a teacher, how their ethos translated to their teaching practice, how they worked to disrupt the status quo and norms in their classroom, how they characterized their teaching philosophy, examples of how they navigated and moved within their school, etc. I ensured to include direct quotes to honour their voices and words as much as possible.

I sent these narratives to each of my participants via email, hoping that, like before, they would clarify, extend, or nuance any pieces of the story they felt needed revisions. While these narratives do not appear within the contexts of the articles specifically, many of these ideas from such narratives were discussed and used within the articles. I added these narratives to Appendix B of this thesis for a few different reasons. One, these narratives represent a (re)telling of participants' stories, but also reveal the culmination of negotiations between each participant and I. Second, many of these stories offer rich insights into their respective experiences as a queer educator that, I found, had a place in later articles, book chapters, podcasts, presentations, etc. However, I thought it would be a disservice to my participants, our time together, and their generous telling of their stories to exclude them from the thesis as a whole. Third, some additional moments of participants' stories are discussed in the conclusion of this thesis. (Re)reading these narratives can help offer additional contextual pieces to each participant's story.

Trustworthiness

Attending to questions of trustworthiness in qualitative research is paramount. Within narrative research, however, Barkhuizen and colleagues (2025) have alerted to the tensions that may arise when recounting another person's story. Indeed, they argue that "there is always a risk that the original storyteller's intentions and meanings will be distorted in the re-telling for the purpose of research" (Barkhuizen et al., 2025, p. 132). One natural way to mitigate such a concern is through member-checking, as previously noted. Through each phase of the data collection, I sent participants both their transcripts and their storied recap. At the end of the process, I sent them a finalized version of their recapitulated stories, which were a (re)combined version of their pre-approved stories. While these polished versions were suitable for us as the researcher-teacher-participant dyads, Barkhuizen et al. (2025) draw my attention to the realities (and complexities) that publishing holds; indeed, "the process through which narratives pass before they reach the printed page" (p. 132).

These realities illuminated starkly while working on revisions for Article 3 – co-published with a participant. In it, reviewers had a plethora of suggestions to enhance the manuscript, but some of which distorted the original voice of my participant and myself. Through digesting these reviews and conversing together, we recursively negotiated meaning from our research and how it may be conveyed in the manuscript. For example, in an earlier iteration, we felt the need to divorce our experiences from one another given our vastly different queer bodies and contexts. However, reviewers saw the need to marry these voices together for clarity – and perhaps simplicity. While we had still hoped to separate our narratives of experience, we ultimately decided to bridge them, folding our narratives together. I add this example to highlight how these decisions sprouted given our direct collaboration on a published piece. Other stories and narratives in this thesis were not as heavily negotiated. On the other side, it is possible that these other stories represent the most full and accurate version of participants' stories, lived and told. Our stories, collectively in Article 3, were shaped and influenced by the reviewers' comments. These examples serve to illustrate and provide insight into the trustworthiness of this study.

Overview of the thesis-by-articles

I submitted the first article, entitled '*Queer, trans, and nonbinary French as a second language (FSL) teachers' negotiations with curriculum to enact a queer pedagogical approach*'. I have chosen this article specifically because of its focus on FSL research and literature, and because I have witnessed an influx of equity-focused research being published by this journal. It is perhaps important to note that I presented earlier phases of this paper at the CERL research conference in London, Ontario in October 2024. The feedback I received helped to shape and (re)orient this paper to a more polished state. In an effort to honour the three-dimensional NI space, I have purposefully chosen for this paper to be the first. Participants first engaged with the FSL curriculum during their ITE programs, and of course, into the field. This represents a moment of inward temporality as they thought through their experiences with the curriculum and with their pedagogical approaches.

The second article, titled '*Experiences of queer second language (L2) teachers in Canada: (Un)preparedness, (dis)comfort, and (re)actions*' was submitted and accepted to the National Association for Teaching English and Other Community Languages to Adults at the Journal of Language Issues. I chose this journal because of my precarious geographical situation at the time. Specifically, the journal runs out of Ireland. My Irish partner and I were meant to move there. Submitting to this journal may have wielded greater networking through disseminating my work in other contexts. This article also represents another temporal move for participants. As they experience the curriculum and navigate their approach to teaching it, they are confronted with both affordances and constraints because of their queer identities and subjectivities from their beginning days as a teacher to when we conversed. This paper represents this line of thinking.

The third article '*Beyond the binary: Queer and trans activism in Ontario French as second language (FSL) classrooms*' was submitted to the Journal of Queer and Trans Studies in Education (JQTSE) and was a collaborative piece between a participant and myself. True to NI, I wanted to collaborate and disseminate their voice, thinking, and work in a way that was particularly meaningful to them. This piece emerged from a call for papers by researchers whose work I admire and whose platform offered a bit of flexibility in terms of publishing opportunities. For instance, when engaging in dialogue with my participant about writing together, I offered a few suggestions in terms of journals – and their lengths. My participant was

attracted to the “from the field” report requests in the JQTSE special issue, in part because a 2,000 word piece is less daunting than a full 7,000 manuscript, but also because of their active participation as a queer, trans, and nonbinary FSL teacher. They thought they would be able to provide fruitful insights ‘from the field’ that may support others who wanted to actualize similar work in their contexts. This third paper emulates what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) highlighted about entering in the midst alongside my participants. Through three rounds of interviews with my participant, and then quite a few more informal conversations, email exchanges, and Zoom calls following our interviews, this piece in particular embodies narrative inquiry as we worked together to negotiate, (co)/(re)construct meaning, and reflect on our place, social contexts, and time.

Finally, the fourth and final article, ‘*Voices of experience: Queer language teachers’ advice for new second language educators*’ was accepted by the Journal of Second Language Teacher Education (JSLTE). This piece was a collaborative undertaking by myself and a queer FSL teacher-researcher-friend, Dr. Cameron Smith, who was generous enough with their time to interview me as part of my research project. Our conversations together, mostly via WhatsApp and on Google Docs, transformed the paper into, I think, a sharp and reflective recounting of my participants’ stories of experiences in their ITE programs and beyond. This final paper ties the loop of the NI. I acknowledge through the guidance of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) that narrative inquiries are never over. Yet this piece acts as a final resting place for this study in its current form.

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Chapter 2: Article 1 – Queer, trans, and nonbinary French as a second (FSL) language teacher negotiations with curriculum to enact a queer pedagogical approach

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Grant, R. (under review). Queer, trans, and nonbinary French as a second language (FSL) teacher negotiations with curriculum to enact a queer pedagogical approach.

Abstract:

This study used queer theory and narrative inquiry to examine how queer, trans, and/or nonbinary French as a second language (FSL) teachers in Ontario (Canada) ($n = 9$), described their queer pedagogical approach in K-12 classes. Findings reveal how vague curriculum expectations can simultaneously act as a catalyst for queer exclusion while also creating space for teacher development with queer inclusion in the FSL context. Although they described experiencing curriculum-based queer erasure, participants simultaneously recognized the curriculum's vagueness as generating opportunity to actively experiment with their queer pedagogical approach, which included exploration of gender inclusive French language, an incorporation of intersectional books and music, and a disruption of students' normative thinking. The implications of teachers actively navigating the space between tension and possibility are discussed in an effort to counter cisheteronormative assumptions and ideologies in the FSL context.

Keywords: French Second Language; Queer pedagogy; Curriculum; Paradox

Introduction

French as a second language (FSL) teachers in Ontario (Canada) are mandated to use the general and specific expectations in the FSL curriculum to guide what they teach (Ontario Ministry of Education [OME], 2014). However, teaching these mandatory expectations from the curriculum can be burdensome for marginalized FSL teachers – especially queer, trans, and nonbinary teachers of French – due to their explicit exclusion as people in the document (Authors, XXX). The FSL curriculum has been shown to (re)produce cisheteronormativity⁴, marginalizing groups (Carroll et al., 2025; Kunnas, 2023) outside of the male/female binary and heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990). Recently, Authors (XXXX) attest to this exclusion, unravelling how the FSL curriculum neglects queer, trans, and nonbinary voices, reinforces

⁴ The privileging of both cisgender and heterosexual identities over all others (see Moore et al., 2024).

male/female binaries, and avoids gender inclusive language. Such stark absences in the curriculum risk creating dissonance as to how – if at all – queer FSL teachers can teach equitably, centering gender inclusive language and weaving representation within their classes. This tension underscores the timeliness of considering queer pedagogical approaches in L2 teaching that challenge traditional methods and foster inclusivity, despite curricular limitations (Carter et al., 2024; Nemi-Neto, 2018; Merse, 2025a, b).

Taken together, exploring how queer, trans, and nonbinary FSL teachers in Ontario engage with – and negotiate – the FSL curriculum while implementing a queer pedagogical approach that centers gender inclusive language and representation is crucial. Accordingly, this study explores how nine queer, trans, and nonbinary FSL teachers in Ontario characterized their (queer) pedagogical choices within the affordances and constraints of having to realize the mandated FSL curriculum. Drawing from three rounds of semi-structured interviews, I show how the structural conditions of the FSL curriculum and the queer FSL teachers' agentic pedagogical responses operate in dynamic tension with one another. After reviewing the relevance of queer language learning and the place of queer pedagogies in L2 spaces, I move to present relevant findings showing how queer FSL teachers use the curriculum as (un)supporting mechanisms for queer inclusion. Specifically, findings highlight a key paradox: the FSL curriculum can serve both as a constraint for queer entry points and as a catalyst for inclusion. I argue that this very tension is shaping how queer FSL teachers engage with the curriculum and navigate their queer teaching practices.

Literature Review

This section situates the focus of this study within relevant queer-related L2 literature, including queerness in L2 education, omnipresent cisheteronormativity, the state of queer FSL research in Canada, and finally, the need for queer pedagogy in L2 classrooms.

Queerness in second language (L2) education and its relevance to language learning

Nelson (2002) offers an extensive list of how validating queer identities and perspectives is integral to any successful L2 learning environment, some of which are particularly relevant to this study. First, learning allows individuals to navigate new cultural and linguistic contexts, offering tools (e.g., language) to express identities authentically (Coda, 2018; Paiz, 2017). For queer L2 learners, these tools are particularly significant when certain grammatical concepts are different across languages (e.g., gender-based languages like French; see Knisely, 2020).

Second, queerness is relevant, given that queer people are in every classroom (Moore et al., 2024), especially if we broaden the scope to consider queer friends, family members, and teachers. Including discussions about queer people – and using language that respectfully reflects their identities – is crucial for building inclusive L2 programming and offering learners the linguistic constructions they need to communicate (Paiz, 2021).

Finally, social and cultural topics are part of many L2 classrooms. In the case of FSL, the curriculum stipulates that learners must “develop their intercultural awareness by exploring diverse cultures and expanding their ability to differentiate between personal, cultural, and universal behaviours, traditions, and beliefs” (Ontario Ministry of Education [OME], 2013, p. 10). Knisely (2022b) advocates that student engagement and motivation are enhanced when such exploration happens via introducing identity-related topics in the L2 classroom – in fact, when L2 classrooms embrace queer identities, learners not only improve their language skills, but also gain a “more accurate and robust understanding of language” (p. 7). Using appropriate language is not only affirming for individuals, but is also an expectation in the OME (2013) curriculum, where students need to learn to “interact with people in French-speaking cultures effectively and respectfully” (p. 10). While respectful FSL communication demands recognition of the diverse ways language can honour various identities, the next section shows how challenges persist due to pervasive cisheteronormativity in L2 educational contexts.

Omnipresent cisheteronormativity in L2 contexts

Cisheteronormativity can be defined as the privileging of both cisgender and heterosexual individuals over all other genders and sexualities. Existing in tandem means that both terms “co-occur and prop each other up to such an extent that we can refer to them as a single oppressive regime” (Moore et al., 2024, p. 11). Because of cisheteronormativity, language classes are often sites where heterosexual and cisgender discourse amplify heterosexual voices and perspectives over all others, and has long been identified as a major contributor to the creating inequitable L2 learning environments (Moore, 2020; Paiz, 2015, 2020). In this light, Nelson (2006) contends that L2 classes exist only for “straight people [to interact] exclusively with other straight people” (p. 1), with no room for marginalized identities to be discussed (Moore, 2016).

Within such interactions, if queer people do attempt to speak ‘queerly’ – e.g., referring to their same-sex partner evidenced through noun and adjective agreements – then language educators may position these students as committing “linguistic failure[s]” (Liddicoat, 2009, p.

191). It is worth questioning how queer people are meant to engage in authentic and communicative activities when discussions in L2 spaces tend to hold “heteronormative frame[s]” (Nguyen & Yang, 2015, p. 222), which inevitably limit their capacity to meaningfully engage in these conversations. For instance, students may be asked what they did on the weekend, or with whom they spent their time. In these moments, students have to choose to redirect these questions, lie, or come out (Milani & Cashman, 2024). Even if students do manage to redirect conversations with teachers that embrace queerness, research has shown that teachers do not always feel entirely comfortable or prepared to engage (Moita-Lopes, 2006), which consequently relegates queer discussions about their identities to the margins.

In this way, cisheteronormativity controls what is (un)said, and seeps into L2 pedagogical materials to create discourses of who are acceptable L2 speakers (De Vincenti et al., 2007; Author, XXXX; Gray, 2013; Moore et al., 2024). Dissecting cisheteronormative language materials has been at the forefront of language research for several decades (Paiz, 2020), primarily because they often guide L2 teaching: opening up or shutting down (queer) language possibilities (Nelson, 2009). When queer people are invisibilized in available materials (Paiz, 2015), they become positioned as “literally unmentionable in class” (Gray, 2013, p. 50). Alternatively, research has documented that when there are mentions of queer people, it is often done in harmful ways (De Vincenti et al., 2007). For instance, in an intermediate textbook in French, De Vincenti et al. (2007) show how when queer people are mentioned, they are included in ways that position them as having an “illness” or that they possess “bad blood” (p. 64). Here, both the silence of queer voices coupled with their negative perceptions in materials creates discourses that positions queer people as “bad language learners” (Paiz, 2017, p. 353). While most research acknowledges how pervasive cisheteronormativity is in L2 contexts, some recent findings emphasize the agency that both students and teachers exercise in order to circumvent cisheteronormative discourses – what Moore et al. (2024) call ‘queer breaches.’ Such breaches invite a troubling of normative assumptions in L2 spaces. Yet these moments are seemingly limited and need further investigation.

The state of queer FSL research in Canada

Studies on the intersections of queerness, French, and education together are limited, but ever-growing. Early research using ethnographic methods from Dalley and Campbell (2006) uncovered ways in which various groups of Francophone youth in an Ontario high school

navigate and reproduce heteronormative thinking. The findings from this study revealed how queer perspectives are commonly rejected, or, if presented, are introduced negatively by teachers and students alike. Stakeholder backlash was also found in Couture (2017), who investigated FSL teachers' perceptions around queer inclusionary topics. Their findings also showed that while strides were being made by teacher participants toward inclusion, there nonetheless remained critical gaps in terms of resource support.

In an effort to support queer and trans student inclusion in FSL classes, Boland (2021) developed professional development sessions using a queer literacy framework for FSL teachers in Ontario. Findings from this study mirrored those from Dalley and Campbell (2006) and Couture (2017) regarding teacher beliefs (e.g., Couture, 2017), but they also offered new possibilities for queer inclusion, particularly around grammar instruction. Pivoting to French immersion, Hakeem (2021) studied students' perceptions of gender and sexuality in a Grade 12 course in British Columbia, and found their general acceptance of marginalized genders and sexualities abound. And yet, participating students' (accepted) perspectives often reified cisheteronormative assumptions and discourses of queer people. As of late, queer FSL teachers have been the focus of minimal research. Of most relevance to the present study is work by Hakeem (2024) who explored how queer FSL teachers in Canada themselves navigate their teaching contexts as queer educators. Tracing their experiences, he highlighted moments of oppression and resistance experienced by these teachers, and drew attention to the emotional toll queer FSL teachers often face.

Queer pedagogy and its links to L2 education

Queer pedagogy is indebted to Bryson and De Castell (1993), Britzman (1995), and Luhmann (1998). These scholars were interested in such critical pedagogical praxis in education, especially to critique normative structures, question binaries, and subvert categorizations of (queer) subjects. Luhmann (1998) extended this line of thinking, while also aiming to show how queer pedagogy encourages us to question knowledge production and our traditional ways of 'doing' education. Put differently, queer pedagogy critiques knowledge production (Nemi Neto, 2018), which acts as an outlet to interrogate structures and problematize schooling systems as a whole.

Queer pedagogies have entered the queer L2 research field within the last two decades (Nemi Neto, 2018), finding practical ways to resist normativities in education, often through an

open questioning and reflection of our practices and how they disrupt or reproduce ‘status quo’ ideologies (Nemi Neto, 2018; Quan, 2021). Both Curran (2006) and Ó’Móchain (2006) were earlier users of queer pedagogy in their L2 classes. For Curran, he responded to questions that arose on queer festivities (e.g., Mardi Gras in Australia), while Ó’Móchain used queer life narratives from community members in Japan to authentically discuss gender and sexuality in a college. In both instances, students were introduced to the ways in which social, political, and cultural factors shape identities, and create space for them to reflect on what equality or acceptance entails. Moore (2016) later offered practical examples of what a queer approach in L2 teaching could look like, such as showing a picture of two men holding hands and asking students how this “could be interpreted and examine where the assumptions that underpin those interpretations come from” (p. 89). Here, the focus of queer pedagogies in L2 spaces is on examining how identities are discursively produced and read as (ab)normal.

Cahnmann-Taylor et al. (2021) showed how queer pedagogy could be enacted via the Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) method to unveil one way that nonnormative genders and sexualities can flow into the L2 classroom. As these scholars shared, queer pedagogies are central to this line of work because “it directs urgent attention to questioning the production of normalcy” (Cahnmann-Taylor et al., 2021, p. 20). Allotting space to critically think through ours – and our students’ – understanding of “normal” opens the door to learning about how other people identify and live. Unpacking what queer pedagogies look, feel, and resemble, Ulla and Paiz (2023) found that many Thai teachers in their study did not have specific training on queer pedagogy, but that in practice, understood queer pedagogy as creating a safe and harmonizing space for students, using students’ first names or nicknames, and avoiding gender roles in pedagogical activities. Taken together, queer pedagogies are viewed as a teaching/learning approach born from the roots of queer theory “with progressive pedagogy aimed at creating social change through the interactions of teachers, students, and knowledge in the classroom” (p. 680). To help frame this discussion, queer theory is discussed in the following section.

Theoretical framework

This study is guided by queer theory: a critical theoretical framework that has been influential within the field of queer L2 research and education (Coda, 2023; Merse, 2025a; Moore, 2020; Nelson, 2009; Paiz, 2020). Although purposefully difficult to define, queer theory

understands identity as fluid, multiple, and contested (Coda, 2023) and seeks to challenge the ways in which (ab)normal identities – specifically in relation to gender and sexuality – have been (re)constructed and (re)produced within societies and schools through discourse (Coda, 2018, 2023). Amid these instances, queer theory also rejects the notion that identities are stable, and and like Zingaretti and Frear (2025) argued, circumvents “binary categorisations of identity, emphasizing instead fluidity, intersectionality, and the socially constructed nature of sexuality and gender” (p. 2). Queer theory offers a lens in L2 education to critique normative language and culture ideologies in L2 teaching and broader schooling contexts (Nelson, 2006; Ulla & Paiz, 2024), promote critical thinking and questioning skills, particularly around questions of gender and sexuality (Paiz, 2020), and trouble pedagogical materials and classroom practices and discourses (Paiz, 2020; Ulla & Paiz, 2024). Recognizing that L2 classrooms are not merely sites of linguistic instruction, but also spaces for exploring the complex (re)construction and negotiation of identities (Nelson, 2006), queer theory is particularly useful in analyzing the “complex sociosexual dimensions and meanings that are part of day-to-day interactions, cultural practices, and social structures (p. 206), which are crucial in FSL contexts.

Moreover, queer theory offers a lens to examine all gender and sexualities – whether dominant or subordinate (Merse, 2017; Moore, 2020; Nemi-Neto, 2018) – and pays attention to power at these nexuses (Coda, 2018; Pawelczyk et al., 2014). Like other queer L2 scholars informed by Foucault (1978), I adopt Pawelczyk et al.’s view of power as a “net like organization in which all participants in the learning process ... are active ‘vehicles of power’” (2014, p. 51). In this framing, power is both “enacted but also contested in every interaction” (p. 51) via discourses that are (re)produced in FSL classrooms. Such contestation is key, particularly because queer FSL teachers in this study experience a multitude of clashes of and between power from their wider institutions and the people within them (Foucault, 1978).

Methodology

What is narrative inquiry?

Narrative inquiry aims to explore the experiences of people’s lives through stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Scholars have argued for the criticality of stories as a means of knowledge dissemination because stories “are always available and accessible – we tell stories all the time – it makes sense to use them productively for research purposes” especially to gather insights and learn more about what, why, and how teachers teach (Barkhuizen, 2022, p. 3).

Indeed, stories allow for others to learn and empathize from the experiences being shared (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Barkhuizen et al. (2025) have characterized narratives within applied linguistic research as being “produced by people who have something to tell; situated in time and space; [and] purpose[ful] and meaning[ful] within the context of their telling” (p. 10). These defining traits help to cement ‘narrative’ within narrative inquiry. In addition, other narrative inquiry researchers have adopted such an approach to trace the experiences of queer L2 teachers in cisheteronormative spaces, bringing to light both constraints and affordances experienced by these teachers’ queer identities (Lin et al., 2020).

Participants and research context

This research was conducted as part of my larger doctoral research study on the experiences of queer FSL teachers in Ontario (Canada). In this article, I focus specifically on the lived experiences of nine FSL teacher participants who self-identified as queer, trans, and/or non-binary (see Table 1). I used purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) to select participants and sought FSL teachers who taught in the various FSL programs (e.g., French immersion, core French, extended French, etc.) and in any divisions (e.g., primary/junior, junior/intermediate, and intermediate/senior). A unique aspect of this research is that I was also a participant in this study as the ninth participant, and completed all three interviews, conducted with the help of a queer FSL researcher-colleague-friend. Importantly, I completed the analysis of data collected from all participants, including myself.

Table 1. Participant demographic information.

Name ⁵	Gender	Sexuality	Pronouns	Teaching Division and Stream	FSL program	Years of teaching experience ⁶
Angela	Female / gender queer	Bisexual / pansexual	she/they	Intermediate	Core French	10
Ay	Female	Lesbian	she/her	Primary/junior	French Immersion	7
Elm	Trans, non-binary	Queer	they/them	Primary/junior	French Immersion, Core French	7
Caleb	Gender queer	Gay	he/they	Intermediate /senior	Core French, French	4

⁵While most participants have a pseudonym, others have chosen to maintain their real names.

⁶ The years of teaching experience were calculated as of 2023-2024.

					Immersion	
Jade	Female	Asexual	she/her	Intermediate/senior	French Immersion, Core French, Extended French	4
Pryor	Gender fluid	Queer - gay (bi-learning)	he/him they/them	Intermediate/senior	French Immersion, Core French, Intensive French	10
Rob	Male	Queer	he/him	Intermediate/senior	Core French, French Immersion	3
Vi	Female / non-binary	Queer	she/they	Intermediate/senior	Core French, French Immersion, Intensive French	3
Yannick	Male	Gay	he/him	Intermediate/senior	French Immersion, Core French, Extended French	20

Data collection

For this study, I relied on three-rounds of semi-structured interviews that were conducted between December 2023 and August 2024⁷ after receiving ethics approval (#S-11-23-9552). Participants were asked open-ended questions grounded in unpacking their experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), including questions such as “Tell me about how you work conversations of gender and sexuality into your FSL classes?”, which invited participants to share their stories on how a queer pedagogical approach was (or was not) operationalized in their context. Interviews with each participant lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. Considering the amount of vulnerability and sharing this study required, I compensated my participants for their time (Veldhuis et al., 2024).

All of the interviews took place using either Zoom or Microsoft Teams⁸. Embracing NI, I remained flexible in my approach to asking questions, allowing my participants to drive, and as such, deviate the conversation (Coghill-Behrends, 2019). For example, when discussing how queerness was perceived within their FSL classes, most participants expanded this conversation to their wider school community. In terms of transcriptions, I relied on the pre-generated transcripts from Zoom and Team recordings as a starting place. However, these original

⁷ All participants completed three rounds of semi-structured interviews except Jason, Vi, and Yannick.

⁸ All interviews were online, with the exception of one which took place in person at a local café in Toronto, Ontario.

transcripts were flawed and necessitated many revisions. I made adjustments to the spelling, punctuation, and grammar, and added or removed missing words. One example of a common change I made occurred when the word “queer” was used. ‘Queer’ often did not appear on the transcript – instead, words like “care,” “career,” or “query” appeared. After the transcription phase was completed, I sent the document to my participants and engaged them in member-checking by giving them editing access through ‘Suggesting’ mode. With this access, participants were invited to read and confirm that the written transcript encapsulated their stories and voices. Out of all nine participants, only a handful made minor revisions (e.g., mostly removing filler words such as “like” in their speech) and clarifying their roles in schools.

Data Analysis

Like other NI researchers interested in teachers’ experiences (Barkhuizen et al., 2025; Xu & Barkhuizen, 2025), I chose to conduct a thematic analysis to ascertain the patterns, threads, and themes that emerged from participants’ narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I relied on Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step framework to identify distinct themes from participant stories that responded to my research question: “What are the experiences of queer FSL teachers who adopt or enact queer pedagogies in their FSL classes, if at all?” I began by (re)listening and (re)reading the transcript at the same time to familiarize myself with their stories as a whole data set. Then, I uploaded the transcripts to NVivo 14 Pro and began coding. Examples of inductive codes generated were “gender agreements,” “resource availability,” “vague curriculum,” etc. With coding underway, I began searching and reviewing the codes for themes, and began defining and naming them (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This thematic piece represented fragments of participants’ stories pieced together (Xu & Barkhuizen, 2025). Finally, I used my queer theoretical framework (Nelson, 2006, 2009) to the themes and discussions of this study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Findings

Participating queer FSL teachers described both problematic and empowering dimensions of their perceived vagueness of the FSL curriculum as a mechanism to support queer inclusion in their classes. I argue that this vagueness presents a paradox for queer inclusion in FSL. On one hand, participants felt the vagueness was problematic because it suggests illegitimacy of queer content and devalues queer voices. At the same time, this vagueness created an empowering

space for participating queer FSL teachers to experiment with queer pedagogy in the name of nurturing empathetic students. The tensions and possibilities of this paradox are discussed below.

The vague FSL curriculum as problematic

Several participating queer FSL teachers characterized the FSL curriculum as being vague in its guidance on the content to teach (e.g., queer people, perspectives, and voices). Such vagueness was described as problematic in its risk of creating frustration, complacency, resistance, or erasure of queer identities altogether.

Frustration. Participants voiced frustration in the face of this vagueness. In our first interview together, Angela spoke extensively about how in their beginning years, they had to design their own FSL programming from the ground up. This design was further complicated for them because of how the curriculum “doesn’t address inclusive language at all” (Interview #1). Angela feared that without training, some teachers may simply continue to neglect introducing students to neopronouns, like *iel* or *iels*, and may continue to conflate the differences between grammatical and social gender (see Kosnick, 2022; Knisely, 2020). In a similar experience, Vi recounted how the curriculum did not provide guidance for queer inclusion: “I read it [the curriculum] like front and back ... sideways. I feel as though there’s really nothing [to support queer inclusivity or marginalized identities in general]” (Interview #1). Vi went on to report how “the open endedness ... is very limiting” in terms of what teachers feel like they can do (Interview #1). In this same moment of reflection, Vi voiced their concern that if queer perspectives are not intentionally mentioned in the curriculum, then “a lot of people will go for the easier option when given the chance” (Interview #1). For Vi, this ‘easier option’ equated to teaching what has traditionally been done in FSL: sticking to the binary and embracing thematic topics, such as “Food, Fashion, Festivals, and Folklore” (Byrd, 2014, p. 77). Piecing together different components of participants’ stories reveals how Elm experienced these same concerns. Elm argued that “there’s even teachers who, out of fear, will say we can’t teach anything ... if it’s not in the curriculum, which we know is wrong because the front matter ... talks about creating inclusive spaces for all learners” (Interview #1). For these participants, the curriculum’s silence leaves teachers without direction, creating uncertainty about whether queer perspectives are worthy ones to include in their FSL teaching.

Complacency. This vagueness also risks (re)enforcing the idea that marginalized voices are peripheral and illegitimate in FSL spaces (Kunnas, 2023). Such (re)enforcement

consequently makes it easier for teachers to be complacent and default to more traditional approaches of FSL teaching that assume a rigid female/male binary. This is significant given that the curriculum *does* require teachers to introduce gendered language; indeed, it states that students should learn that “feminine and masculine forms of nouns and adjectives exist” (OME, 2014, p. 89). For example, in French, this means that students often need to choose between either adding an “e” to the end of some verbs and nouns, signalling that they are female, or avoid the “e”, signalling they are male. Without any explicit guidelines on what gender inclusive forms look like, a discourse is presented that queerness exists outside of standard French instruction in FSL (Kosnick, 2022).

This uncertainty about where queerness can intersect in the language classroom also extends beyond the language itself to broader FSL teaching practices. Consider how, on a macro level, the absence of queer perspectives in the curriculum and materials signals what is considered ‘acceptable,’ legitimate, or upholding the ‘status quo’ in FSL education, often in ways that reify white, heterosexual, able-bodied people and perspectives. On a micro level, this omission is reproduced in practice as teachers replicate these normalized ways of teaching. Ay reflected on how her own learning shaped her current teaching and noted vastly similar parallels in French Immersion between the ways she learned and the materials used to support her learning.

Resistance. Ay added that teaching in FI is “very much stuck to tradition, so when it comes to introducing things like queer pedagogy, there’s more resistance” (Interview #3), making deviation feel like a disruption rather than a valid pedagogical choice. When participating teachers spoke about challenging these norms, some encountered such resistance, which appeared in their stories. Pryor, for example, shared their reaction to a conversation with a parent who was angry about discussion of queer identities that had taken place in the FSL classroom:

You may need to select a different school board, or you have to recognize that if it’s not me teaching your kid about this [queer people and identities], then they’re going to meet queer people when they go to university, college or the workplace. (Interview #1)

In their narrative, Pryor felt confident having these conversations with parents and caregivers. At the same time, Pryor was still left defending and justifying their pedagogical choices to parents who advocated against queer-inclusivity in their teaching.

Erasure of queer identity. Given research showing that marginalized identities are chronically excluded in the FSL spaces and curriculum (Carroll et al., 2025; Kunnas, 2023; Wernicke et al., 2024), Ay shared how such exclusion runs the risk of promoting “queer erasure” in FSL classes. As she told a story of her language learning process, it appeared queer erasure was magnified by the curriculum’s omission of gender inclusive language and queer representation, couched within an oversaturation of whiteness from pedagogical materials and language activities. Consider her framing: “I grew up in a small suburb that was very white ... And so I was often the only racialized person in the class ... So I didn’t really see myself in the curriculum ... Like, I didn’t know I could be both [Brown and queer]” (Interview #1). These moments led to her feeling and “erasure of [her] queer identity in the French curriculum” (Interview #1) and encased her within the perspective that being a valid French speaker only existed for white and heterosexual people: categories to which she did not belong.

In a similar vein, Caleb, recounted that while training to become an FSL teacher, several discussions of the importance of ‘airtime’ occurred. For example, Caleb shared that “students take notice of what you give airtime to in your classroom ... and so when you’re ignoring something, either purposefully or not, it’s showing them [the students] that it’s not important to you, even though it might actually be” (Interview #2). The connection between queer erasure in the FSL curriculum and this notion of ‘airtime’ suggests that whether intentional or not, such erasure devalues a group of learners and has the potential to limit their learning and decrease their motivation to continue studying the language (Speigelman, 2022).

Considered together, these curricular silences and ambiguity create discourses of illegitimacy for queer learners and teachers in FSL. The challenges of such curricular vagueness for queer FSL teachers illuminate a noteworthy tension. While the absence of explicit gender inclusive language and representation indeed creates barriers for queer FSL teachers, findings suggest that this same ambiguity simultaneously empowers teachers to exert their agency. As the following section demonstrates, the same vagueness that problematically erases queer identities appears to have also created space for queer FSL teachers to assert and experiment with their queer pedagogy.

The vague FSL curriculum as empowering

Several queer FSL teacher participants drew attention to the strength of the aforementioned curricular vagueness as being a mechanism for empowering queer inclusion.

Indeed, findings delineate how the vague curriculum empowered participants to experiment with their queer pedagogical approach, trouble normative assumptions, and finally, create moments where they could advocate for queer(er) teaching through critique of existing materials and promotion of empathy.

Experimentation with queer pedagogy. While the above queer FSL teacher-participants critiqued the curriculum's paucity of queer inclusion, this ambiguity also served as a freedom to experiment and enmesh queer identities in their classes. For example, when discussing how to plan a course, Yannick noted that the curriculum's overall expectations "are the same from grade 1 - 12 ... So this gives teachers more freedom to do what they feel is appropriate." (Interview #2). Building on this idea of freedom, Jade explained that the curriculum's lack of prescriptive specific expectations allowed her to instead prioritize diverse perspectives. She noted,

It's vague, so I can kind of do whatever I want. I can have whatever voices I want in the classroom, because the curriculum doesn't really tell me I have to have these certain voices. (Interview #2)

For Jade, harnessing the fluidity of the curriculum proved to be a useful starting point in actively integrating and embedding queer voices and representation throughout her course materials.

Similarly, Angela was attuned to the same kinds of affordances of a vague curriculum:

I don't think that it [the curriculum] addresses enough at all. Like I think the fact [that] the French curriculum is so vague ... can be fun. I like taking advantage of it and teaching what I want to teach and following student interests. It's great. (Interview #1)

The vague FSL curriculum here afforded them space to experiment with their inclusive practice (including queer pedagogy) so as to embed queer and intersectional voices, introduce inclusive language, and trouble normative thinking collectively as a class.

Infusion of queer and intersectional perspectives. Given the dearth of curricular guidance on including queer identities (Carroll et al., 2025) or the myriad cultural identities in FSL (Kunnas et al., 2024), participants described how this vagueness positioned them to experiment more freely with queer pedagogy that prioritizes intersectionality. Pryor contended that despite its absence in the FSL curriculum, "I think it's a big miss if we do not include all identities. Not just queer identities, but also, for example, persons of colour." (Interview #3). While tracing their approach to teaching inclusively and queerly, Pryor – and others, like Ay, Caleb, and Yannick – consistently underscored the dominance of cisheteronormative perspectives in FSL materials and activities that often reify whiteness as the default. For Caleb, they found that finding relevant and culturally responsive listening activities in French was

cumbersome, since the majority are “very Eurocentric and white” (Interview #2). Queer FSL teachers’ experimentation was inspired in large part by the vague FSL curriculum paired with these limiting materials. To sidestep exclusive materials and activities that invisibilize queer and intersectional identities, some participants shared how they were motivated to seek books, stories, and music to support their inclusionary practices. Jade, for example, shared:

So in the past I like to have music because it's a good way to bring in culture ... but we get to have different representations through music. So, when I was teaching music [in FSL], I had like an artist Bilal Hasani, who is genderqueer with their identity, and how they present themselves ... And we're just naturally bringing in this representation. But also just talking to the students like, hey? They kind of look a little bit different. Let's, you know, talk about, you know, at this point gender identity, and what that means, especially when you're writing answers to questions. (Jade interview #2)

Using authentic materials, like French music with diverse artists, affords space for FSL learners to see various identity markers – helping to challenge stereotypical assumptions about what French looks and sounds like (Wernicke, 2020). In his second interview, Yannick, described how he intentionally embraces intersectional identities in his teaching, offering a brief example of how this unfolds: “*Voici une photo. Il y a plusieurs types de familles différentes. Est-ce que vous connaissez certaines personnes ... ces types de familles différentes, comme*, you know, it’s like a woman and a dog, and like two men or two women and a baby.” Through these diverse photos, Yannick created an environment that allowed students to examine the social construction of different families, enabling them to see the overlaps of their families with others, while also prioritizing diverse representation.

Similarly, Ay discussed how incorporating intersectional identities can be achieved with her French immersion students via picture books, such as is the case with a book titled “Calvin.” She shared “I found it so hard in French to find [books] that I’ll use English books, but I will just read it in French to them and show them the pictures.” (Interview #2). Etched throughout these moments, Ay divulged that she intentionally chooses these materials to provide outlets for her students to see other identities and people and in an effort to “disrupt” normative and standardized materials (Interview #2). Caleb also described how they weaved intersectional identities throughout their courses by focusing specifically on defining, naming, and locating the term intersectionality with their students. This practice in particular is an important means to bolster inclusivity for students and to create more equitable learning spaces (Cahnmann-Taylor et al., 2021; Kunnas, 2023).

Introduction and creation of queer inclusive language material and activities. Angela had earlier harboured concerns because of the lack of clear, direct, and tangible expectations in the curriculum related to teaching gender inclusive language. They highlighted that looking throughout the curriculum became cumbersome, because it did not provide helpful directions for teachers on what to include or where to start. While outside the scope of the curriculum itself, Angela acknowledged that generally “finding resources for gender neutral language or inclusive language is ... impossible” (Interview #2). In response, while laborious, queer FSL teachers did dedicate time to creating and experimenting with different ways to introduce and include gender inclusive language, while also critiquing the gender binary in French. For example, Angela described how they created a slidedeck with their colleagues outlining gender inclusive language strategies, forms of language, and arrays of pronouns that students could use in French as a starting point to bolster inclusivity. Elm, in a similar vein, shared that when teaching any unit of study, they provide students ample options to play around with different agreements “that feel right to them” (Interview #2).

An additional layer of experimentation with gender inclusive material includes challenging the male/female gender binary in French and where (if at all) this binary in/excludes queer people. This exploration is important, because as Elm shared, “if we don’t, FSL reinforces [this] gender binary” (Interview #3), limiting who has access to the language. Caleb provided an example of how this (lack of) equitable language access has the potential to permeate FSL classes via an introductory unit in French where students learn to present themselves. Caleb shared that students “aren’t sure how to access the language, because the words don’t exist to describe themselves” (Interview #2). Within these moments, wrestling with the rigid – but evolving language – is necessary to seek validating and affirming terminology, grammar, and vocabulary in French.

One way that Caleb helped to promote gender inclusive language and disentangle the harmful binary in French is through “call[ing] out the B.S of l’Académie française ... [because] I know that it’s not inclusive of everyone” or might not best encapsulate students’ identities (Interview 2). Indeed, Caleb positioned themselves as “much less of a grammarian when it comes to my teaching” (Interview #2), but being more focused on carving space for students to ‘try out’ different linguistic forms. Challenging dominant and powerful systems, like Caleb does alongside their students, is thus facilitated vis-à-vis a vague curriculum.

Troubling normativities alongside students. Since the FSL curriculum has students engage in almost any tasks related to listening, reading, writing, and speaking (OME, 2013, 2014), queer FSL participants in this study described how they used these general expectations to ‘play with,’ question, and critique all the materials as part of their queer pedagogical experimentation. Consider a story Angela recalled about a Valentine’s Day lesson with their FSL students. As they were reading a comprehension text aloud in French, they quickly realized how the text embodied cisheteronormative discourses. Angela stopped reading, and began questioning alongside their students: “Huh. These are all straight couples, like, isn’t this interesting?” (Interview #2). Throughout this activity and the prepared resources, Angela came to understand how “we were excluding all of these kids that might be amazing linguists. They [the students] just don’t see themselves. They don’t feel like there’s literally a word for them. To me, that’s huge” (Interview #2). Probing along students in these very moments of troubling prompted their students to see the material in a different light, and shifted their thinking around how prioritizing cisheteronormativity culminates in the linguistic exclusion of students. Caleb offered another rationale for troubling content and discourse with students:

I don’t want them [their students] to ever think that I’m not talking about something because it’s not important. Like the *passé composé* is not important, right? Like, everything else is ... You know, the *iel* pronoun is very important. (Interview #3)

Through revisiting Caleb’s story, their allegiance to deconstructing binaries and challenging the status quo helps students to emulate this thinking, not only in their FSL classes, but hopefully within their daily lives, too. Caleb also shared that in a Grade 11 course, they “do an album *de jeunesse* unit, so they [the students] have to go take a children’s book, and kind of like dissect it - dissect what the teachings and themes are and then come together with friends and make a podcast to talk about it” (Interview #2). In doing so, Caleb delineated the myriad ways that teachers can leverage pre-existing material, such as children’s books, while finding ways to discuss critical topics, like queer inclusion and representation. Similarly, Yannick stressed that adapting pre-existing material is a wonderful anchoring point for embedding queer identities, so long as teachers take the time to learn about their students. Re-emphasizing, he shared “if we’re gonna keep using the same textbook, and if we’re gonna keep using the same handouts, or black masters every year, that’s fine. We still have to know our students” (Interview #2). As he shared,

one way to do so is asking students questions about themselves, and funnelling these questions into pre-made handouts.

Creating moments to advocate and promote empathy. Participants described their queer pedagogical approach alongside the vagueness of the curriculum as being an asset to promote empathy among their students. Pryor discussed that in their school, they wanted to create spaces where their students leave with “an understanding of other people regardless of whether or not you agree with how they run their lives” (Interview #1). Jade shared a similar sentiment around how she envisioned a queer pedagogical approach in her contexts, largely by “having these students kind of see that the world exists for different people, and it’s not just them, allows them to sort of make that connection that other people exist, and we should kind of have compassion towards what other people are going through” (Interview #2). It is through these moments of collaborative discussion around how different people exist in the world that students come to understand the importance of respecting and valuing others. For Angela and Ay, they shared how this empathy was also built with their students by modelling and nurturing intentional respect and care. Angela in particular shared that via representation, teaching styles and activities, she ended up “showing up for students that need you to be there” (Interview #2), with Jade highlighting that these interactions and relationships, then, help to heal “your inner child” because of the environment created vis-à-vis a queer pedagogical approach (Interview #2).

Discussion

As these findings have shown, participating queer FSL teachers were empowered to leverage the vagueness of the Ontario FSL curriculum – while also recognizing its limitations – and experiment with queer pedagogical approaches in their language teaching. Such approaches included a reorientation to include gender inclusive language and intersectional representation, a deconstruction of normative activities, and purposeful promotion of empathy among students. I will now discuss the significance of the queer pedagogical approaches and practices documented in this study, all of which (at first glance) speak to recognized potentials of implementing a queer pedagogical approach (Ulla & Paiz, 2023). I then pivot to exploring the implications of the paradox of the vague curriculum alongside the advantages and limitations that it seems to afford in terms of moments of empowerment combined with challenges associated with the risk of continued erasure of queer, trans, and/or nonbinary identities in the FSL classroom.

Significance of a queer pedagogical approach in FSL contexts

Scholars in the field of L2 research continue to argue for the need to queer our language practices (Merse, 2025a, b; Nemi Neto, 2018; Paiz, 2020; Ulla & Paiz, 2023), not only to better our understanding of sexual identities, but also to engage in “critical and creative interventions” of teaching and learning that aim to empower and transform learners (Nelson, 2009, p. 210). Such “critical and creative interventions” emerged in this study in a variety of ways, from breaking free from simple verb conjugations and policing whether students follow strict agreements with nouns and verbs that reflect their lives, to listening to intersectional French music, creating photo albums, and discussing non-normative family structures and relationships. For Caleb in particular, a resistance to mainstream FSL teaching and learning wielded much deeper learning for their students.

In addition, participants’ queer pedagogical approach culminated in creating intentional space for students to question assumptions (Luhmann, 1998), challenge the status quo, and relegate traditional classroom norms to the sidelines (Jackson, 2010). Rewinding to the example of Angela’s reading with their students on Valentine’s day, these moments of disrupting “social hierarchies and mak[ing] identity construction transparent” (Jackson, 2010, p. 39) can lead to more meaningful conversations around who is typically included (or excluded) in French. This in/exclusionary discourse came alive for Angela when they realized that we risk excluding plenty of “amazing linguistics” in French when we neglect to consider how non-cisgender or non-heterosexual people use the language. Other scholars have shown how harmful it is to students when they are linguistically excluded from classroom learning because of cisheteronormative activities (Cahnmann-Taylor et al., 2021; Liddicoat, 2009; Moita-Lopes, 2006, Spiegelman, 2022).

Pushing the limits of our teaching through such queer pedagogical approaches resembles what Jackson (2010) calls “conspiratorial moment[s]” (p. 39). Such moments occurred most prominently in Caleb’s stories of experience when they troubled the traditional male/female binary in French – certainly one that is so deeply entrenched in the French language and upheld and maintained by organizations who control the language. As teachers and students actively challenge such organizations, space is created to collaboratively reflect on who ‘owns’ language and who controls and accepts changes in language. Like teacher participants in other FSL studies (see Masson, 2021), moving from an authoritative figure to a facilitator interested in bolstering dialogue leads to more equitable spaces for all students. Queer teacher participant discourse (like

those in Ulla & Paiz, 2023) highlight how approaches to teaching queerly in FSL can be intimately connected to one's goals of fostering empathetic and critical thinkers, where multiple identities can be discussed, valued, and troubled. Looking outward to the curriculum, and its role in motivating and/or limiting queer pedagogy in the FSL context also emerged as a contentious factor in this study, which I discuss in more detail below.

Implications of the vague curriculum as empowering

Narratives from queer, trans, and/or nonbinary FSL teachers unveiled how they considered the vagueness of the curriculum as an empowering tool that afforded them with permission to exercise their pedagogical agency and include content, representation, and language that honoured students' lived experiences. Others have noted this theme of empowerment among queer teachers (see Tompkins et al., 2019), where queer beginning teachers report exercising their agency to disrupt homophobia and transphobia. In this study, for instance, given the lack of prescriptive direction from the curriculum in this regard, teachers reported feeling empowered to bring forth queer teaching and resources themselves, such as music in *Manie Musicale* and activities that trouble normative family and intimate relationships alongside their students. Participants attributed their empowerment to the vagueness of the curriculum, in that it opened the door for integrating such resources and conversations into their teaching. It also resulted in the empowerment of students, bolstering their students' empathy toward others and their awareness of how social identities are discursively constructed to be read as either normal or deviant (Coda, 2018). The resulting depth of student-teacher relationships paired with more equitable and inclusive learning spaces that are produced by such empowered practices are well-documented (Lebrec et al., 2024; Masson, 2021; Ulla & Paiz, 2023). For example, Lebrec et al. (2024) have extended lines of queer pedagogy to account for "students as partners" through FSL learning activities, which aims to transform and honour classroom discourses around queer identities instead of remaining tolerant to them (p. 72). Similarly, in the case of FSL, Masson (2021) showed how an FSL teacher positioned "her students as integral contributors to curriculum development," where both parties are positioned as "active co-creators of the FSL curriculum" (p. 179). Indeed, positioning students as foundational to the classroom discourse helps cement the language classroom itself where all identities are valued (Ulla & Paiz, 2023).

While the curricular vagueness showed potential to empower queer FSL teachers, the challenges associated with this vagueness are impossible to ignore (hence the paradoxical relationship that emerged in this study). I explore the implications of this in more detail below.

Implications of the vague curriculum as challenging

Participants in this study underscored that the vagueness of the FSL curriculum incites challenges to navigate where teachers may be unsure whether to address non-normative genders and sexualities in FSL – if at all. This is contentious, precisely because research has reported that teachers globally feel reticence to discuss such identities in their language classrooms (Rhodes & Coda, 2017), which may correspond to eschewing queer, trans, and nonbinary perspectives in FSL classrooms. Just as Elm cautioned, since the document does not acknowledge queer learners specifically, there is a fear that some teachers may follow the logic of avoidance mapped out in the curriculum, culminating in queer erasure in the classroom. Some participants, such as Ay, drew attention to such erasure through her lived experiences. Yet Ay is not alone in these feelings; indeed, Gray (2024) warned of the consequences of such vagueness in the curriculum, where erasure is:

“not simply a matter of editing out what is considered ideologically unmentionable, it is also a denial of recognition, which can be understood as a form of symbolic violence directed against those considered unworthy of inclusion.” (p. 933)

Ay felt this “editing out” as a learner who was subjected to learning through a cisheteronormative glaze. In this line of thinking, such erasure, or to borrow from Brown (2021) “symbolic annihilation” (p. 604), can be read as a purposeful tool of invisibilization by the OME in an effort to promote economic gains (see Merse, 2025a) and to thwart queer language learning access (Authors, XXXX). Taken together, such invisibilization in the curriculum is viewed as part of a broader systemic issue used to silence queer, trans, and/or nonbinary people.

With this in mind, it is challenging to view the empowerment documented in the previous section in a simplistically positive light. For teachers like those in this study who aim to challenge the system and counter such invisibilization, working with the curriculum documents in such meaningful and culturally responsive ways becomes an additional source of labour. Masson (2021) has called out this labour as resembling “a form of systemic oppression,” because teachers who want to challenge dominant discourses, ideologies, and perspectives in FSL frequently attend to these questions via building their own programs with potentially little

support (p. 178). Such (re)building of programs occurred for Ay who was a learner in FSL teaching environments where white, middle class, cisgender, and heterosexual students prevailed. Yet in Ay's practice, she began to challenge these discourses by creating spaces where students see themselves reflected. Given that the curriculum is representative of the broader systemic issues of FSL, it is worth questioning whether the vague inclusive undertones identified by participants were included intentionally in an effort to silence teachers – or, at the very least – to make it more challenging to deviate from what has been traditionally done in FSL. Resisting the 'traditional' in FSL ultimately culminates in placing the onus on teachers to create culturally responsive and meaningful activities and resources (Masson, 2021). Yet to reiterate, this 'onus' is a form of additional labour that not all teachers experience.

Centering this paradox (e.g., affordances and limitations of inclusion/exclusion of queer perspectives in the FSL curriculum), I end with a contemplation of the possibilities of a more queered approach to FSL teaching. Since it is well known that FSL curricula are exclusionary and prioritize a hegemonic perspective (Carroll et al., 2025; Kunnas, 2023), it may appear that a more explicitly inclusive FSL curriculum could reorient towards greater queer inclusivity for students in FSL. Indeed, an explicitly inclusive curriculum could reduce the additional labour currently shouldered by queer, trans, and/or nonbinary teachers – certainly in relation to their physical and emotional labour (Hakeem, 2024) – while legitimizing their pedagogical approaches. In fact, the strategies documented throughout this article are tools that all FSL teachers should apply to their pedagogical stance. However, some scholars argue that queer inclusion “relies less on formal curriculum than the responsiveness of educators” (James, 2019, p. 957-8), which corroborates how Merse (2025b) advocates for an “unqueer” approach to L2 teaching and learning, encouraging educators to embrace “ambiguous and open situations in coursebooks rather than shutting down endorsed meanings or readings in advance” (p. 164). In this way, embracing the ambiguity in curriculum can naturally flow into exploring diverse opinions (Merse, 2025a) and may help combat some teachers' worries or fears about deviating from curricula (Rhodes & Coda, 2017), decentering the teacher as an expert and letting students explore multiple identity groups (Paiz, 2020). (Re)designing an FSL curriculum that names, locates, and honours marginalized identities is a starting place. Couched within such changes, teachers can build in a queer pedagogical approach that challenges' students' thinking (Merse, 2025a), building in different teaching methods (Cahnmann-Taylor et al., 2021), leveraging

students' knowledge and experiences to (co)create content (Masson, 2021), and relying on strategies other scholars have used to create gender inclusive classrooms, such as using videos, audios, and other authentic resources (Carter et al., 2024).

7. Recommendations and limitations

In light of this study focusing on the experiences of queer FSL teachers as they enact a queer pedagogical approach through the FSL curriculum, I offer recommendations for practitioners. First, it is important for educators to bring in nonnormative language in FSL spaces, such as nonbinary or neopronouns, because the French language currently exists in a masculine/feminine binary, but not all students do. Providing students with the tools to use the language will contribute to greater language engagement, motivation, and acquisition. Many resources already exist in this realm as well (see Knisely, 2022b for a starter kit on queer inclusion). Second, educators should be reflective of the pedagogical materials they use in their classrooms. Given that accessing quality material resources is already a challenge in French (Arnott et al., 2023), this recommendation may become even more burdensome. However, I urge educators to critique or question their materials alongside their students. For example, if learning about families in an FSL class and the provided material only has heterosexual, white, able-bodied images, ask students what they think this message sends to people learning French. Then, have students create their own 'resources' that show the multiple, non-nuclear families that do exist in French. Third, educators can leverage their students' interests when building in a queer pedagogical approach. For example, if students are interested in cooking, music, or sports, educators can find multiple and varied people and entry points within these fields and industries to discuss with their students. Not only does this contribute to more queer visibility, but it also helps students question why or how these queer individuals may have been previously invisibilized from their learning, a main tenet of queer theories. Fourth, a queer pedagogical approach may begin with an insertion method, but should expand beyond having a 'Google Drive' folder of queer representation. Queer pedagogy in FSL seeks to critique identities, question school and societal structures, and critically think about who is in/excluded (Paiz, 2020). Finally, educators need to know that they are doing their best and to not fear mistakes they may make, but rather, embrace them (Paiz, 2020). It is not always a simple task to learn about diverse perspectives or how to create queer-friendly materials. However, for educators committed to student learning and social justice, and admitting that they do not have all the

answers, learners will embrace the nuances of the language and may leave with an increased sense of intercultural competence.

Segueing from recommendations, I end by acknowledging a few limitations of this study. First, this study explored participants' experiences and perspectives of queer informed practice; however, I did not complete classroom observations to see how such approaches unfold in practice. Classroom observations could have added nuance to the ways in which both students and teachers alike perceive the effectiveness of a queer pedagogical approach. Second, this study emphasized the need for intersectionality, but many of my participants identified as white. One participant identified as Asian, and another as Southeast Asian. Missing perspectives from Black and Indigenous people which could have strengthened the study. Third, many participants were from major urban cities, with participants noting increased inclusivity because of its urban proximity. More research is needed into queer, rural FSL teachers in Canada and how they incorporate queer pedagogical approaches.

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Chapter 3: Article 2 – Experiences of queer second language (L2) teachers in Canada: (Un)preparedness, (dis)comfort, and (re)actions

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Abstract

Queer, trans, and nonbinary teachers face increased hostility compared to their cisgender and heterosexual counterparts in schools (Tompkins et al., 2019). This increased hostility experienced by queer FSL teachers certainly plays a role in the ongoing French as a second language (FSL) teacher shortage in Canada (Arnott et al., 2023), with research showing how marginalized teachers are more apt to fleeing the profession (Masson et al., 2024). In response, I sought to learn about the experience of queer FSL teachers ($n = 12$) through narrative inquiry to examine their stories and insights in schools. Findings reveal a unique portrait of the queer FSL teacher experience, including a perceived lack of training on incorporating queer topics in the FSL classroom, the need to navigate tensions with colleagues and parents, the importance of using queerness to foster teachable moments, and finally, contending with feelings of isolation within their profession. These findings point to the need for more collaboration in schools among all stakeholders.

Keywords: Queer educators; Second language teachers; Queer, inclusion; French as a second language

Introduction

In Canada, some strides in acceptance of 2SLGBTQ+⁹ (henceforth referred to as ‘queer’) communities have been made (Meyer & Airton, 2024). At the same time, recent statistics point to increasing levels of hate crimes toward queer people (Government of Canada, 2023). Such statistics coalesce with feelings of hostility in the workplace, where teaching in particular “lags behind other workplaces in acknowledging the rights of LGBTQ individuals” (Tompkins et al., 2019, p. 387). Research has shown that this slow lag presents a quandary for queer teachers in schools to be themselves (Cole & Surette, 2024; Hakeem, 2022). Indeed, there is often heightened backlash and hostility from students, parents, administration, and colleagues (Anderson, 2020). What is more, queer teachers in educational literature have been harmfully portrayed as “less competent than their heterosexual peers” (Anderson, 2020, p. 1). These combined experiences

⁹ Two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, plus.

are shaped because of how schools (re)create, (re)produce, and (en)force heterosexism and cisheteronormativity to uphold expectations of what it means to be a ‘teacher’ (Endo et al., 2010).

In addition to these aforementioned issues for queer teachers in schools, their unique experiences are nuanced and layered because of their teaching subject. For French as a second language (FSL) classes in Canada, the context of this study, identity-prone topics and authentic communication are at the forefront of curricula objectives (Ontario Ministry of Education [OME], 2013, 2014). Yet these objectives clash with the languages’ rigid grammatically gendered roots and with a lack of culturally relevant and inclusive second language (L2) materials and pedagogy (Knisely, 2020; Masson et al., 2024; Paiz, 2015). Queer FSL teachers at this nexus have reported feeling unsupported and emotionally drained (Hakeem, 2024), which in the case of FSL, risks contributing to FSL “teacher flight” (Masson, 2018, p. 1).

This study aimed to expand on the minimal research focusing on the experiences of queer FSL teachers in Canada (see Hakeem, 2024) by employing a narrative approach to the topic and including myself as a study participant amongst the larger sample size of queer FSL teachers. The research question guiding this inquiry is: What are the experiences of queer FSL teachers as they navigate with/in cisheteronormative schooling environments in Canada? To respond, I first discuss where cisheteronormativity lives in L2 spaces, paired with the experiences of queer educators (both generalist and L2). Then, I describe how I used queer theory and narrative inquiry to anchor my analysis and documentation of key themes of (un)preparedness, (dis)comfort, and (re)actions from participating queer FSL teachers.

Literature Review

Cisheteronormativity in L2 education

The term ‘cisheteronormativity’ is defined as the privileges afforded to both heterosexual (e.g., straight) and cisgender (e.g., people who currently identify with the same male/female binary assigned at birth) over all others in such a way that the two terms come together to form “a single oppressive regime” (Moore et al., 2024, p. 1). This oppressive regime divests L2 learners from the linguistic and cultural tools needed to discuss themselves, identities, and communities (Coda, 2018). Instead, it adopts superficial or uncritical “approaches to addressing topics like relationships, families, and hobbies” (Evripidou & Çavuşoğlu, 2015, p. 71) that reinforce the status quo. What is more, cisheteronormativity often goes unnoticed, positioning

this regime as a controlling tool (Jones, 2015) that, when left unchallenged, dominates L2 teaching materials (Paiz, 2015), L2 teachers' assumptions and bias about who and what should be discussed (Nelson, 2009), classroom conversations (Nguyen & Yang, 2015) and discourses (Liddicoat, 2009). As a result, schools have been shown to become violent and problematic places for queer L2 learners (Kappra & Vandrick, 2006). Currently, much of the literature within this field relies on the perspectives of heterosexual and cisgender teachers (Tarrayo & Potestades, 2024). More research is needed to learn about how queer FSL teachers navigate within these spaces.

Experiences of queer (L2) educators

Schools are known to be sites of conformity, making the experience of queer people in particular “problematic, uncomfortable, and tension-filled” (Mayo, 2020, p. 32). Research has shown that these ‘tension-filled’ moments come alive for queer teachers with respect to their decisions to ‘come out’ (see King, 2004). Some have reported feeling fearful of disclosing their queerness because of anticipated backlash from parents, paired with a lack of support from administration (Endo et al., 2010). Consequently, this means they risk being left on their own to contend with homophobic or transphobic incidents. Other queer teachers have described contending with discourses and tensions around (hetero)professionalism (Lin et al., 2020), which molds the ways they interact with various stakeholders in schools. Given the laundry list of challenges involved with/in being a queer teacher, many decide to “become an invisible presence to survive in the trenches” (Lin et al., 2020, p. 1066). At the same time, research maintains that queer teachers who embrace their queerness can help students address, question, and dismantle homophobic and transphobic discourses they encounter (Boulay et al., 2014; Endo et al., 2010). And yet, it is difficult to ascertain how queer teachers can be champions for queer students given the discrimination and marginalization placed on their shoulders in schools (Fielder et al., 2024). Recent research on the experience of queer FSL teachers shows that there is an emotional toll that corresponds with their roles as queer and FSL teachers which needs to be further investigated (Hakeem, 2024).

Theoretical Framework

This study uses queer theory (QT; Sullivan, 2003). Although QT is vast and encompasses several points of entry for theorizing fluid identities and discursively produced genders and sexualities read as (ab)normal (Coda et al., 2024), I use QT to specifically investigate how

cisheteronormativity operates with/in L2 classrooms (Coda, 2018), and how cisheteronormative discourses create ‘normalized’ truths of what and who are acceptable in societies and schools (Coda et al., 2024). Troubling cisheteronormativity can also lead to a heightened understanding of the power dynamics involved in educational systems, where parsing through such dynamics can lead to greater inclusion of all people (Coda et al., 2024).

Methodology

Since this study focuses on the experience of queer FSL teachers in Canada, using narrative inquiry (NI) proved to be a helpful starting point (Barkhuizen, 2022). Narratives in FSL research, specifically with marginalized FSL students (Kunnas, 2024) and teachers (Masson, 2021) are increasing. Yet queer FSL teachers’ perspectives are infrequent within educational scholarship (Hakeem, 2024). This absence in the literature is problematic because it presents a narrow and hegemonic view of teachers’ stories, often accentuating the stories of white, heterosexual, middle-class, and able-bodied people while neglecting marginalized teachers. Providing space for queer FSL teachers to share their experiences has the potential to offer a paradigmatic shift in educational research literature to understand the needs and perspectives of teachers who deviate from the ‘norm,’ while providing rich insights into how their identities influence their relationships in the building and how their queerness intersects with their practice, if at all. NI centers stories of participants (Cao, 2023) and enables them to question, reflect, and think through what they know as teachers (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Research contexts and participants

In an effort to understand the experiences of queer FSL teachers in Canada, I recruited twelve participants from two Canadian provinces: Ontario ($n = 9$) and British Columbia ($n = 3$). Given my positionality as a queer FSL teacher from Ontario, I was also a participant in this study and completed the semi-structured interview process with the help of a queer researcher and colleague. As seen in Table 1, participants included practicing FSL teachers who self-identified as queer, trans, or nonbinary and came with varying levels of teaching experience. For example, as seen in column 5 of Table 1, some participants taught primary (students in grades 1-3), junior (grades 4-6), intermediate (grades 7-9), and senior (grades 10-12). This contextual piece is important to consider when thinking about the age-range of participants’ students. With each participant, I conducted three rounds of semi-structured interviews. All interviews were

conducted via Zoom or Teams¹⁰, and participants all signed a consent form prior to beginning their interviews, outlining their rights, contributions, and risks associated with the project (Cao, 2023). All participants had the option to choose a pseudonym; however, some participants chose to maintain their real name for future publication and presentation purposes.

Table 1.

Name¹¹	Gender	Sexuality¹²	Pronoun list	FSL program	Years of experience¹³
Alex	Non-binary	Queer	He/him	Core French, French Immersion	4
Angela	Female/gender queer	Bisexual/pansexual	She/they	Core French	10
Ay	Female	Lesbian	She/her	French Immersion	7
Caleb	Gender queer	Gay	He/they	Core French, French Immersion	4
Elm	Trans, non-binary	Queer	They/them	French Immersion, Core French	7
Isabella	Female	Queer (pan)	She/her	French Immersion	10
Jade	Female	Asexual	She/her	French Immersion, Core French, Extended French	4
Jason	Male	Gay	He/him	French Immersion	10
Pryor	Gender fluid	Queer-gay (bi-leaning)	He/him They/them	French Immersion, Core French, Intensive French	10
Rob	Male	Queer	He/him	Core French, French Immersion	3
Vi	Female/non-binary	Queer	She/they	Core French, French Immersion, Intensive French	3
Yannick	Male	Gay	He/him	French Immersion, Core French, Extended French	20

With NI as a foundation, the interviews were semi-structured and offered space for participants to deviate from prescribed questions in order to describe and discuss their stories of experience. For example, some teachers in the study referred to their main teachable subject

¹⁰ One participant had their first interview in-person at a local café in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, based on the participants' preference, and one final participant could only meet via FaceTime. Two participants only completed two rounds of semi-structured interviews.

¹¹ Some participants chose to maintain their real-name.

¹² Gender and sexuality appear exactly as participants have written.

¹³ The years refer to their experience at the time of the interviews.

(e.g., music) to provide examples of their queer practice instead of FSL because they had more teaching experience with these particular subjects. The first interview focused on how and why they entered the FSL profession as queer teacher, the second on how they navigate FSL teaching as queer people, and the third on how performing their gender expressions impacts (if at all) their experiences in schools.

Data collection and data analysis

Data collection included three-rounds of semi-structured interviews for the majority of participants (three people – e.g., Jason, Yannick, and Vi only completed two-rounds of semi-structured interviews). The interviews were conducted in English, but there were many moments when participants spoke in French. After each interview and transcription, I drafted a 1-2 page storied recap of our interview, articulating participants' voice and intonation as much as possible (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This storied recap was important during the write-up phase of this article, as I returned to them often to ensure I honoured participants' experiences and stories. Once finished, I sent both the transcript and the storied recap to each participant. In line with member checking protocol (Chase, 2017), I gave each participant full editing privileges on Google Docs and asked them to review the documents, as well as to make any necessary changes via 'Suggesting' mode. I accepted all of their changes, and once finalized, each transcript file was uploaded into NVivo 14 Pro, at which point I began my analysis phase.

For this portion of this paper, I relied on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis framework for the analysis. First, I began with a deep dive into (re)listening to the audio recordings and (re)reading the transcripts to familiarize myself with the data. Then, I began to generate initial codes while reading - some sample codes included "discrimination against teachers," "examples of resistance," and "student interactions." To segue into the third phase, I started to search for themes, which "involves sorting the different codes into potential themes, and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within identified themes" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 19). In line with this suggestion, I used tables to map out themes and subthemes. Moving into phase four – reviewing themes – required (re)reading all codes, and making sure they fit within the generated themes. Next, in phase five, I began to define and name these themes, paying particular attention to the "essence" and "story" that each theme aimed to articulate (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This manuscript represents the sixth and final dissemination phase of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis process.

Findings and discussion

In this section, I share the following four themes generated from this study: 1) lack of formal training; 2) discomfort faced by educational stakeholders; 3) queer teachable moments and safety; and 4) marginalization at the intersection of identity and profession.

Lack of formal training

Most participants felt relatively prepared to bring in queer topics in FSL due in large part to their personal identities, lived experiences, and community engagement – not from any prior training they received. This self-preparedness is one way that queer teachers bear the burden of needing to do extra work because of their queer identities (Dills, 2023).

Many participants described receiving little training to support queer learners. For instance, Jade recounted that her FSL methodology course in her teacher education program narrowly focused on single identity markers, and in doing so, disavowed intersectional approaches to identity, which is needed in FSL education (Masson, 2021). She reflected that instructors were “so focused on one issue at a time that they don’t realize like everyone else is bleeding out at the same time” (Jade, Interview #1). With this, she felt ill-equipped when she entered the profession to support the myriad students in her classroom. While not focused on queer teachers specifically, international scholarship shows that teachers receive little attention to topics of gender and sexuality (see Ulla & Paiz, 2023).

Such a lack of training was frustrating for some participants, like Yannick. Indeed, he explained that “we’re still in the absence of learning opportunities for these teachers. And so we’re fighting for survival. We have so much to do and such limited time” (Interview # 2). Participants expressed a shared desire to integrate queer inclusivity and content within their teaching approach, but as other researchers have also found (Dills, 2023), participants expressed that queer inclusivity rested on their shoulders alone. For example, participants would often run Pride events or lead antihomophobia and antitransphobia sessions for other teachers. While participants acknowledged their willingness to run these events, almost all described how tiring it is being “the token gay teacher” (Pryor, interview #1), and be a source of queer teachings in their school to support their colleagues. In this way, some participants reported stress, fatigue and potential burn-out associated with the pressure of always being called upon “to have the answers to be like the ‘go-to’ person” (Caleb, interview #2). Being sourced as the “queer champion” increases the emotional toll required for queer FSL teachers, as discussed in other literature (see

Hakeem, 2024). Caleb illustrated this emotional toll well. Since queerness was not visible or present in their learning, when transitioning to becoming a teacher, they had to answer all queer-related questions, advocate for queer-infused material, and often, respond and disrupt hate. These collective stories made Caleb reflect, leading them to think “taking the charge is tiring. There’s been moments where I’m like, is this what I should be doing?” (Caleb, interview #1).

An area where participants expressed needing more training was with respects to inclusive French language, consistent with other research (Hakeem, 2024). Caleb underscored the importance of such training to better support their students. They shared a story about how one of their students inquired about the French translation of “siblings,” but Caleb did not immediately have the answer. This led them to feeling “fraudulent” because while they were a queer FSL teacher, they did not have the vocabulary (Caleb, interview #2). Here, there was a clash between their ascribed association as the ‘queer’ FSL expert, paired with feelings of illegitimacy as a FSL teacher because of the unknown term.

Discomfort faced by educational stakeholders

Some participants reported that their colleagues were a roadblock to their full acceptance in schools, which mirrors other literature with queer teachers in Canada (e.g., Tompkins et al., 2019). For example, Ay emphasized that “the hard part of my job isn’t the kids, it’s the adults. So with kids, I can reason with them ... whereas I find it very difficult with other teachers how to navigate those conversations. I find those very depleting” (Interview #2). Such depleting conversations emerged from interviews with many other participants in this study. When Caleb came out to their colleagues at school, they were cautioned by others to be mindful of confiding in all staff members because of their outward homophobic ideologies. When recounting a story about coming out in a Catholic school, Caleb shared that some of the teachers “are like, by the way, like don’t talk to the teacher three doors down, because like, she doesn’t think that gay people exist, and like, she won’t be okay with that” (Caleb, Interview #1). Unlike their heterosexual counterparts, Caleb needed to consider the complexity of safety within their teaching environment against the backdrop of homophobic discourses.

In terms of discomfort with administration, two queer FSL teacher participants described their experiences as hostile, cementing their decision to transfer schools. For Ay in particular, she shared that:

I've had some like really gross experiences of certain schools where I've had principals make jokes about how it [queerness] is a lifestyle. Yeah. It was my first year teaching, just like really gross, and like, I wasn't out, and after that, I'm like, well I can't say anything now. (Interview #1)

In Ay's case, her administration created environments where questions of diversity were not celebrated. Instead, their exclusionary discourses contributed to intensified hostility. While Ay experienced explicit discrimination from her administrations, Caleb's interactions were much more implicitly discriminatory. For example, their administration urged for tolerance instead of acceptance with the goals of circumventing queerness altogether. Caleb recounted how their principal called a meeting to discuss the intersections of their sexuality and teaching practice:

[The principal said] 'I want you to know I don't give a shit about your sexual orientation. Like that doesn't matter to me.' And he was trying to say it in like, it's fine, like we're okay with that. And that was when I was, and I'm so proud of myself to have said to him, I was like, 'and that's why I can't be here. Because you don't see it as an asset to this school like you don't see it as something that I'm bringing to the students that need it.' (Interview #1)

Here, discomfort arises among queer FSL teachers because administration devalues queerness and neglects to see how it positively contributes to the overall school community. Instead, Caleb's administrators aim to suppress their sexuality, presenting a discourse of tolerance rather than acceptance, which mirrors other generalist queer teacher research (see Connell, 2015).

Outside of administration, parents can also play a key role in contributing to queer FSL teachers' discomfort in schools (Hakeem, 2024; King, 2004; Taylor et al., 2015; Tompkins et al., 2019). The stories of three participants in this study (e.g., Ay, Alex, and Pryor) are particularly salient here. Ay, for example, found herself clashing with several parents. When she was completing her second year in a new school, she described having inclusive paraphernalia around her room – such as a Pride flag. However, she shared that “I've had parents like full on tell me things like [that] I have a Pride flag and they don't like it” (Ay, Interview #1). At the same time, she was discouraged by her administration to create inclusive spaces, such as Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) because “parents are going to be upset,” ultimately creating more work than ‘needed’ for administration (Ay, Interview #1).

Parental discontent was also described by Alex, who shared a time when they sent parents an email outlining areas of study in the upcoming semester, including graphic novels with queer characters and content. The next day, Alex awoke to “this long homophobic email”

where parents outlined their discontent with Alex's pedagogical choices. More overt discontent was experienced by Pryor, who recounted having a parent arrive in uproar in their class, emphasizing how "queer people don't exist" (Pryor, interview #1) following their correction of a students' homophobic language. These moments offer a glimpse into the realities and lived experiences of queer FSL teachers, which does indeed mirror generalist queer teacher literature (Tompkin et al., 2019), but also spotlights additional barriers queer FSL teachers encounter.

Teachable moments and safety for queer FSL teaching

As research shows, queer inclusive teaching is beneficial for all students – especially queer students who seek queer role models (Tompkins et al., 2019). While not all students respond to queer inclusive teaching as positively (Wright et al., 2019), findings from this study suggest that such teaching often can produce teachable moments in the FSL context. For example, Angela described that when she introduces nonbinary pronoun usage in French, such as *iel*¹⁴, that they hear "kind of snickering under their breath about it" (Interview #1). Beyond snickering, Angela shared a story from when they taught gender inclusive adjectives in a French family unit. In it, they explained how the gender of inanimate objects was oftentimes more difficult to ascertain than human subjects. Angela described one moment of their lesson:

Somebody made some a joke about, like, 'but what if the table identifies as ...' and I said 'oh whoa whoa whoa, like that's not how this works'. I said if you have a genuine question about whether this thing is masculine or feminine or how that works, you can ask me, but we're not gonna make a joke out of gender identity because it's not a joke. That's like people's real life. (Interview #1)

It is within these moments of tension that Angela, like other study participants, stressed the importance of shutting down harmful conversations, and instead, using these moments as learning opportunities to combat the (re)production of homophobic and transphobic discourses within the FSL environment. In Angela's own words, "I make it a point that if I hear things like that happening in class that I really address it" (Interview #1).

It is important to highlight that nested within moments of hostility for queer FSL teachers lived moments of positivity for students because of their teachers' efforts toward inclusion. Some participants in this study suggest that given their queer identities, they are able to build more authentic connections and act as allies for their (queer) students. When tracing the moments of

¹⁴ *Iel* in French is the third-person singular, gender inclusive pronoun.

their relationship building with students, Pryor shared how their students' siblings make time to meet them, since they have often been the only queer educator others have had. Similarly, Angela shared how their queerness "just attracts those students. They know you're a safe person without even having to tell them you're a safe person" (Interview #3). The lived experiences as queer (FSL) teachers, then, can both physically and emotionally create feelings of safety for all students, queer students in particular. It is within these moments where research reminds us that if queer teachers find safety within their working contexts, such teachers are in a better position to then offer the same support to their queer students (Wright & Smith, 2015).

Marginalization at the intersection of identity and profession

In exploring the experiences of queer FSL teachers, particularly in relation to their inclusion of queer content, a central theme emerged: the dual isolation and marginalization they face. Plenty of FSL research points to the idea that FSL teachers in general are isolated in their profession (Arnott et al., 2023). However, queer FSL teachers appear to be doubly marginalized because of both their subject and their queer identities. Consider how Angela places themselves at this confluence:

Like I was thinking about there's sort of some parallels where in terms of being queer and then French is the subject that is seen as like not a main subject. It's always on the periphery, right? I'm an accessory teacher who teaches the extra subject. My sexuality and my gender expression fall on that margin as well, just like constantly a little bit marginalized, a little bit not understood ... quite literally in all aspects, right? (Interview #3)

Angela's metaphor of being "constantly a little bit marginalized" draws attention to the dual pressures faced by queer FSL teachers. On one hand, their queer identities are marginalized and alienated in schools, evidenced through homophobic and transphobic language, isolation, and (hetero)professionalism, described earlier (Endo et al., 2010; Hakeem, 2024). On the other hand, FSL itself is a subject with lower status in a school's class hierarchy (Kissau, 2005). For queer FSL teachers, this creates a work environment with increased isolation and fatigue (Hakeem, 2024).

However, Angela is not alone in these sentiments of isolation. Other participants echoed feelings of being "invisible" or "falling through the cracks" because of their doubly marginalized status. Vi, for example, described how their lower seniority led to frequent transfers between schools, which compounded this sense of isolation: "you don't really have anybody else to talk

to about the subject. And like, you kind of have to find your own way and do what you can with like the ... resources you have available.” (Interview #2). Findings show that the constant movement, both between schools and between marginalized roles, intensifies feelings of isolation and makes it even more difficult for queer FSL teachers to feel connected to their work. For participating queer FSL teachers, there are clearly a unique set of challenges that decrease their sense of belonging and professional purpose.

Conclusion

Using QT as a theoretical lens, findings reveal an insurmountable cisheteronormativity permeating across participating queer FSL teachers’ narratives. Challenging cisheteronormativity emerged as being paramount, especially given polarizing discourses about who these teachers are in Canadian contexts (Iskander et al., 2024), and with calls to retain marginalized FSL teachers (Masson et al., 2024). Findings showed that such advocacy by queer FSL teachers reflects different levels of (un)preparedness, (dis)comfort, and (re)actions. As detailed below, queer FSL teachers experience a range of dualities that exist between various levels of preparedness versus unpreparedness, comfort versus discomfort, and action versus reaction.

Participating queer FSL teachers indicated that, while they had previous experiences relative to their lived identities that helped prepare them for bringing queerness into the classroom, formal training was virtually absent – leaving queer FSL teachers feeling unprepared. Such a lack of training, then, instilled various levels of (un)preparedness. Given the dearth of explicit mentioning of queer identities in any training, a message is sent that queer people are not in schools and do not warrant any discussions. Findings show that acknowledging the need for a more diverse teacher population and increasing queer-related training would be beneficial for two reasons. First, it allows for all educators to gain a deeper understanding of how to embed queer identities in the classroom, and second, it alleviates additional pressures placed onto queer FSL teachers to always be the ‘token gay teacher’ (Pryor, interview #1) and to be the ones to do the work in their schools (Dills, 2023).

Outside of formal training, many participants in this study highlighted the tensions they experienced with educational stakeholders, which contributed to the increased tension between comfort and discomfort (i.e., [dis]comfort) in schools (Taylor et al., 2015). For example, colleagues’ homophobic and transphobic comments created tensions and discomfort where participants felt the need to conceal their identities (King, 2004), despite research showing that

‘being out,’ in the right environments, can increase safety for students (Wright et al., 2019). Moreover, ‘being out’ (while comfortable) is not always the safest option, especially at certain schools, where administration (re)produce homophobic discourses onto their queer teachers, which was certainly the case for Ay. Indeed, Ay felt she could not be true to herself and her sexuality because of comments about “queerness being a lifestyle” (Interview #1), which also impacted her practice as an FSL teacher. Here, how might we acknowledge the power that administration and other stakeholders, such as parents, have over queer FSL teachers and how such power (im)balances constitute, regulate, and privilege cisheterosexual bodies over others (Coda, 2018). In the case of Ay, pushing the boundaries with administration on her homophobic discourses may have resulted in even greater levels of hostility, which all participating teachers claimed to be at risk of in their contexts.

Beyond hostility from different educational stakeholders and how their discourses reinscribe cisheteronormative assumptions, participating queer FSL teachers illuminated different actions and reactions (i.e., [re]actions) as a result of their identities in schools. For example, some participants, like Angela, actively challenged cisheteronormative ideologies from students, certainly where they wanted to “snicker at” nonbinary people and nouns in French lessons. Challenging cisheteronormativity here allowed for learning opportunities and what Moore et al. (2024) refer to as “queer breaches,” insofar as (queer) students were validated in their FSL learning and felt represented and cared for because of their queer teachers who troubled normative assumptions (Pryor, interview #1). Participating queer FSL teachers also stressed their own (re)actions to feelings of isolation and alienation because of the subject they teach and their queer identities. Angela described this confluence by highlighting how both their gender expression and sexual orientation, coupled with the subject they teach “fall on the margins” (Interview #3). If our goal is to prioritize the retention of marginalized FSL teachers in particular (Masson et al., 2024), then we need to think about the ways their voices can be uplifted and supported in their own school environments.

The varying levels of (un)preparedness, (dis)comfort, and (re)actions described above underscore the need to prioritize collaborative efforts among all teachers and educational stakeholders to combat these areas as well as isolation and marginalization. As Hakeem (2024) might agree, such collaborative networks enable stakeholders to reevaluate their classroom policies and structures, with the goal of moving away from focusing solely on those who are

cisgender and heterosexual; instead emphasizing how a myriad of identities exist in the world (Coda, 2018). Viewed this way, all people can be included and can see the relevance of French to their lives. At the same time, such efforts can allow for reflection so that colleagues and administrators can think about the ways they position and think about queer FSL teachers, with the goal of moving away from deficit thinking about them to viewing them as assets in the school community (Connell, 2015).

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Chapter 4: Article 3 – Beyond the binary: Queer and trans activism in Ontario French as second language (FSL) classrooms

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Grant, R., & Allister, E. (accepted). Beyond the binary: Queer and trans activism in Ontario French as a second language (FSL) classroom. *Journal of Queer and Trans Studies in Education*.

Abstract

Drawing from data from a larger doctoral study, this “from the field” report showcases the activist and pedagogical practices of two queer and trans/nonbinary French as a second language (FSL) teachers in Ontario, Canada. Through detailed accounts from elementary and secondary FSL classrooms, we demonstrate activism through empowering (using students’ pronouns and bringing in multiple identities in pedagogical resources), disrupting (challenging assumptions about “normal” identities and families), and resisting (parents’ and stakeholders’ homophobic and transphobic rhetoric). Our experiences reveal that proactive, consistent integration of 2SLGBTQIA+ representation throughout the classroom discourse minimizes student resistance, particularly in elementary settings where children readily embrace inclusive language. Despite operating within contradictory conditions – i.e., those of “parental rights” opposition and Ontarian “indoctrinating” rhetoric – we illustrate ways our activist efforts counter resistance from educational stakeholders. This report offers practical strategies for FSL teachers seeking to transform classroom spaces into sites of linguistic activism that authentically represent diverse identities.

Introduction

Taking the lead from critical scholars (Freire, 1970; Mayo & Rodriguez, 2019), we conceptualize our teaching as a political act of activism that interrupts, disrupts, and impugns anti-homophobic and anti-transphobic discourses in our schools via our physical presence and pedagogical approaches. Such activism is particularly crucial in our context (French as a second language [FSL] classrooms) where the French language has traditionally been viewed as grammatically gendered in a male/female binary, engendering deep and damaging implications for individuals who fall outside of this binary (see Spiegelman, 2022). However, we are reminded by the work of Knisely and Russell (2024) that humans have created these language categorizations – and we can subvert them.

This subversion is crucial in FSL courses in Ontario, Canada, given their aim to foster intercultural competences, whereby students are required to learn about – and accurately discuss – groups of people in diverse communities (Kunnas et al., 2025; Ontario Ministry of Education [OME], 2013, 2014). Teaching in alignment with FSL curriculum expectations and including all learners demands a questioning of gender binaries and an interrogation of (normative) assumptions, made possible through gender-just language education (Knisely, 2020, 2022; Kosnick, 2022).

Although scholars have shown that FSL learning, teaching, and research tend to eschew critical topics, like race, class, gender, and sexuality (Kunnas, 2024; Masson et al., 2024b), we intentionally embed these perspectives in our classrooms as a form of resistance to polarizing discourses surrounding 2SLGBTQIA+ people that are all too commonplace in Ontario schools and in the media (CBC News, 2023; Martino et al., 2019). This ‘from the field report,’ drawing from data within a larger doctoral study using narrative inquiry and queer theories (Grant, forthcoming), traces the activist-oriented practices of two FSL teachers that show possibilities of resistance against normative ideologies about who uses – and who is allowed to access – the French language (Masson et al., 2024a).

Positionalities

To contextualize our activist practices, we first share our positionalities as queer, trans, non-binary educators. As we describe below, an impetus for our work is our respective identities. Author 1 identifies as a white, queer, cisgender male. Author 2 identifies as a white, disabled, queer, non-binary/transgender person. Author 1 and 2 are both ‘out’ to students – though in different ways. Author 1 teaches in the secondary panel in Ontario and is – and is perceived as – cisgender. However, some students recognize his queerness via his voice, mannerisms, and gender expressions that impact the ways he meaningfully engages with all stakeholders in his school. For example, it is not uncommon for students to ask Author 1 so forthcomingly, “Sir, are you gay?” leading to disruptions in the class. While Author 1 benefits from cisgender privilege, he experiences discrimination from his sexual orientation. Before Author 2 describes their positionality, we sidestep to acknowledge that they have chosen to use a pseudonym for this paper as opposed to their real name. This was an intentional choice to shield them from any backlash or resistance.

Author 2 teaches in the primary division in Ontario where many young students have considerably less experience with queerness – and certainly transness. Such a framing means that Author 2’s students perceive them – as many other individuals in their school – as strictly cisgender and heterosexual. However, Author 2 is “out” to students and is perceived by students who know them as transgender, particularly due to their use of the singular ‘they’ pronoun (*iel* in French). What is more, given they eschew using an honorific with their students, discussions around their ‘coming out’ abound, often dovetailing language and gender. Sharing this information with their students, Author 2 described that,

Most but not all people who use *madame* are women and most but not all people who use *monsieur* are men. I’m not a man or a woman so neither monsieur or madame feels right. Some non-binary people use Mx but I prefer that people just use my name.

For students who do not know Author 2, they are often perceived as cisgender, although they are asked “are you a boy or a girl?” Prior to being out as transgender, the students of Author 2 noticed that they were “different” from others – even if students did not understand why. Their physical presence as a trans and nonbinary teacher is notable because they are often the first transgender person most students have encountered, and their transmasculine gender expression challenges students’ typical assumptions about what a teacher looks like.

Both Authors identify as white settlers who live and work on unceded and unsundered land, specifically the Mississaugas of the Credit and the Algonquin Anishinaabeg Nation in what is known today as ‘Canada.’ We understand the privilege afforded to us as white settlers and take responsibility to do this work with good intentions. We also take responsibility for any limitations in our thinking.

From the field report

In the following sections, we describe our activism efforts in FSL teaching and learning, and embed reflections of resistance that occur vis-à-vis such efforts. We aim to shed light on how our goals of teaching French are anchored in challenging existing understandings of people and the world (Hakeem, 2022; Nemi-Neto, 2018), which largely mirror tenets of gender-just language education (Knisely, 2022, 2023a, b). In what follows, we describe three interrelated activist approaches used in our FSL classrooms.

Activism to disrupt beyond the binary.

Central to our work as activists in FSL education is the intentionality of disrupting students' (often normative) thinking, attempting to disentangle their entrenched beliefs around both gender and sexuality in French (Knisely, 2023a, Spiegelman, 2022). For instance, inspired by Paiz (2020), Author 1 reads a dialogue about members of a family who are preparing for their day, with phrases like, "Alex and Sam come running down the stairs, asking their parents for lunch money" in French. As students listen, they draw or write the situation described. Almost invariably, students depict a nuclear family: Sam as a girl, Alex as a boy, with a mother and father as parents. When asked to explain their choices, students often respond with "well, that's normal," "that's what I know," or "my family has a mom and a dad – doesn't everyone's?" To disrupt these assumptions, Author 1 probes what "normal" means and why we equate a nuclear family with normalcy. These moments create space for students to (re)consider the assumptions shaping their thinking. While some students resist these ideas, often through snickering, Author 1 responds patiently, hopefully transforming these moments into critical dialogue (Freire, 1970) that helps students recognize the diversity of people beyond their immediate experience.

While Author 1 attempts to massage out ingrained beliefs alongside his students, both Authors specifically disrupt students' knowledge about the historically gendered French language in a binary (e.g., using masculine and feminine forms of language only) and teach their students about gender inclusive and nonbinary forms of French writing (see Feng et al., 2024, which include teaching epicene forms, the midpoint, as well as nonbinary adjective agreements). Specifically, both Authors teach about non-binary adjective agreements and neologisms, such as *froeur* and *toncle*. Our goal of using such inclusive and nonbinary forms coalesces with gender-just language to account for the ways in which students will engage with "real world, enlanguaged experiences of LGBTQ+ people" (Knisely, 2023a, p. 610) to ensure that students are represented and have access to authentic language. Since not all students exist in a binary, we stress the importance of teaching students how the French language does not either (see Knisely, 2023a). In response to this teaching, Author 1 has encountered some pitfalls, predominantly from students who purport that this language is not "real." What sustains Author 1 is the community support and available resources to keep disrupting students' thinking, such as the case of Knisely's gender-just education project (see Knisely, 2023b), to continuously disrupt beyond the binary.

Activism to resist.

While students tend to be willing to engage in inclusive language learning, such as learning gender inclusive and nonbinary French language forms (Lebrec et al., 2024) – consistent with other research (see Nelson, 2015) – resistance abounds from other educational stakeholders. For example, both authors contend with highly vocal “parental rights” advocates, as well as politicians, such as premier Doug Ford, who claim educators are “indoctrinating” children when discussing queer identities (Khan, 2023). For the former, such resistance often manifests through parent emails. In one case, parents explained how their children would be absent during Pride month activities – such as the case for Author 1. In contrast, Author 2 works for a school board where parents have calcified opposition to inclusive school board policies. In keeping, large scale protests were organized, resulting in parents removing their children from school on June 1st. While Author 2 did not receive explicit parent emails, some of their students were also absent during Pride events. While students’ absence is problematic, our resistance emerges via continuous integration of queer, trans, and nonbinary identities throughout the year: not solely relegated to one day or month. With ongoing incorporation, our resistance stance creates intentional space for students to learn about, explore, and engage with myriad identities continuously.

We rely on the expectations outlined in the Ontario FSL curriculum to support our activist stance and counter accusations of ‘indoctrination’ rhetoric. For instance, the FSL curriculum suggests teaching students to “produce brief, rehearsed messages in French containing information and ideas about themselves, family, friends” (OME, 2013, p. 57). One way to respond to this expectation is through the explicit teaching of gender inclusive and nonbinary language, as noted above (see Feng et al., 2024) and offering examples of non-nuclear families and queer people through music, stories, and role-playing activities that inherently exist in students’ lives and communities. In doing so, our teaching actively spotlights queer and trans voices instead of concealing them in fear of falling victim to indoctrinating, while also ensuring we meet our professional obligations to students and their families.

Activism to empower

In our FSL classrooms, part of our activist approach entails empowering students through representing multiple identities and people. Such empowerment corroborates gender-just language that demands we centre students’ multiple, fluid, and evolving identities (Knisely, 2022). To do so, in his FSL teaching, Author 1 begins each course with a survey to learn about

students' personal and educational needs and identities drawing inspiration specifically from anti-oppressive scholars (see Carroll, 2021). In the survey, Author 1 asks students their pronouns in both English and French, providing a list of (potential) options if they are willing to share. Although this differs in scope from Author 2, who invites students to share pronouns (optionally) orally, given their work with primary-aged students, the goals remain parallel: to honour and validate students' identities. Both authors understand the importance of this work, especially for Author 2, who has experienced gender dysphoria from feminine agreements. Through such an exercise, we elaborate on the importance of pronouns and spend time explaining how inviting pronoun sharing bolsters acceptance within the class – and hopefully students' wider communities.

In recent years, Author 1 has witnessed an influx of student discomfort and resistance toward this task. A main contributor to this resistance is students' internal or overt homophobia and transphobia. Consider a response he received from a student when asked to complete this exercise: "I look like a guy, what other pronouns would I use besides 'he'?" Such overt student resistance compromises the safety of others in the class. Nonetheless, he relies on his activist teaching during these moments and welcomes his students to join him in questioning what pronouns are, how they work, and what they mean. These questioning moments help to transform a lack of understanding of the relationship between pronouns and gender expression into learning opportunities for all students. He often makes the comparison of how, in English, we associate unknown people with "they" or "them," helping students realize these pronouns are already part of their lexicon.

In contrast, Author 2 does not see the same kind of overt resistance among students in early primary contexts. Sometimes, when sharing pronouns, students pose questions like "which are the girls ones." However, these interactions do not seem to embody resistance or hostility. They feel akin to introducing new tasks for younger students: with a bit of unease, uncomfortability, and uncertainty. At the same time, this is not to say that Author 2 never experiences overtly negative attitudes towards 2SLGBTQ+ people. Author 2 once had a student say, quite factually – yet not in a hateful way – that it is "haram to be trans." In response, Author 2 articulated that is their [the students']

belief and that's okay. But at school we're kind and respectful to everybody and it doesn't make people feel very good when we tell them that it's haram to be something that they are.

While such rhetoric is indeed harmful, this students' resistance is likely shaped by their age, limited experiences and understandings of the world, and the overwhelming cisheteronormativity seeped into schools (see Moore et al., 2024). Yet Author 2's response offers a possibility of responding to this resistance through negotiating their own understanding of language and its use. In both of our practices, we carve out time to work through students' ongoing learning, collectively crafting ways to question normativities through language and "fostering respect of individual agency" (Knisely, 2022, p. 646) to promote wider acceptance in schools.

Given the differences of student responses (i.e., more adversely in secondary versus primary), we are left questioning how homophobia and transphobia are learned over time in society. Indeed, if teachers implement practices such as pronoun sharing in earlier years in French, it is likely (and hopeful) that waves of understanding will catapult from elementary into secondary schools, leading students to accept diverse perspectives – or, at a minimum, demonstrate respect toward such perspectives.

In addition, our activist approach in FSL aims to empower students by showcasing multiple identities and perspectives in our classrooms with relevant and locally available materials, such as those available on YouTube. Such an approach in FSL is critical given the paucity of FSL resources (Arnott et al., 2023; Hakeem, 2024). Following other queer scholars like Cahnmann-Taylor et al. (2022), Author 1 began using videos to integrate comprehensible input in the target language reflective of students' identities, such as [In A Heartbeat](#). Although it is difficult to ascertain students' beliefs toward queer-related material in FSL in the context of this report, he sees resistance emanating through subtle uncomfortability in discussing the material. In practice, this often translates to students putting their heads down or avoiding responding when called upon. Yet in many cases, these behaviours do not often disrupt classroom dynamics.

In a similar vein, Author 2 provides students with representation of queer and trans identities, often with the caveat that this may be students' first exposure to – and introduction of – these identities. For example, such inclusion resembles discussing pictures before reading a book and modeling inclusive language when talking about a character without making assumptions about gender based solely on appearance. Additionally, Author 2 recognizes the importance of students learning about real people, not just fictional characters. To ensure that students have multiple opportunities to learn about and benefit from the representation of

2SLGBTQIA+ throughout the year, Author 2 intentionally includes 2SLGBTQIA+ people when learning about contributions of diverse Canadians for different days or months of significance. For example, when learning about Islamic Heritage Month, in addition to learning about straight and cisgender Muslims, students learned about children's book author, Zain Bandali and poet/activist Nasra Adem. In concert with such practice, students begin to question their own understandings of normative identities, leading many students to challenge their peers' assumptions. Consider how one student described to another in an FSL class: "you said 'I see a boy' but we don't actually know if that's a picture of a boy or not, it's just a kid with short hair." In this interaction, it became clear that through intentional and purposeful representation, children, for the most part, embody acceptance.

Conclusion

This reporting of different activism practices across elementary and secondary contexts in Ontario, Canada, showcases the ways two queer and trans FSL teachers have endeavoured to create more inclusive learning spaces. Our experiences show that actively modelling acceptance and engaging in critical questions with our students can lead to more equitable learning environments for all. Through an introduction of gender inclusive and nonbinary French (Lebrec et al., 2024), we help offer students an alternative perspective of language learning: one that deviates from traditional gendered norms and instead opens avenues to foster greater inclusion, representation, and criticality. Our goals as queer and trans FSL teachers means we rely on activist practices – to disrupt beyond the binary, to resist, and to empower – to distance our FSL classes from uncritical and monosexual spaces (Paiz, 2019). Although we have both been met with resistance, often via snickering or from parents' and other stakeholders' backlash, we understand the benefits of disrupting, resisting, and empowering as lasting and timely to engage with all learners in the FSL classroom.

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Chapter 5: Article 4 – Voices of experience: Queer language teachers’ advice for new second language educators

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Grant, R., & Smith, C. (2025). Voices of experience: Queer language teachers’ advice for new second language educators. *Second Language Teacher Education Journal*, 4(1), 67-88. <https://doi.org/10.3138/slte-2025-0001>

As per Academic Regulation 11-7, under 7.3 thesis format, 7.3.1.2 Thesis by articles, students need to “clearly identif[y] the student’s contribution and distinguis[h] it from those of collaborators, co-authors or researchers, if any.” To do so, this article was written collaboratively by myself (Robert Grant) and Dr. Cameron Smith. I (Robert) completed data collection and analysis of the empirical data and wrote the entire draft of the article. Cameron took part in some analysis and planning of the article, as well as in editing and revising the paper, and provided mentorship throughout the thinking, planning, and submitting process.

Abstract

This study presents the narratives of 12 queer-identifying second language (SL) teacher experiences in Canada as they offer advice about teaching a SL to their queer pre-service and early-career peers about the realities and complexities of teaching SL. Using narrative inquiry with three rounds of semi-structured interviews, the data reveal several themes about the experiences of queer SL teachers in their initial teacher education (ITE) program: SL teachers lack support, resources, and mentorship in ITE and in beginning practice around navigating the intersections of their identities, SL pedagogy, community, and policy. Implications for SL ITE programs to enhance inclusivity for queer pre-service teachers are offered, particularly in relation to increasing inclusive language teaching strategies, disrupting anti-queer hate in schools, and the need for mentorship opportunities for queer SL teachers.

Keywords: anti-oppressive education; French as a second language; language teacher education; queer French teachers; queering second language

Introduction

Second language initial teacher education (SL ITE) programs have the potential to foster critical awareness and consciousness for their pre-service teachers (Carroll, 2021; Liu, 2015). Yet research shows that critical topics, especially related to gender and sexuality, remain relatively absent from ITE programs globally (Kitchen & Bellini, 2012; Mayo, 2020; Paiz, 2020). This absence creates a discourse where questions of gender and sexuality are silenced in schools

(Coda, 2020). As a result of this silence, queer, trans, and nonbinary¹ teachers contend with a host of problems related to their marginalized identities: homophobic and transphobic comments (Tompkins et al., 2019), prevailing cisheteronormativity in their schools (Moore et al., 2024), fear of being ‘out(ed),’ and a lack of safety (Mayo, 2020). This silence of queer perspectives in ITE is particularly salient for queer French as a second language (FSL) teachers because they teach a gendered language (Peters, 2020) that historically operates within a masculine/feminine binary. This language, paired with common pedagogical materials, has been critiqued for its lack of inclusivity (Abbou, 2022; Knisely, 2020; Paiz, 2015, 2020). Researchers have highlighted the rarity of these queer inclusive in ITE in Australia (Rhodes et al., 2024), Canada (Kearns et al., 2017), Thailand (Ulla & Paiz, 2023), and the U.S. (Paiz, 2020). Nonetheless, such programs can be promising grounds to train pre-service SL teachers on ways to disrupt anti-queer and anti-trans discrimination (Goldstein et al., 2007; Iskander, 2021; Kearns et al., 2017; Kitchen & Bellini, 2012; Murray, 2014), contributing to anti-oppressive schools (Kumashiro, 2002). Despite this research, Paiz (2020) highlighted that “there have been very few studies done that have explored how teacher education might equip pre- and early-service teachers” to queer their SL classrooms (p. 19). This study emerged in light of this call.

With this as a backdrop, a greater emphasis on incorporating topics of gender and sexuality is certainly needed in SL ITE programs to bolster inclusivity, both for (queer) teachers and students alike. In this paper, we draw inspiration from Mayo (2020) who offered reflections, advice, and hopes from in-service queer teachers to queer people aspiring to become teachers. In this same spirit, we take up the following questions:

- 1) What advice do queer FSL teachers offer to queer pre-service and early-career SL teachers?
- 2) What implications do these insights hold for ITE programs?

Our response to these questions is guided by anti-oppressive education theoretical frameworks (Kumashiro, 2002). We begin by synthesizing literature on ITE in Canada, queer topics and content in ITE, as well as the general experiences and preparation of queer pre-service teachers in SL ITE. We then present our methodology and frameworks. Our findings and discussion are woven together to illustrate the narratives of teacher-participants, and we conclude with reflections, advice, and hopes for SL ITE programs to support their queer pre-service SL teachers.

Literature review

ITE in Canada

Initial teacher education (ITE) serves many roles, but among those, it aims to: 1) provide licensing to qualify and accredit teachers, and 2) equip pre-services teachers with the tools to prepare and sustain them throughout their careers (see Smith et al., 2023, for example, for a recent overview of Canadian FSL ITE). For SL pre-service teachers in particular, preparation needs vary, as these educators will teach both the language itself and use it as the medium of instruction (Borg, 2006). Integrating social justice topics in ITE is important to challenge normative thinking (Masson et al., 2024), to embrace diverse experiences (Cahnmann-Taylor et al., 2022), and to support teachers' identities (Masson et al., 2024). When these issues are not addressed, stakeholders run the risk of (re)producing SL teachers who are not critical of their structures, teaching practices, or interactions with students (Carroll et al., 2025; Murray, 2014), and by extension, (re)create oppression in their learning spaces (Kumashiro, 2002) and contribute to student disengagement from language education (Spiegelman, 2022).

To combat these issues, ITE has been called upon by researchers to embed discussions around queer identities, peoples, and perspectives in their programs; such dialogue could include troubling heteronormativity (i.e., the privileging of heterosexual people; Moore et al., 2024) and heteronormative structures in schools (Hakeem, 2024). Rhodes et al. (2024) remind us that pre-service teachers need to be equipped with the tools to address heteronormativity, because otherwise, they “will graduate without being aware of, or be equipped to challenge heteronormativity in their classrooms and the schools where they teach in the future” (Rhodes et al., 2024, pp. 325-326). In a Canadian context, looking at ways to bolster queer discussion is particularly important given that “no education ministry in Canada has taken concerted steps to ensure that there is instructional attention to sexual diversity built into the overall school curriculum” (Rayside, 2014, p. 205).

Recent international research reveals that topics related to gender, sexuality, and identity are crucial learning opportunities in ITE programs (Bangeas et al., 2020; Paiz, 2020, 2021), yet such topics are virtually absent – or consciously silenced – from SL ITE programming in particular (Dejean, 2010; Kitchen & Bellini, 2012; Paiz, 2021; Ulla & Paiz, 2023). By sidestepping topics related to gender and sexuality, a discourse of exclusion is promoted, suggesting that queer people are still absent in schools (Murray, 2014).

The place of queer topics in SL ITE

Discussions about the perspectives of queer people in SL ITE generally, and FSL specifically, are needed for a few reasons. First, some SL language curriculum expectations, such as FSL in Ontario, require students to learn to express themselves and engage with different users of the language, all the while navigating different cultures (e.g., Ontario Ministry of Education [OME], 2014). Second, there is an assumption that queer people are in every class or school (Moore et al., 2024). Some teachers may replicate what Liddicoat (2009) has termed ‘linguistic failures,’ where teachers wrongly assume that students who make gender agreements that deviate from typical heterosexual agreements is incorrect; for example, if a male student learning French uses masculine pronouns to describe his romantic partner. Thus, providing pre-service teachers engage with multiple identities, while at the same time, addressing homophobia and transphobia and disrupting hate, through conversation and resources, is paramount to bolstering inclusivity and the success of all students in (SL) ITE programs (Goldstein et al., 2007; Spiegelman, 2022). Third, engaging in discussions about critical topics in ITE can help cultivate and foster more socially just-oriented teachers (Maher & Toledo, 2022). Yet as Paiz (2018) has revealed in the research of 17 TESOL graduate courses and accompanying materials, discussions of queer related-topics are “often conspicuously absent from the syllabi of many TESOL core courses, despite increased scholarly attention to the matter” (2018, p. 8). Learning about the experiences of queer in-service SL teachers against this backdrop is thus paramount to understand how they navigate their teaching contexts.

Experiences and preparation of queer pre-service teachers in (SL) ITE

Although efforts to prepare queer pre-service teachers for the reality of the field are promising (Paiz, 2020), research alludes to the tensions they experience when beginning their careers. For example, queer pre-service teachers reported heightened stress when they transitioned from ITE to their schools, partly due to “a lack of relevance and insufficient preparation” (Benson et al., 2014, p. 383) in their ITE programs. They added that queer educator experiences are unique in that they are “often ignored and thus they face innumerable hurdles and hardships that their heterosexual peers may not during the transition to the field” (p. 383). Similarly, Fleet (2016) found that the queer experience in ITE was characterized as the “separation of the personal and

professional identity, silencing, and shame,” entangled within ITE programs that did not prepare her queer participants for the realities of the classroom (p. 115).

Investigating the experiences of queer pre-service teachers in ITE, Unwin et al. (2024) indicated that heteronormative discourses in schools prevail, positioning queer identities as “uncomfortable, politicized, or unwelcome” (p. 315). While hostility certainly exists within schools for many queer teachers, studies highlight areas where queer teachers have established positive spaces for themselves (see Tompkins et al., 2019). Indeed, some of their participants in their study were ready to express agency and advocate for their needs, indicating their resilience in light of homophobic and transphobic discourses. However, others reported experiencing discrimination because of their marginalized identities. Taken together, these findings suggest that “there remains a lot of work to be done in queering the educational system” (Tompkins et al., 2019, p. 409) if such a narrow-minded outlook persists in ITE programs, and queer educators continue to be restricted in their freedoms of identity expression. For queer teachers in particular, a dichotomy emerges where they strive to be their authentic selves, while simultaneously feeling reticence over issues of safety and support. Consider how a queer participant in Mayo’s (2020) study expressed such concern:

I need to be able to teach fearlessly, using all of my experiences and knowledge, and unfortunately, the current climate in our country means that I have to be brave in ways that others do not, as well as make decisions about what to hold back that others do not.
(p. 41)

Importantly, these discussions should not be divorced from courses preparing SL teachers for the field. Rather, they should be prioritized via ongoing dialogue threaded throughout core programming, along with other mandatory training inclusive programs (see Kearns et al., 2014, 2017). This idea is seen in the work of Banegas et al. (2020) where student teachers in an Argentinian context had to complete a mandatory module on “comprehensive gender education” (p. 4). Findings from their study in ITE revealed that with such a module, pre-service teachers had an increase in “confidence and empowerment” to address topics related to gender and sexuality (p. 20). In this light, pre-service teachers can develop language awareness, learn about the (social) construction of gender, and unpack their biases, making ITE programs a “powerhouse” in promoting social justice and equity to reverberate across schools (Banegas et al., 2020, p. 20). In other contexts, like the Philippines for example, researchers have also explored how Muslim pre-service teachers in particular conceive and understand gender in their

ITE programs. Interspersing gender inclusivity and sensitivity materials throughout ITE programs is a first step and can be achieved via promoting gender-inclusive interactions and using instructional materials that reflect students' myriad genders. Spotlighting how gender is socially constructed with pre-service teachers also helped to foster safe(r) and more inclusive spaces (Tarrayo et al., 2024). While other studies have focused on queer teachers' general experiences in ITE (Tompkins et al., 2019), this present study extends this dialogue to consider how their role as queer SL teachers who teach a gendered language coalesces with the realities of the turbulent cisheteronormativity with which they contend. Examining queer SL teachers' experience was the subject of this study.

Theoretical framework

Anti-oppressive education frameworks

This study was grounded in anti-oppressive education frameworks. This framework is most relevant to the context of this study, given that schools are imbued with multiple layers of oppression, and stakeholders in schools have the opportunity to work against this oppression (Kumashiro, 2002). With their roots in poststructural, feminist, queer, and critical theories and pedagogies, anti-oppressive education frameworks explore how schools address oppression, whether by reinforcing or leaving it unchallenged. According to Kumashiro (2002), anti-oppressive education provokes a shift in our thinking to work against such oppressive discourses. Other scholars who have used anti-oppressive frameworks in similar research demand that anti-oppressive praxis "needs to [do] more than simply fill the heads of pre-service teachers with knowledge about LGBTQ lives and realities; it must interrupt heterosexism" (Kearns et al., 2014, p. 19). This framing is essential for investigating the experiences of queer SL teachers who work within systems designed to marginalize and regulate their teaching identities and practices (Coda, 2020; Hakeem, 2024). Adopting such framing also helps to understand how we can enact change in these systems, especially to resist and disrupt heterosexism and cisheteronormativity (Kumashiro, 2002). One such way of engaging in this disruption is through collaborative mentorship opportunities and professional communities (Kumashiro et al., 2004).

For this study, we focused specifically on Kumashiro's (2002) fourth tenet of anti-oppressive education (i.e., education that changes students and society). If we aim to challenge oppression – and engage in anti-oppressive education – then we need to change ourselves as we look beyond the "binary of normalcy/Otherness" (p. 64). It is within these moments of reflexivity

and collaboration with others where there can be a promotion of change or transformation within schools and society. This study analyzes the experiences of in-service queer FSL teachers to provide actionable advice and support for queer pre-service FSL teachers in an effort to empower them to navigate and challenge oppressive systems with more agency.

Methodology

Narrative inquiry

In this paper, we adopt a narrative inquiry (NI) qualitative methodology design (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry has been crucial within applied linguistics research because it uses stories to understand the ways that language teachers make sense of their unique experiences in the classroom (see Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Learning about the stories and experiences of queer SL teachers is particularly valuable, partly because their experiences remain underexplored (Endo et al., 2010), but also because their experiences have the potential to make actionable and structural changes needed in SL ITE programs. We also use NI as a way of exploring participants' stories within their "social, cultural, familiar, linguistic, and institutional narratives" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 18), as these factors shape and impact how queer FSL teachers exist within their schooling contexts.

Participants and contexts

Participants who identified as queer, trans, and/or nonbinary, and who taught FSL at any level, stream, or division in Canada were recruited via an open call online. A total of 12 teachers responded. As Table 1 shows, teachers were from two Canadian provinces and have different genders and sexualities, coupled with experience teaching in various programs. Table 1 summarizes additional demographic information about the sample.

Table 1. Participant demographic information.

Name	Gender	Sexuality	Pronouns	Teaching program and student age range	Years of experience
Alex	Non-binary	Queer	he/him they/them	Core French, Immersion 12 - 18 year olds	4
Angela	Female / gender queer	Bisexual / pansexual	she/they	Core French 12 - 14 year olds	10

Ay	Female	Lesbian	she/her	French Immersion 4 - 11 year olds	7
Caleb	Gender queer	Gay	he/they	Core French, French Immersion 12 - 18 year olds	4
Elm	Trans, non-binary	Queer	They/them	Core French, French Immersion 4-11 year olds	9
Isabella	Female	Queer / pansexual	she/her	French Immersion 4 - 11 year olds	10
Jade	Female	Asexual	she/her	French Immersion, Core French, Extended French 12 - 18 year olds	4
Jason	Male	Gay	he/him	French Immersion 12 - 14 year olds	10
Pryor	Gender fluid	Queer - gay (bi-leaning)	he/him they/them	French Immersion, Core French, Intensive French, Extended French 12 - 14 year olds	10
Rob	Male	Queer	he/him	Core French, French Immersion 12 - 14 year olds	3
Vi	Female / non-binary	Queer	she/they	Core French, French Immersion, Intensive French 12 - 14 year olds	3
Yannick	Male	Gay	he/him	French Immersion, Core French, Extended French 12 - 14 year olds	20

Notes. While most participants chose to use a pseudonym, others chose to maintain their real names. Gender and sexuality terms are presented exactly as provided by the participants.

Data collection and data analysis

For this NI, data were primarily collected via three semi-structured interviews conducted with each participant (apart from Jason, Vi, and Yannick, who completed two rounds of semi-structured interviews) throughout the 2023-2024 year. Given the focus on stories in line with a NI approach, each interview asked teacher-participants to reflect on their experiences as queer

FSL teachers. While there was an interview protocol with questions about how queer FSL teachers approach discussions of gender and sexuality in their classrooms, the conversations naturally led to participants discussing their wider in/exclusion as queer people in schools and in society at large, which formed the basis of these “research stories” (Barkhuizen, 2022, p. 8). Each interview lasted roughly 45-60 minutes. Most interviews took place via videoconferencing, although one took place in person at the participant’s request. After a polished transcript was ready, participants were sent the clean version with ‘Suggestion Mode’ enabled via Google Docs, allowing them to make any necessary changes in terms of voice, intonation, as well as content (the few changes made were mostly syntactic). During each interview phase, the two authors also interviewed each other using the same interview guide. These conversations prompted us to reflect our own experiences as queer educators, as well as examining how our thoughts intersected with participant data and developing themes as part of the analysis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Like other narrative inquirers (see Xun & Barkhuizen, 2025), we relied on Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase thematic analysis (TA) procedure. We began by familiarizing ourselves with the data in an “active way” to be able to understand initial patterns and meanings in the data (p. 16). Moving to phase two involved generating codes for this study. Some examples of codes that were generated include one day workshops, lack of queer inclusivity, prior experiences, and so on. After generating codes, we sorted “different codes into potential themes, and collat[ed] all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 19). As an example, searching for themes helped us to understand that participants had a (lack of) inclusive activities, materials, and dialogue represented within SL ITE programs. After searching for themes, we reviewed and began to refine them to uncover the “essence” of each theme within our study (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 22). Building on the expertise of Barkhuizen et al. (2014), this manuscript reports the findings from this final phase of analysis where themes “are broken down ... and illustrated by extracts from the [participant] narratives” (p. 75).

Findings and discussion

We begin this section with an overall review of participant stories of experience in ITE to set the stage for the more specific examples and suggestions related to supporting queer SL teachers in their training and beginning years. Then, we summarize four specific areas of need

for such support that emerged from our analysis: 1) training on gender inclusive language, 2) critical (self) reflection, 3) authentic pedagogical resources, and 4) mentorship and community. Findings are connected to existing research wherever relevant.

Experience in ITE

While the queer SL teachers in this study are now teaching in the field, they reflected on their experiences in their ITE programs. Notable across all their stories, although they unfolded in different institutions, was the scarcity of questions and perspectives related to gender, sexuality, or queerness in matters of pedagogy, which echoes existing literature (Benson et al., 2014; Goldstein et al., 2007; Paiz, 2020). Pryor's narrative emerged as a point of tension here. Although they entered their ITE program in hopes of receiving professional preparation on how to discuss queer identities, gender, and sexuality, Pryor instead found themselves repeatedly positioned as an unexpected expert. "They left it up to us to educate our colleagues," Pryor recalled. Their experiences held some frustration. On one hand, they were happy to be part of discussions and questions related to queer identities, and on the other Pryor expressed that they "found it to be a bit of an affront to have to be the expert, especially because I was paying for this [education]." In other words, Pryor wanted to be guided in effectively honouring all identities through pedagogy rather than being put on the spot to teach others.

Although in geographically different contexts, Elm and Alex shared that when queer-inclusive dialogue was spotlighted in their ITE programs, it was often done through 'one-off' workshops. Reflecting on their experience, Elm remembered that in their ITE training, "there was some day where I feel like the unions were there, and also maybe the [Ontario College of Teachers], and I feel like it was a lot of, like, they came and they did workshops. That was about it." In a striking parallel to Elm's experience, Alex's story echoed this experience where topics related to gender and sexuality in ITE were often relegated to 'one-day' endeavours. Recalling their earlier moments in their ITE, Alex said that they "talked about sexual orientation and gender identity [SOGI] for like an entire afternoon as a group, and it was interesting to see my cohorts' views on it." For both Elm and Alex, while these workshops offered some basic exposure, both advocated for queer inclusion to be embedded meaningfully within ITE curricula. In this way, pre-service teachers will have the opportunity to engage more deeply with what inclusion and representation resembles in schools. These stories also reveal more than individual

disappointments. Rather, they illuminate how institutional practices in ITE relegate certain identity groups and topics, while prioritizing others (Kumashiro, 2002).

Training on gender inclusive language

Within each teacher-participants' story of experience in their SL ITE programs, a missing piece of their training puzzle was how to use and embed gender inclusive language practically in the FSL classroom. Elm, for example, found this absence of gender inclusive language troubling because it creates a discourse that such language is not warranted or needed in the FSL classroom and may result in teaching through a cisheteronormative frame (Nguyen & Yang, 2015). Thinking through this absence, Elm shared:

If FSL teachers don't start doing right by non-binary kids by already having a set of knowledge – so that when a kid says like, oh, like *je suis nonbinaire, j'utilise iel*² 'I'm nonbinary, I use they' or whatever, the teacher can say like, okay *comment accordes-tu?* 'How do you make [gender] agreements?' – then we're gonna start having more and more kids just not continuing in French.

A central message to Elm's story is that providing teachers with the tools to use language inclusively will inevitably support both the wellbeing and the linguistic opportunities for their students. If pre-service teachers are not shown these tools, SL teachers may continue to adopt cisheteronormative practices, which culminates in disengagement for students (Spiegelman, 2022), particularly where the language becomes unusable for them (Liddicoat, 2009). This learning is urgent given that neopronouns and new inclusive vocabulary are coming to the fore in linguistically diverse queer communities. To combat this, Elm described their activism to create and disseminate queer-centred FSL materials that focus on uplifting and centering queer voices for their colleagues. Outside of creating materials, they also described holding professional development sessions for various stakeholders on embedding gender inclusive language and engaging in written advocacy work to increase awareness of queer exposure in French. Similar to Elm, these ideas also intersected within Isabella's story of experience. Indeed, when Isabella thought through stories from her ITE program, she stressed that there needed to be a greater acknowledgment of the evolution of the language. "More conscious of the ways people are speaking and about inclusive language, like using '*froeur*'² in French are crucial, Isabella shared. Applying Isabella's advice means reintroducing inclusive language into ITE, offering pre-service SL teacher's opportunities to explore, question, and collaboratively imagine its classroom application. (Re)constructing Isabella's narrative brought to the light the idea that if pre-service teachers are provided with – and are guided to explore – various inclusive verb

agreements and vocabulary in the target language, then they may be more prepared to integrate such resources in their classrooms.

In addition to offering inclusive language and training to pre-service teachers, Yannick, who described having an exceptional ITE experience, drew attention to the importance of modelling such language. Regardless of the context in which he teaches (e.g., secondary or postsecondary contexts), Yannick, with confidence in his voice, emphasized how, as a teacher, “from the very beginning, I model inclusive language. I’m always saying things like ‘*bonjour tous, toutes, et tous*’³.’ And if they don’t recognize the word, then it’s easy to look up, and easy to see what it means.” Applying this same idea to teacher education, dedicating time to showcasing how to adapt and pronounce inclusive language, and modelling what structures work well in their practice, could equip pre-service SL teachers with the tools to emulate this modelling and integrate it into their practice (Paiz, 2020).

Critical (self) reflection.

Across the diverse stories in multiple – and varying – contexts, queer SL teachers reflected that their experiences in their ITE programs could have been enhanced with dedicated time to think through the intersections of their identity and practice. Alex, for example, maintained that they wished they “had time to figure out what my identity would be like as a teacher, and my pedagogy.” Scholars investigating inclusionary practices in pre-service SL programs in general assert that moments of reflection in ITE offer fruitful benefits to pre-service teachers (see Ball & Ladson-Billings, 2020; Martin & Kitchen, 2020). As queer pre-service teachers question their own beliefs and practices, as well as their constitutive subjectivities via reflection (Carroll, 2021), these moments can also lead to increased confidence in bringing their authentic selves to the classroom (Mayo, 2020).

Although they had been teaching at the time for 7 years of this study, (re)constructing Pryor’s narratives illuminated a dynamic shift in their teaching from ITE, to beginning teacher, to tenured teacher. For instance, during their ITE, their stories highlighted their confidence to confront homophobic and transphobic assumptions. As an early career teacher, while still out and proud, this confidence was sidelined. Pryor told a story about their earlier moments teaching: When I first started teaching, a lot of the students, you know, you come in as a queer teacher, you’re a little more hesitant ... You don’t want to make any waves, because you’re worried that

it's going to cause admin to not like you. So you're kind of riding this line of like, what can I do and not do?"

As their years of experience increased, so too did the ways they perceived themselves and their teaching in light of their queer identity. Across all of our interviews, Pryor, for example, shared how their queerness, in many cases, propelled students closer to them. As they thought about their experiences with their students in their FSL classroom, they continuously returned to the idea that students saw them, "a teacher ... super campy, high energy, the kids loved my course. And because of that, they had respect for me already." Just as Maher and Toledo (2022) described in their research, having a teacher representative of students' identities is crucial, especially for "increased equity and justice within and across schools" (p. 2126). These moments of reflection and links between identity, teaching, learning, and "the social and political implications of schooling" (Liu, 2015, p. 141) are needed in – and beyond – ITE to support educators' as reflective practitioners. In doing so, (queer) pre-service SL teachers could also be encouraged to consider how their identities will be an asset to the school and how they will support the development of their future students.

While not every student in Pryor's stories shared these views, it became clear that over the course of their career, through different time, place, and space (Barkhuizen, 2022), embracing their queerness and viewing themselves as 'imperative' to the school climate has been fruitful for their professional wellbeing. For example, their queer identity, critical reflection, and years of experience have enabled them to rely on their queerness to build relationships with students and enhance their overall teaching environment. In an ITE context, arming pre-service SL teachers with the tools to see their multiple, varied, and intersecting identities (Carroll, 2021) as assets to their future students could create structural change that reverberates within institutions and into the schools themselves to promote queer inclusivity. (Re)constructing Jason's narratives also corroborate the importance of queer inclusivity, where being 'out' with students has the power to invite change and foster critical thinking and reflection (Coda, 2018). For example, Jason recounted that "there is that power, privilege, and therefore responsibility ... to be fully present and fully open about who I am. So that others can too, and open that invitation to students ... [and] enact some sort of change." While other research has shown that it is not always easy or possible to be open and 'out' (Ferfolja, 2014; Unwin et al., 2024), many teacher-

participants, such as Angela, Elm, Jason, and Pryor explored that doing so can lead to deeper bonds and ties to students as a caring, queer adult in the school (Mayo, 2020).

Without moments of critical reflection, teachers risk believing that their identities need to be relegated to the sidelines (Ferfolja, 2014; Unwin et al., 2024). This notion of ‘flying under the radar’ was particularly acute with Vi’s experiences as an early queer FSL teacher. Their stories were shaped by an undercurrent of anonymity in terms of their sexuality in their schools. “I kind of keep it low key. I think that reflects into the way that I teach as well. I kinda try to have those conversations be a little more subdued,” Vi described. As we further unravelled their stories, the complexities of remaining covert were influenced by contextual, social, and cultural factors in Vi’s teaching environment. For example, as an early-career teacher, they shared the difficulties of ‘coming out’ without holding permanent status in the school, coupled with being assigned to numerous schools in different semesters that limited their connection with each site – adding layers of difficulty in their work as a queer FSL teacher. Similarly, they recounted that at some of the schools in which they have worked, the school culture was not conducive to uplifting queer identities because of students’ and teachers’ fears in addressing them. In one of our interviews, Vi shared a story where they attempted to discuss *Pride* and its history with their students, although students did not seem keen to partake. Vi thought that their students’ identities may have played a role, considering “the majority of my students are cis, het, white. They’re scared to say the wrong thing.” Moments within ITE programs focused specifically on critically (self) reflecting guided by the realities of where identity, social, and political tensions intersect within schools can equip pre-service SL teachers to address resistance and discuss strategies to navigate (un)comfortability. Just as Iskander (2021) shared, providing space for pre-service teachers “to reflect, in a meaningful way, about the workings of gender normativity in their classrooms and their teaching” can hopefully inspire change for beginning and experienced queer SL teachers alike (p. 215).

Pedagogical resources

Reflective of a broader challenge in SL teaching, accessing inclusive pedagogical materials is often seen as an arduous and time-consuming task (see Cahnmann-Taylor et al., 2022), let alone ones that center and uplift queer voices (Hakeem, 2024). Stretching across the majority of queer SL teacher participants’ stories of experience, many witnessed how a lack of queer-friendly materials can complicate inclusion in the classroom. This dearth appeared

throughout several moments of Ay's narratives specifically. She identified that available teaching materials in her Immersion classroom were "really old" and, as a result, were "very much gendered" and encompassed "all of the stereotypes" that make them difficult to fully implement in an inclusive classroom. With only these resources at her disposal, Ay described how she often translates more inclusive English materials, like children's books, to French, but is aware that such activities require higher levels of linguistic proficiency, time, and effort. Indeed, without adequate materials, it is possible that other SL teachers may use gendered and cisheteronormative resources, inadvertently (re)enforcing or (re)producing mainstream thinking about gender and sexuality in schools. Holding purposeful discussion about creating, adapting, and critiquing SL materials in ITE programs has the potential to offer a shift in the ways SL teachers choose and use pedagogical resources to bolster inclusivity.

Both Pryor and Caleb offered advice and provided strategies about the ways they purposefully facilitate conversations with students to address and challenge cisheteronormativity in the resources they are made to use – or have access to using – for their SL teaching. One such strategy is through asking questions and deconstructing normativities alongside students. Consider a film study for Grade 10 French Immersion students. Here, Pryor discussed how gender is perceived within society, both in the film's contexts and in their wider school environments, with the goal of having students "talk about the aspect of how we push people into these boxes, and how do we construct that in terms of a less homogenous society." As Pryor shared, holding these conversations has the potential for students to widen their worldviews and deepen their understanding of people in the world to promote empathy. While challenging cisheteronormativity was nourished organically vis-à-vis conversations, Caleb and Jason both recounted how they have had more success with their schools' language departments in ordering updated books that encompass a myriad of identities, including queer people. When discussing their relationship with resources and the ways in which they challenge cisheteronormativity, Caleb maintained that:

A lot of times it's very informal. We've decided to choose specific books that would include [queer] characters. For example, in Grade 9 ... French immersion, we have a really cool book called *Fab*, which is about a student in Québec who loves drama class, and has two moms. So, that's one way of navigating those conversations. Fortunately for Caleb and Jason, accessing more culturally responsive and relevant materials was prioritized within their schools. Walking us through his teaching approach, Yannick highlighted

that he relied on different media sources to find more inclusive content: “I show movies and films, and TikToks, and YouTube with all kinds of different people in it. You know, it’s easier than ever to pull these resources and use them in class.” Outside of technology, the narratives of teacher-participants, like Ay, drew attention to the importance of joining teacher book clubs, or social media groups dedicated to anti-oppressive language education, to expand their awareness of resources others may be using. Such approaches might be replicated in teacher education communities of practice.

Mentorship and community

Mentorship is a much-needed area of scholarship in SL ITE to support the retention of beginning teachers (Culligan et al., 2023; Masson, 2018; Masson et al., 2024). Bolstering their feelings of belonging and legitimacy in the field seem to be particularly important, as feelings of isolation and working without support are commonly identified challenges in studies of new SL teachers (Arnott et al., 2023; Miller & Gkonou, 2025). The narratives of queer SL teachers have advocated for targeted mentorship opportunities integrated throughout and beyond their ITE programs. Consider a vignette from Vi’s narrative as we went back and forth on the needs of queer FSL teachers, particularly early career teachers:

If I were to get more mentorship on how to navigate the experiences of being queer, and teaching FSL... And, you know, just talk about those topics [gender and sexuality] in French class as well ... I think that what I’m doing right now is testing the waters and just being like, putting a few queer coded things in here and there, just to see how my students would react.

As Vi shared, they described that they are merely “testing the waters” when bringing in queer topics and perspectives in their SL classes. While they see value in this approach, more mentorship and community-building on how other teachers engage in such conversations may lead to improved practice and confidence in their teaching. Like Vi, both Rob and Caleb called for more mentorship that is targeted to support (queer) SL teachers. Rob recalled that his feelings of success in his first years of teaching were largely due to the mentorship of his colleagues, noting that it was beneficial to “find a mentor or find someone who has a little more experience in the field” to bounce ideas off one another, while Caleb insisted on “find[ing] your allies and your people, that can really help.” In our interview with Caleb, they shared a story about how their beginning years of teaching were met with some resistance and discrimination because of their queer identity. It was not until a change of schools (and boards) that they found community with other queer and allied teachers that their experiences as a queer FSL teacher drastically

improved. Being embraced, welcomed, and valued as a queer member of their school community has translated to becoming a cornerstone advocate for queer students. Caleb's story alludes that grassroots mentorship programs can become spaces where questions of identity can be nurtured and developed insofar as (queer) SL teachers feel as though they can adequately address them in their language classes.

These collaborative networks can foster ongoing dialogue and support around challenges faced by various stakeholders (e.g., administration, students, parents, etc.) unique to queer SL teachers. This critical dialogue and support from mentorship was transformative for Alex. In the unfolding of one of their stories, they described pushback they received from a parent who was resistant to queer-inclusive French materials on behalf of their child. Leaning on their mentors, Alex confided in one of their colleagues who helped take charge of the situation. Alex elaborated:

She was there and she just told the vice principal, like, hey, he might need a minute, if you want to go and supervise his class. [The vice principal] came down ... And the other teacher who was co-sponsoring the [Gay Straight Alliance] came down with us ... [thought] I feel better with these adults. The vice principal was like, 'do you want me to write an email [to the parent]? I'll write them an email saying SOGI's in the curriculum, you can do whatever the hell you want as long as it's not inappropriate.

In our (re)telling of Alex's story, it became clear how he was armed with a supportive network of people who are collaboratively interested in disrupting and dismantling homophobic and transphobic rhetoric. Alex's positive mentorship and community experience is not unique to him. However, these communities and networks – either formal or informal – are missing from ITE programming (Culligan et al., 2023) and are urgently needed. As a result of this absence, teacher-participants sought their own mentors and accomplices, often through “in the field” partnerships (Culligan et al., 2023, p. 364). For example, Ay shared how she took place in a curriculum writing group during one summer with the goal of intertwining queer identities into the SL curriculum. For her, this community:

was just so nice and so affirming to be in that space. But you know, other than that ... like it's hard. I find it's hard to find community ... My union did have an anti-racism-equity committee. And so there were quite a few queer people ... I found that very affirming. But again, these are like extras for my job, right?

These “extras” involved Ay seeking such communities herself, outside of her contractual hours. She wished to “naturally engage with this [queer topics] during my job with the community

where it's not off to the side, I think it would be a lot easier and a lot more affirming." Ay's experiences echoes calls from Hakeem (2024), whose participants insisted on the importance of financing collaborative FSL teacher networks to promote the sharing of resources and knowledge related to equity, diversity and inclusion (p. 64). While it may feel daunting to meet the needs of all pre-service SL teachers without "blanket solutions" (Culligan et al., 2023, p. 367), study participants highlighted the positive impact of attending to the local conditions and goals of SL teachers.

Conclusion and Implications

The many narratives shared by queer FSL teachers paints a picture that SL teachers generally experience a silence around queer topics in their ITE programs. The teacher-participants in this study therefore advocate for additional and ongoing training on using gender inclusive language, moments of critical (self) reflection, updated pedagogical resources, and finally, queer and SL-specific mentorship opportunities. The silence around queer identities in teacher-participants' ITE stories of experience may carry into schools (Carroll et al., in revision), and engenders conditions in which pre-service teachers enter the field underprepared to address queer people in schools and societies at large. A common thread tying many of these experiences together is that ITE programs can be a key player in facilitating queer SL teacher transition to the field and sustaining them while "in the trenches" (Endo et al., 2010, p. 1023). If one of the goals of ITE programs is to equip pre-service teachers with the tools to teach in ways that embody equitable and social justice-focused approaches (Tompkins et al., 2019), then the findings from this study suggest that structural changes to ITE program formats are needed.

To that end, we offer several recommendations for ITE programs that integrate the suggested advice from participants lived experiences with relevant literature to date. First, like other researchers suggest (Kearns et al., 2014), weave discussions and perspectives of queer people throughout all courses. In SL methodology courses, emphasize the relationship between power and language, and the links that power holds on questions of gender and sexuality with/in various languages, like French. In this same vein, concerted efforts in ITE programs are needed to address the myriads of ways in which queer, trans, and nonbinary people use the target language so as to provide authentic language to their queer students. As such, expose pre-service SL teachers to various resources on gender inclusive language in the target language (see Knisely, 2021 for a starter kit on inclusive language in French), as well as the differences

between grammatical and social gender (Spiegelman, 2022). ITE instructors may, for example, have their students examine the SL curriculum to find moments where grammatical and social gender live, and if at all, how the document may (re)inforce normative assumptions and beliefs around people. Finding and replacing outdated materials with inclusive resources becomes important for both ITE programs and practicing teachers to consider. Lüte and Merse (2020) extend this line of thinking and propose impugning the implications of heteronormativity through SL materials. Such an examination moves beyond merely learning about queer identities, and instead, “takes into account the cultural norms and binaries that regulate such identities in the first place” (Lüte & Merse, 2020, p. 187). As Yannick shared, leaning on social media applications, such as TikTok, can be a helpful starting place to replace and contrast outdated materials.

Second, engage in conversation with pre-service SL teachers on the explicit forms of homophobia and transphobia that exist in schools, either from students, colleagues, administrators, parents, and so on. Then, collaboratively discuss ways in which they may work against or challenge these inimical discourses. Pre-service SL teachers may benefit from specific sentence starters and key links to where their inclusive stance aligns with curricular and policy guidelines (see Paiz, 2020). Third, if possible, like Hakeem (2024) emphasized, establish and connect teachers to (queer) SL mentorship networks. Some already exist in Canada, like the FSL Disrupt project (www.FSLdisrupt.org) – designed to bring French teachers together to engage with alternative materials to foster more inclusive representation and dialogue for all learners. If not available, attempt to establish them within local contexts. As others (see Benson et al., 2014) have acknowledged that queer SL teachers experience heightened anxiety with supervisory teachers, ITE programs can send all mentor teachers specific guidelines on supporting their pre-service teachers, including the need to respect and validate different identities. Fourth, building on research from Culligan et al. (2023), ITE programs can inquire with their pre-service teachers to gauge the types of support they require through entry surveys. Here, ITE programs may be able to target pre-service teachers’ needs and find new avenues to support them and their overlapping identities. We leave you with this quote from Angela: “[SL] can be a lonely space and so can being a queer educator, so that rare intersection is kind of exquisite, isn’t it?”

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Notes

1. We use the term 'queer' as a shorthand term for all non-normative identity categories (e.g., 2 Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer). See Moore (2016).
2. *Froeur* is a portmanteau of the French words for brother and sister, as there is no standard gender neutral equivalent of 'sibling.'
3. *Toux* is an indefinite pronoun neologism, taking the -x ending as opposed to the traditional masculine and feminine forms, similar to Latinx.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study's findings illustrate how the experiences of queer, trans, and/or nonbinary FSL teachers are shaped by cisheteronormative discourses embedded within their teaching contexts. This thesis-by-article manuscript draws on narrative inquiry and queer theories to shed light on the realities, tensions, and provoking moments that coalesce with queer FSL teachers' identities, pedagogies, and lives in their respective Canadian schools. As previously mentioned, it is imperative to understand that these experiences cannot be generalized across all participants' teaching (and being) within their schooling contexts. Instead, these thesis articles offer glimpses into the overarching research puzzle driving this study: "What are the experiences of queer, trans, and/or nonbinary FSL teachers in Canada as they navigate cisheteronormative discursive regimes?" Each article addresses this question in different ways – and with different aims. Specifically, findings across these four articles show that participating queer, trans, and/or nonbinary FSL teachers experience paradox (Article 1), oppression (Article 2), activism and resistance (Article 3), and opportunities for collaboration in the name of advocacy (Article 4) as they navigate and negotiate their queer identities against the backdrop of a school system that privileges – and maintains – cisheteronormativity.

The first paper presented in this thesis, "*Queer, trans, and nonbinary French as a second language (FSL) teachers' negotiations with curriculum to enact a queer pedagogical approach*" approaches this research question by showing how queer FSL teachers' experiences are directly informed by the subject they teach, and by extension, the mandated curriculum required to guide their instruction. Indeed, findings showed how the FSL curriculum decentered and eschewed queer identities, which left queer FSL teachers expressing feelings of illegitimacy and erasure from the subject area. While the FSL curriculum certainly impinged on queer FSL teachers' initial engagement with queer perspectives in the FSL classroom, it later became clear that the vagueness presented noteworthy opportunities to suffuse queer perspectives in FSL.

The second paper, "*Experiences of queer second language (L2) teachers in Canada: (Un)preparedness, (dis)comfort, and (re)actions*" examines more broadly how queer FSL teachers navigate their schooling contexts. Specifically, it shows that a lack of training, various (but largely adverse) interactions with administrators and colleagues, and general feelings of marginalization because of their identities *and* the subjects they teach all contribute to isolating experiences in their schools. Taken together, this article contends that while it is impossible to

generalize experiences of queer, trans, and/or nonbinary FSL teachers, many overlapping and interlocking forms of oppression are at play that work towards maintaining the status quo, thereby bolstering queer FSL teachers' perceived hostility and feelings of isolation.

The third paper, "*Beyond the binary: Queer and trans activism in Ontario French as second language (FSL) classrooms*" was a collaborative writing endeavour between me and one of my participants. This paper responds to the overarching research puzzle by describing our specific teaching practices that we have experienced with students (e.g., bringing in French trans artists and modelling the use of inclusive language) and delineating both activism and resistance experiences through our FSL teaching. The findings from this article highlight that although there are tensions and contradictions associated with teaching FSL queerly, we argue that doing so supports the emergence of more socially aware and empathetic students in light of current anti-queer and anti-trans rhetoric in Canada.

The fourth (and final) paper of this thesis, "*Voices of experience: Queer language teachers' advice for new second language educators*" recounts the experiences of participating queer, trans, and/or nonbinary FSL teachers in their initial teacher education (ITE) programs to suggest avenues for concrete change in second language (L2) ITE contexts. This paper demonstrates how ITE programs should work toward threading conversations of marginalized identities (e.g., nonnormative genders and sexualities) throughout foundational courses, with an emphasis on teaching, modelling, and practicing gender inclusive and nonbinary French within FSL methodology courses. Importantly, this article argues for the creation of mentorship and community-based opportunities for queer FSL teachers within their ITE programs. This paper was also a collaborative piece where my co-author (Dr. Cameron W. Smith) and I recursively discussed ways to support (queer) L2 teachers. It can be seen as the article that 'closes the loop' of the study: offering advice, guidance, and hope for the next generation of queer FSL teachers by tracing their experiences in ITE and beyond. With each article's recap underway, I segue to show how each responds uniquely to the research puzzle, layered within relevant literature.

Responding to the research puzzle

This thesis-by-articles responded to the following research puzzle: How (and do) queer, trans, and/or nonbinary French as a Second Language (FSL) teachers in Canada navigate their cisheteronormative discursive regimes? Findings from this study showed that each queer FSL

teachers' experience was layered, fragmented, textured, and nuanced. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) earlier signaled, there are often no clear-cut answers to narrative inquiries. This claim held true in this thesis. Instead, we gained a deeper insight into how participants' experience their schools in their own respective contexts enveloped around their social contexts (Kim, 2016).

Understanding the experiences of queer FSL teachers in this study first warrants exploring the time spent with their students. Participants in this study underscored how students often acted as allies and accomplices to their inclusion and belonging in school. These findings differ from others (see Hakeem, 2021; Johnson et al., 2025), where these scholars showed how students are often roadblocks to queer teachers' and student's inclusion. I would be ignorant not to acknowledge that some students seek to maintain and perpetuate, as Saunston (2025) argues, "their own existing privileges" (p. 250). However, in these contexts, queer participants were often well-received by all students. These feelings may have been due to their urban contexts, as well as participants' status in their schools. Similarly, the idea that students felt connected to their queer teachers, as we saw in Article 4, mirrors research from Nelson (2009) who argued that queer students and teachers alike might operate well together under the guise of "shared oppression" (p. 104). In response to the research puzzle, queer FSL teachers in this study navigated their school experiences with more fluidity courtesy of student accomplices.

These queer teachers' feelings of acceptance were, however, met with resistance from some colleagues, administration, or parents. While not each participant discussed their relationship with parents, those that did described how parents tended to be vocal around what their child could or could not learn, such is the case in Article 4. In Article 3, parent resistance was abundant because of parents' removal of their students during the first day of Pride month. In these moments, queer participants from this study felt the censorship and surveillance cast upon them through their gender performance, language, and body (Foucault, 1978). Colleagues also played a significant role in queer teachers' overall experiences in the school – with the caveat that context arguably played a larger role. For example, Caleb felt the urge to flee from their school when met with homophobic – and religious – colleagues. On the other hand, being in a school where queer identities were uplifted allowed Caleb to flourish in their space.

In unearthing the experience of queer FSL teachers in this study, discourses of professionalism and "fitting in" illuminated and shaped each participants' experience. For some

participants, remaining professional meant performing heterosexuality, as was the case for Ay in Article 2. Because of her homophobic experiences with administrations, she also feared that she had to approach her identity as a Brown and queer woman as “disparate, rather than entangled” (Coda, 2020, p. 123). Much like Khayatt and Iskander (2019) argued, we need to acknowledge how some ‘coming outs’ are “complicated when we take seriously the intersections of race, class, disability, and gender” (p. 6). For some participants, they felt as though their queer identities and sexualities contributed to their label as being “weird French teachers.” In all cases, deviating from what Mizzi (2013) coined as “heteroprofessionalism” complicated queer FSL teachers’ acceptance, inclusion, and belonging in schools.

A final noteworthy dimension of queer FSL teachers’ experience in schools centered on the subversion of cisheteronormativity in language materials and activities. While participants came to this subversion and disruption after a few years teaching, many described the agency they had in creating spaces that embodied and included multiple identities in their classes throughout their careers. Otherwise, as Angela argued in Article 1, if we do not challenge cisheteronormativity, then we exclude “amazing linguistics.” Although many examples in each article show the subtle (and sometimes loud) ways that participants challenge cisheteronormative discourses, their stories show that they still remain silenced outside of their classroom walls. For example, all participants (except Yannick) discussed how queer inclusionary training generally, and in FSL specifically, was non-existent. All discussed the lack of available resources. All discussed how the curriculum left them to their own devices in finding avenues to integrate queer identities. These collective invisibilities feel intentional. Together, findings from this thesis-by-articles explored the various ways in which queer FSL teachers navigate their cisheteronormative discursive regimes. While each article has aimed to show different avenues of queer FSL teachers’ experiences, many ideas and tensions percolate. I discuss these wonderings in the following section.

In the section that follows, I ponder several wonderings about the research findings from the collective thesis articles – with the understanding that I do not possess any specific answers. I pivot to offer implications for theory, methodology, practice, ITE, and policy, as well as offer some direction for future research. I end with limitations of this study and final thoughts.

Wonderings from this thesis

In the following section, I flesh out three wonderings that emerged from this thesis as a means to reflect, contemplate, and question the data – and what follows from the data.

I came to the term ‘wonderings’ after having read sociomaterialist scholars – specifically those in FSL (MacLure, 2013; Smith, 2024; Waterhouse & Arnott, 2016). I frame these wonderings in such a way to conclude this thesis by acknowledging that many more questions, thoughts, and reflections abound. For these wonderings, I first consider how intersecting layers of marginalization impact queer FSL teachers. Second, I explore the unique experiences of Elm, a queer, trans, and nonbinary participant. Third, I reflect on my own positionality as a researcher-participant in this narrative inquiry. I corroborate or contrast these wonderings with findings from my thesis and relevant literature, and, where relevant, nuance and complicate additional lines of inquiry that are produced by these tensions.

Multiple marginalization for queer, trans, and/or nonbinary FSL teachers

Throughout each of the articles in this thesis, intersecting layers of marginalization played a role that shaped each teacher-participants’ experience. I thought deeply about the various layers of marginalization that queer FSL teachers experience as they navigate within their cisheteronormative schooling environments. In what follows, I flesh out three potential and intersecting forces contributing to queer, trans, and/or nonbinary FSL teachers’ multiple marginalizations in schools because of 1) their isolation; 2) their deprofessionalization, and 3) the FSL program structures. Before doing so, I need to acknowledge that many different layers *could* exist (and likely do) outside of these three aforementioned layers because FSL teachers embody intersectional identities that collide with their status as FSL teachers, impacting their experiences in schools altogether (see Crenshaw, 1991; Ortaçtepe Hart, 2025; Paiz & Coda, 2021). Intersectionality is crucial to consider within these lines of marginalization, because they lead to “multiplex ways in which one’s identity and identity positionings create variable spaces of privilege and marginalization” (Paiz, 2021, p. 11).

First layer of marginalization: isolation in FSL

The first layer of marginalization is FSL teachers’ isolation: an area ensconced in FSL literature (e.g., Knouzi & Mady, 2014; Lapkin et al., 2009; Masson, 2018; Masson et al., 2024; Smith, 2024). This layer is not unique to queer FSL teachers specifically – it impacts all FSL

teachers (Arnott et al., 2023). For instance, isolation in FSL occurs because teachers tend to be the only ones teaching the subject in their schools, they zigzag between classes in a cart, and they are not given adequate resources or language materials to teach the subject (Arnott et al., 2019; Jack & Nyman, 2019; Kissau, 2005; Knouzi & Mady, 2014; Smith, 2024). Viewed this way, such isolation for FSL teachers creates a discourse where they possess a “second class status” compared to other subject specialist teachers in their schools (Kissau, 2005, p. 18).

These isolating factors had adverse impacts for queer FSL teachers in this study. Article 1, for example, showed how a vague FSL curriculum left many teachers feeling simultaneously devalued and free to experiment, while also being in disarray about what to teach. With this, I am left wondering if a purposefully vague curriculum (without ample detail and direction) was designed to mirror the realities of FSL teaching (often, without detail or direction). Much like with the FLS curriculum, FSL teachers are often left to their own devices to navigate and understand the terrain (Arnott et al., 2023; Grant, under review) – a daunting task without guidance from mentors or more tenured FSL teachers (Culligan et al., 2023). Without such guidance, feelings of isolation abound, prompting teachers to leave the field (Canadian Parents for French [CPF], 2024; Knouzi & Mady, 2014; Masson, 2018).

Second layer of marginalization: deprofessionalization in FSL

In addition to the landslides of isolation for FSL teachers, many also experience moments of deprofessionalization that contribute to their marginalization in schools (see Masson et al., 2024). Deprofessionalization occurs for FSL teachers when they “lose their sense of agency and control over their work” (Masson et al., 2024, p. 56), and often manifests when their practice and professional judgement are devalued (Lapkin et al., 2006). Throughout this thesis, moments of deprofessionalization were recurrent for many teacher-participants. Yet I feel compelled to return to Angela’s example in Article 2. In it, they illustrate this tension so effortlessly: “There’s sort of some parallels in terms of being queer [and teaching French] ... It’s always on the periphery. I’m an accessory teacher who teaches the extra subject.” This statement in Angela’s narrative probes me to question the double bind of experiencing, on one hand, homophobic and transphobic rhetoric that casts queer teachers to the outskirts of their school communities (Callaghan, 2015; Connell, 2015; Taylor et al., 2016; Tompkins et al., 2019). And on the other hand, sentiments of being viewed solely as “an extra subject” teacher – certainly those left without a classroom, creating all materials from scratch, teaching all students in the building, trying to build an

equitable program on their own, among a growing list of other tasks associated with being an FSL teacher (see Arnott et al., 2023; Masson, 2021). Teacher-participants in this study reported feeling the effects of such deprofessionalization. For example, some stressed that they had to translate materials like inclusive books into French if they wanted access to introduce it to their students (Article 2), that the common way to teach FSL often excludes “amazing linguistics,” including nonbinary students (Article 1), and that they had to justify their rationale for equitable FSL materials to their colleagues and parents (Article 2).

This layer of marginalization adds mounting pressure, work, and emotional labour (Hakeem, 2024) to queer FSL teachers’ workload. It also signals how the paucity of materials generally, and queer inclusive materials specifically, is regarded in FSL: with little attention. Such a dearth of available materials means that queer, trans, and/or nonbinary identities in FSL have the potential of being invisibilized – consistent with what other queer L2 scholars have documented (Moore, 2016; Nelson, 2009; Paiz, 2020). These limited materials also thwart language learning, and as Spiegelman (2022) argued, can decrease motivation and engagement of students. Given that we know FSL to be a “second class” priority in schools (Kissau, 2005), with Angela embodying this “accessory teacher” discourse, I am left questioning if other subjects would also fall victim to this level of deprofessionalization and lack of support in Canadian schools.

I also wonder about deprofessionalization vis-à-vis student interactions. While many queer teacher participants described cultivating strong relationships with their students, this experience was not universal. Indeed, some students refuted queer-inclusive efforts from their queer FSL teachers through disengaging or disregarding their teachers, as Vi described in Article 4. These stories had me thinking about other research findings showing that students generally hold negative attitudes toward learning French and being in FSL classes (see Arnott, 2019). In this way, students’ dissatisfaction with FSL language learning may make it all the more challenging for queer FSL teachers to fully bring themselves and their queer identities to the classroom.

Similar to how Hakeem (2023) impugned the myriad ways students become defensive around questions of nonnormative gender and sexuality in FSL, I am left thinking how teaching about (or through) our queer identities in FSL might contribute to our own deprofessionalization in the field. Put differently, if students fracture the dynamic of FSL classes because of

homophobic or transphobic rhetoric, I wonder how feasible it would be for queer FSL teachers to navigate through these currents. Contextually, I began thinking about how Alex discussed wanting to distance themselves from teaching Core French (CF) altogether, although they enjoyed learning the subject as a student because of the ample behaviour issues nested within CF. Similarly, Angela described feeling mired by the behaviour issues and lack of motivation from CF students, which culminated in them declining sought-after contracted positions in their board because they were CF-specific. It is interesting that both teachers – and myself included – felt the difficulties associated with feelings of deprofessionalization while teaching CF specifically. Although I did not go into significant detail of Angela's or Alex's CF teaching experience in this thesis, parsing through these nuances may be promising grounds to explore why queer FSL teachers experience resistance in CF in particular.

Third layer of marginalization: program structures in FSL

As queer FSL teachers have experienced marginalization in terms of their isolation and feelings of deprofessionalization, I also noticed their marginalization because of FSL programs and its structures. Structural barriers have been documented in the literature, such as needing to follow curriculum documents that reify whiteness (Carroll et al., 2025; Kunnas, 2023), using pedagogical activities that reproduce and maintain the colonial French language (Masson et al., 2022; Masson & Van Geel, 2023), coupled within a lack of time to collaborate and discuss (Culligan et al., 2023). Collectively, these studies show that these structural barriers culminate in fueling the 'status quo' in French (Grant, under review; Hakeem, 2024). As queer FSL teachers are often bound by these structural issues, certainly as they began their careers, in this study it appeared as though they felt all-consuming. Some of these ideas emerged in Article 4 as teacher-participants thought of advice they would give to beginning teachers. For example, Yannick elaborated that, despite the dearth of resources, increased time in the field had led him to find and create alternative – but equitable – resources to use. While this in and of itself shows promise for mid- to late-career queer FSL teachers, I cannot help but think why some of these areas of concern cannot be remedied for early-career teachers – especially given the first five years are critical for retention (Arnott et al., 2023; CPF, 2024). This particular issue pushed my thinking to consider whether this systemic issue is tied to larger issues of coloniality, capitalism, and neoliberalism. For example, these systems aim to oppress, maintain, and uphold the status quo (Kumashiro, 2002). Thus, it becomes easier for early-career teachers to follow through what

has been traditionally done (see Article 1; Paiz, 2019), because deviating from the system creates additional labour for all teachers, but especially beginning teachers. With this, the queer teacher participants in this study were propped against overlapping and intersecting layers of marginalization (e.g., isolation, deprofessionalization, and program structures) that play a role in shaping their experiences in schools.

A trans and nonbinary perspective in FSL: What does this bring to the field?

As I grappled with the myriad of marginalizing forces at play in queer FSL teachers' lives and experiences at school, I could not help but return to Elm, a trans and nonbinary participant – and now, friend – in this study. Elm is the only trans/nonbinary participant in this doctoral thesis, and with that, I understand that I cannot generalize their experiences as a trans/nonbinary FSL teacher across the board of trans and nonbinary FSL teachers in Canada and worldwide. Yet, I was still intrigued about how their movement throughout their school as an FSL teacher was unique or differed from other participants in this study. As I reread and relistened to my and Elm's conversation, and followed up through discussions, some differences emerged. Indeed, throughout Elm's narratives, it became clear that their interest in FSL teaching was rooted in equipping students with the tools to speak more authentically with others. This was evident in Articles 1 and 3 in particular, certainly where they argued for other teachers to “do right by nonbinary students” by having a set of knowledge of this language for their students. Keeping the focus on language, a divergence of Elm's experience to that of other queer teacher participants in this dissertation is linked to their linguistic journey with learning French. Consider how, in one of our conversations, Elm described how ‘coming out’ as gay did not obfuscate their access to the language. However, they stressed that ‘coming out’ as trans and nonbinary exacerbated the need to better understand their gender. They argued, “being in Francophone spaces is what pushed me over the edge of needing to address my gender. I started to experience intense gender dysphoria with *les accords féminins*” (Elm, interview #1). In this vein, French became both a limiting and liberating mechanism: pushing them to think through what the language meant for them and how to use it in ways that reflected their fluid identity. While other scholars have indicated the importance of using gender inclusive and trans affirming language (Knisely & Paiz, 2021; Kosnick, 2022), especially to validate and honour students' identities

(Spiegelman, 2022), this example paints a clear picture of the power that language holds for trans, gender nonconforming, and/or nonbinary people specifically (Knisely, 2023).

After rereading transcripts and relistening to our interviews, some key ideas stuck with me. Although all queer FSL teachers in this study consistently ‘come out,’ it appeared as though Elm’s ‘coming outs’ occurred daily, weekly, and monthly. In their narratives, they described the constant misgendering they experience by all in their schools. Such misgenderings vary in magnitude: in emails, over the Public Address (PA) system, in oral conversations with students, colleagues, parents, etc. However, they all feel impactful. In these moments, Elm is caught having to (re)explain themselves to others, adding additional material and emotional labour to their overflowing workloads. Taking a Butlerian (1990) view of their gender performances here, Elm appears to be upending norms related to performing typical “masculinity” and “femininity,” and in doing so, “disrupts the fragile norms that hold cisgender heteronormativity in place” (Brett, 2024, p. 4). This troubling of ‘traditional’ gender performance sometimes culminates in tension that runs much deeper than misgendering. For example, as evident in Article 3, Elm disclosed that it is common for students to declare to them how “it’s haram to be trans.” While we did not dive into the roots of these comments thoroughly in this thesis, I am left questioning and wondering how these transphobic comments sit with Elm – impacting every part of their life in schools.

Finally, in thinking through how their experiences differed from some others in this study, I zeroed in on how Elm’s gender expression as a nonbinary, masculine-presenting person demands they teach about myriad gender inclusive language. For example, they *have to* teach their students about gender inclusive and nonbinary language – not as a supporting tool to bolster equitable interactions – but because their students need such language to interact with them as their teacher. That is, learning about the pronoun *iel* in French, for instance, cannot solely appear once as a catalyst for inclusion; instead, students need to learn it, understand it, and use it with Elm in all interactions.

Me as researcher-participant in this narrative inquiry

For this narrative inquiry study, I was a participant alongside my participants. Just as Clandinin (2013) earlier contended, narrative inquiries need to begin with an inward look – unravelling who we are as people within an inquiry. She maintained that “without an

understanding of what brings each of us to our research puzzles, we run the risk of entering into relationships without a sense of what stories we are living and telling in the research relationship” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 36). As such, I wanted to be implicated in a plethora of ways since this research topic was ontologically and axiologically driven. I felt the need to ‘walk in my participants’ footsteps, because as a researcher, I “do not stand metaphorically outside the inquiry but [am] part of the phenomenon under study” (2013, p. 24). However, from a research perspective, I was met with some tensions with the idea of layering my story with and alongside the stories of my participants. Put differently, I wanted to ensure I engaged deeply with my participants – asking them questions, following up meaningfully, listening carefully – which clashed with how I understood adding pieces of my stories alongside my participants’. Indeed, I thought by adding my own stories to theirs, I would drown my voice amid their narratives. This led me to think of the work of Clandinin (2013) as she argued,

we intentionally come into relation with participants, and we, as inquirers, think narratively about our experiences, about participants’ experiences, and about those experiences that become visible as we live alongside, telling our own stories, hearing another’s stories, moving in and acting in the places – the contexts – in which our lives meet. (p. 23)

To remedy this, I decided to become a participant in this study as well. I was able to do so, thanks to my colleague and friend, Dr. Cameron W. Smith, who interviewed me using the same protocols as those I used to interview the other participants in this study. As I took part in the interviews, I was pushed and questioned to think more deeply about the ways in which my queer identity moved throughout the various schools in which I have worked. I remember articulating some of the feelings that were stirring in my head, but that I had not said aloud. For example, I described moments where my face was left in a red flush after hearing homophobic slurs during my practicum placements – and doing nothing about it. Or, discussing experiences that prompted me to take a break from teaching FSL in lieu of other subjects. Ultimately, taking part in this narrative inquiry as a participant felt empowering (Callaghan, 2018). As I earlier mentioned, I feared that my own voice would figuratively drown theirs. Yet as the inquiry progressed with each teacher-participant, I came to realize that my stories often extended theirs – percolating ideas in their minds. Through these conversations, I became increasingly aware of how Johnson and Golombek (2002) describe narrative inquiries as professional development. To borrow, they highlight that narrative affords “increasing control over their thoughts and actions; grants their

experiences enriched, deepened meaning, and enables them to be more thoughtful and mindful of their work” (Johnson & Golombek, 2002, p. 6-7). This experience also afforded space to extend my stories to probe my teacher-participants on how (and if) their stories collided with mine. In sum, acting as a researcher-participant strengthened my connection to my participants, because it offered space to reflect in similar ways to them – without occluding their stories of experience in their narratives.

Moreover, as a researcher, I felt tension about being the main author on my teacher-participants’ stories. Research has shown that marginalized voices are absent in research generally, and especially in FSL (Callaghan, 2018; Hakeem, 2024). With this, it felt disingenuous to write, present, and publish my participants’ stories with *only* my name. I felt a strong need to do more to (re)present their stories, prompting me to ask them to collaborate in different ways. Three participants responded with the hopes of collaboration – often taking forms of running professional development sessions. However, a key response came from Elm, whose drive to co-write their story emanated quickly from our conversations, leading to Article 3. I wondered, and still do wonder, about the optics of co-authoring portions of a thesis, certainly this deviates from what felt like a “traditional” thesis. This tension as a researcher, while outside of the realm of teaching and being a queer FSL teacher specifically, responds to the overarching research question by shedding light on how I navigate within these cisheteronormative regimes: through collaboration and community.

What is more, this collaboration, especially in Article 3, allowed Elm and I to nuance our stories with additional lines of detail. For example, in our general conversations, we had both discussed feeling under surveillance at times in our teaching (Foucault, 1978). This idea transcended our initial conversations and bled into our collaborative writing sessions. Here, I learned that Elm was cautioned by stakeholders *not* to write (and publish) about their experiences for fear that it would dampen the optics of their school board. This brief example shows one way that queer FSL teachers can be silenced, while also underscoring the power narratives hold. Indeed, Elm’s narrative has the potential to cast a light on the triumphs and pitfalls they experience as a queer, trans, nonbinary FSL teacher. These stories, generated thanks to narrative inquiry, can foster empathy for those who read their story. This is an important consideration, because empathy has the potential to create change; like Callaghan (2012) suggests, these narratives “have the power to invite readers to reflect on moral complexities in a much more

transformative way than traditional forms of argumentation” (p. 79). My hope is that Elm can share their name on Article 3 and let others understand some of the impacts that transphobia has in shaping their experiences as an FSL teacher.

While I see the benefits of collaborating this deeply with a participant, I am left thinking pragmatically about how such collaboration may (or could?) transpire with all participants. To put into context, Article 3 required roughly three additional Zoom sessions that all exceeded an hour, many pages of back-and-forth Google Docs of thinking, and even more pages filled with (figurative) red ink left behind from each other’s edits and revisions. I say this to highlight that while this level of collaboration in the context of a narrative inquiry yielded richer and nuanced layers of Elm’s experience, it took an abundance of time that some participants (and myself as the researcher) may not always have.

Implications

In the following sections, I outline the implications this thesis holds theoretically for queer theories, methodologically for narrative inquiry, pedagogically for (FSL) practice and policy, and empirically for future research.

Implications for queer theories

In the field of FSL education and research, relatively little attention has been paid to questions of gender, sexuality, social justice, or antioppression (Arnott et al., 2019; Grant & Smith, 2025; Hakeem, 2024). Yet these questions are intimately connected to *all* FSL teachers and their practice. Employing queer theories in the context of FSL research, then, has three implications, both for this thesis, but also for the field of FSL more broadly. First, queer theories have provided a lens to interrogate the traditional and ‘common sense’ ways of teaching and learning French. Applying queer theories to analyze teacher-participants’ experiences in schools revealed the myriad of ways that cisheteronormativity invisibly slid into students’ thinking, especially regarding their understandings of gender and sexuality in an essentialist framing. Considering this data through the lens of queer theories expands possibilities for focusing FSL teaching on more than ‘traditional’ linguistic cognitive perspectives (Griffiths, 2022) or French language form and literacy strategies (Arnott et al., 2019). For example, queer theories affords space to trouble our conceptualizations of ‘form,’ asking instead ‘form for what?’ or ‘form for

who?’ A queer theoretical perspective asks how we are reproducing a gender binary in FSL teaching, questions which voices and perspectives we are privileging, and investigates how we align with – or subvert – cisheteronormativity in the FSL context.

Second, in reference to the ongoing FSL teacher shortage in Canada (Arnott et al., 2023; Lapkin et al., 2009; Obadia & Martin, 1995), queer theories can start to ask new questions about old problems. Research has documented, for example, how FSL teachers are typically treated as second class citizens in their schools (Kissau, 2005), where they are devalued, underappreciated, and relegated to the sidelines (Knouzi & Mady, 2014; Masson, 2018). Instead of focusing on the outcomes of this mistreatment, I suggest applying queer theories to ask *why* queer FSL teachers are mistreated: is it through the constant surveillance (Foucault, 1978) on behalf of other colleagues, administrators, or parents? Is it through their (lack of) power to exercise agency over what or how to teach? Is it through their systematic erasure from curriculum documents, and subsequently, materials, textbooks, and classroom discourse? Is it through self-concealing parts of their identities to ‘fit in’? (Endo et al., 2010). Queer theories can be used to illuminate and impugn systemic issues that pervade FSL research and education alike, thereby shifting the focus from individual teacher behaviour to broader structural inequalities.

Third, given that queer theories aim to disrupt normativities (Coda, 2018; Coda et al., 2024), the implications of queer theories in FSL education hold promising ground for all teachers to question their pedagogical practices. As teacher-participants in this thesis argued, FSL teaching has remained steadily ‘traditional,’ with colleagues aspiring to teach traditional novels, use black line masters, as well as other dated materials, as mapped out in Article 1. Yet understanding these perspectives via queer theories casts a light on why maintaining the ‘status quo’ is sometimes a priority for certain teachers. Questioning our practice is thus critical for two reasons. One, research has shown that students in CF specifically are disengaged, and as such, embody negative attitudes toward learning – and being – in FSL spaces. Such negativity can have detrimental impacts on all stakeholders implicated, but especially teachers. Applying queer theories to FSL can encourage teachers to approach their work differently: using queer pedagogies (Nemi-Neto, 2018) or queer inquiry (Nelson, 2006), for example, like teacher-participants articulated in Article 1. These perspectives can encourage us to build in more linguistic and culturally diverse classrooms (see Coda, 2023) which can invite learners to engage more meaningfully with FSL. They can also invite a troubling of typical methodological

approaches, like moving from textbooks or grammar sheets to using methods such as Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS), like Cahnmann-Taylor and Coda (2019) delineate. Second, applying queer theories to FSL education has the potential for creating spaces that embody inclusion, destabilize our traditional assumptions, encourage intersectional approaches, and allow students to explore their “imaginary words” (Pavlenko, 2004, p. 55; see also Coda, 2018; Coda et al., 2024; Paiz & Coda, 2021). What is more, building these spaces can be – and should be – done by all FSL teachers to contribute to creating more equitable classrooms.

Implications for narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry offers several implications for educational research, specifically as it pertains to spotlighting and amplifying marginalized voices (Caine et al., 2018; Callaghan, 2018; Saleh et al., 2014). First, given the amount of time spent together, trust and relationality among participants and researchers are created (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Such trust is an important implication because it allows for vulnerability to be harnessed and embraced, which leads to producing meaningful stories. These stories have the potential to be key players in building empathy for others (Callaghan, 2012), especially in FSL who may be unaware of the challenges associated with being a queer FSL teacher in schools.

Second, narrative inquiries can foster deep self-reflection about our practices and pedagogical approaches as teachers that can culminate in change (Johnson & Golombek, 2002). For example, as Angela described some of their FSL lessons and interactions with students, I remember they stopped, and shifted to describe an ‘aha’ moment: they had been (re)producing cisheteronormative discourses through their Valentine’s day lessons. Through moments of sharing our lived experiences as teachers in the classroom, narrative inquiries invite us to reflect on our practice and to reflect on ways we can improve it (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

When writing and engaging in a narrative inquiry study, plenty of rich data will be generated. These endless stories and experiences are invaluable. However, I do need to acknowledge that it can be daunting to have 20 pages of interview transcript per person, multiplied by three. With such extensive data, I agree with Cao (2023) that the planning process is key, especially with thesis-by-article formats of dissertations. Like Cao, I created an outline

and map of what each of the articles (which turned out to be four) could contain in terms of data, what relevant literature was needed, and to which journal it could be submitted.

In addition, if I were to redo this narrative inquiry, I would spend time co-analyzing with each of my participants, if they were willing. Barkhuizen (2022) reminds me that participant involvement for narrative inquiry is already plentiful. However, I think collaborating on ways we see key themes emerge from their stories may yield richer data. I recommend this, for example, because when I sent crafted narratives to each teacher-participant, few made any changes. At the time, I thought this may have been due to my meticulous listening and understanding of their stories – which may hold true. Yet I wonder if teacher-participants held a greater role in creating their narratives, what outcomes may have been different – if at all.

Finally, I understand narrative inquiries have value in creating a platform for marginalized voices to be heard (Caine et al., 2018). I also understand, through this dissertation, and other research (Arnott et al., 2023; Knouzi & Mady, 2014) that FSL teachers in general are isolated. I would have liked to bring all teacher-participants together to build a community – where they could have all leaned on each other and collaborated more fruitfully into their careers. While I think this collaborative network could have been beneficial for many, I am also reminded of participants in this study who stressed the importance of their anonymity. Perhaps, then, being part of such a collective may not have been possible for these teacher-participants.

Implications for pedagogy and curriculum policy

Practice. Findings from this thesis offer practical implications for FSL education. For example, Article 1 indicated that the Ontario FSL curriculum lacks prescriptive teaching points on queer identities. While some scholars have examined the lack of criticality to questions of race, gender, sexuality, and ability (Carroll et al., 2025; Grant et al., 2024; Kunnas, 2023), this study offers an exploration of how queer FSL teachers navigate this vague curriculum to their benefit – exercising agency over the document to center student interest and bring in multiple identities and perspectives. Such direct explanations and modelling of how to navigate this vague curriculum is critical if our goal is to have pre-service and early-career FSL teachers question the document, ensuring it reflects the multiple identities of students in their classroom. Indeed, as Article 1 revealed, it was over the course of several years of FSL teaching where FSL teachers

began to manipulate and work with the vagueness of the curriculum to their advantage. To reiterate, these discussions need to be held as FSL teachers begin their careers.

Moreover, calls in queer L2 scholarship have attested to the need for more practical, tested, and useful ways that L2 teachers can ‘queer’ their practice (Neto-Nemi, 2018; Paiz, 2020). This study responds to these calls – offering in-depth explorations and descriptions of how teachers can question and adapt their pre-existing materials to challenge the status quo and mainstream questions related to gender and sexuality, while bringing in additional perspectives thanks to social media applications, like TikTok.

Practically speaking, the implications from the findings show the critical need to embed and integrate gender inclusive and nonbinary language in French classes (see also Lebrech et al., 2024). Teacher-participants from this study attested to the overwhelming default of the male/female binary in French, which eschews the perspectives of multiple student identities. Introducing, using, and including different pronouns and noun or adjective agreements is paramount if we hope to increase intercultural competences among students and provide accessible language learning experiences (see Knisely, 2023). Indeed, just as Elm argued, if we eschew these practical identity-affirming entry points in our classrooms, we will perpetuate cisheteronormative discourses that fuel discrimination.

Initial teacher education. Findings from this study have also documented the perceived lack of focus toward inclusive education in FSL ITE programs broadly, and to queer perspectives specifically. A contribution of this research is the evidence-based call to embed discussions of gender and sexuality into FSL methodology courses. Other research has shown that these courses in particular tend to focus on pragmatics of the language, linguistic cognitivist perspectives, teaching strategies, and course management, among others (Popovich, 2022). However, teaching is inherently connected to our identities (Masson et al., 2024); and yet, FSL methodology courses frequently exclude such critical topics. In response, this research suggests that collaborative networks for queer FSL teachers in ITE programs could be useful in filling this gap, as they can offer queer FSL teachers a sense of community with/in their respective communities and to carry through in their practices. This is particularly important if we contextualize this in the chronic FSL teacher shortage in Canada (Arnott et al., 2023) where “socially marginalized teachers [like participants in this study] are at greater risk of deprofessionalization and departure from the profession” (Masson et al., 2024, p. 58). We need to begin thinking systematically about the

ways in which we can support the whole FSL teacher, including their marginalized identity markers in schools, if we hope to retain them in the field.

In keeping, findings from this thesis can help trans(in)form initial teacher education for FSL education specifically in Canada – and beyond in L2 education generally. Increasingly, tenets of social justice, anti-oppressive education, and equity are being enmeshed within ITE programs to provide teacher candidates (TCs) the opportunity to recognize systemic oppression and question the links between power and language (Anyia, 2018; Carroll, 2021; Carroll et al., 2025; Masson et al., 2024). As Carroll et al. (2025) posited, ITE programs need to push the boundaries of critical language awareness, instead striving toward critical language action in an effort to challenge hegemonic discourses that perpetuate status-quo ideologies in society that often fuel discrimination (Sensory & DiAngelo, 2017). Narratives and specific findings from this study can help centre action. For example, FSL ITE programs can have TCs reflect on their memories of learning French: learning grammar, reading stories, completing role-play activities, conjugating verbs, etc., may appear. Against the backdrop of their own learning, TCs can read narratives from this study to show how they may trouble the way they teach French – collectively imagine new possibilities for learning and doing French in ways that honour and validate marginalized identities. In addition, TCs can examine commonly used materials – such as the FSL curriculum in any context – and ask questions, such as ‘What types of information or activities are common?’ ‘Whose voices are upheld? Whose may be excluded?’ ‘Do these activities centre the voices of Black, Indigenous, People of Colour?’ ‘Does the writing and explanation of activities invite a troubling of cisheteronormativity or do they reify normativities of language usage?’ Alongside these questions, TCs can learn to become advocates under the guise of the vague FSL curriculum, as seen in Article 1.

In a similar vein, Article 2 could be used within FSL ITE programs as a scenario-based activity. For example, TCs could read some brief excerpts of queer, trans, and/or nonbinary FSL teachers’ experiences with students, colleagues, and parents. Collectively, TCs and instructors could walk through how these situations could have been mitigated, could think of certain policies in place to support queer teachers, and how TCs might respond if similar events transpire in the future. Article 3 offers accounts of how activism and resistance emerge in FSL from the perspective of two queer and/or trans and nonbinary FSL teachers. TCs could reflect, critique, and question the article, finding places where further activism could occur within their

local school contexts. Importantly, this activism can be viewed and taken up by all FSL teachers – queer or otherwise – to become allies in the FSL space and to promote critically-oriented classrooms. Following these scenarios, TCs in ITE programs can apply insights from Article 1 about ways in which they may approach adopting a queer pedagogical framework in their classrooms. What remains to be discussed within these environments are ways to respond to resistance and hate in response to equity-orientated approaches to FSL teaching.

Policy. Findings in this study showed that most queer FSL teachers characterized their students as being allies and supportive to their queer identities. In contrast, other educational stakeholders (e.g., colleagues, parents, and administrators) tended to interfere with queer FSL teachers' inclusion and feelings of belonging in schools. Research on opposition to queer inclusion in Canadian schools also highlighted how fear from parents and administration obfuscated teachers' readiness to include queer perspectives in the classroom (see Campbell et al., 2021; Wright & Smith, 2015). With this, policy shifts need to be implemented to thwart parental or administrative opposition. Policies such as Sexual Orientation Gender Identity (SOGI) have proven to reduce discrimination and harassment and to ameliorate the general sense of wellbeing of queer people altogether in British Columbia (see James, 2019). Implementing these policies, like SOGI, are needed in Ontarian schooling contexts to combat homophobia and transphobia, teaching students about various genders and sexualities that exist. This is especially important given the increased levels of hate toward queer and trans people, paired with emboldened guardians and caregivers attempting to silence and invisibilize queer people. At the same time, I have to acknowledge that some scholars with living experience of SOGI have perceived such policies as performative (see Hakeem, 2023). Thus, finding meaningful ways to critically engage with questions of social justice, gender identity, and sexuality are urgent (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Implications for future research

This doctoral study is one of the first pieces of scholarship to document queer, trans, and/or nonbinary FSL teachers' experiences in their respective schools in Canada. Findings showed that teacher-participants had little time to discuss or work through these feelings before – and in doing so, revealed a perennial appreciation for our time together. Future research should endeavour to find safe and affirming spaces where queer and allied FSL teachers can come

together to collaborate, digest, and unpack their experiences in the classroom. Indeed, Article 4 exemplified this urgency, with teacher-participants advocating for mentorship and/or collaborative networks with other queer teachers to support their thriving and surviving as FSL teachers in schools.

Following similar logic as above, much of the research presented across these articles documents teacher-participants' frustrations in their roles, often due to meager resources and lacklustre training, as well as adverse interactions with colleagues, administrators, and parents. While these stories of experience need to be documented to begin to make actionable change within the profession, future research should centre queer joy within FSL classrooms. Queer joy needs to be brought to the fore to "allow us to feel more alive and connected to our personal capacities and power" (Wright & Burkholder, 2025, p. 757) that often feel dismissed and disconnected from our lived experiences as queer FSL teachers. Although not fleshed out in this thesis, there were certainly moments of queer joy that queer FSL teachers experienced. For example, while there were some tensions in Article 1 around the vagueness of the FSL curriculum – leading to an overall disarray of what and who to include – some queer FSL teachers capitalized on this vagueness. In doing so, they engaged in experimentation, created lessons that honoured multiple identities and challenged students' (and their own!) thinking about normativities in FSL. As we delineated in Article 4, this type of experimentation and teacher-authenticity played a role in creating deeper bonds with students, which also act as possible moments of queer joy. Some scholars have already begun this work in and outside of L2 education, although they do not name it so forthcomingly (see Brett, 2024; Lundin, 2024; Moore et al., 2024). To capture queer joy in FSL education, researchers could employ (auto)ethnographic methodologies to follow queer, trans, and/or nonbinary FSL teachers' in the field over the longer term, collaboratively documenting where queer joy emerges and how to harness it.

Third, this study relied on semi-structured interviews as a primary data collection method, which is common within narrative inquiry (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). Although these interviews generated rich and elaborate stories of participants' experiences, coupling these semi-structured interviews alongside other data collection means, like letters, autobiographical writing, or classroom observations as field texts could be promising grounds for future research. For example, since Article 1 characterized queer FSL teachers'

usage of a queer pedagogical approach, future research could extend this and observe teachers as they enact such an approach.

Finally, a constellation of scholars have advocated and argued for increased queer visibility, resources, and support webbed throughout ITE programs (Boland, 2021; Grant & Smith, 2025; Hakeem, 2024; James, 2019; Kitchen & Bellini, 2012; Masson et al., 2024; Nelson, 2009; Ulla & Paiz, 2023, 2024). In the spirit of responding to such calls with concrete avenues, future research should investigate FSL methodology courses in ITE programs, first conducting a “lay of the land” search of what occurs within these courses, similar to Paiz’s earlier work (2015) with materials, and Arnott et al. (2023) work with FSL courses in ITE. Then, researchers should work in partnership with FSL methodology course instructors on different paths to implement queer pedagogies, inquiries (Nelson, 2006), and gender-just language education (Knisely, 2022) – as well as to trouble our cisheteronormative thinking in FSL. This collaborative undertaking should not be left to a ‘one day’ workshop for instructors. Instead, researchers should construct lessons, materials, and activities in tandem with instructors. Together, researchers and instructors alike can also model for pre-service teachers the ways in which we need to constantly adapt and update our practice to reflect the needs of our students.

Limitations

While this study had success in examining the experiences of queer, trans, and/or nonbinary FSL teachers, there were nonetheless limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, a major limitation lies in the oversaturation of white participants – myself included. Ten of twelve participants identified as white. Much of the (limited) research on the experiences of queer L2 teachers has also raised concern over this (see Coda, 2020; Hakeem, 2024), because whiteness affords privilege to intersecting identity markers. Since the white perspective was widespread throughout this thesis and its articles, it is highly likely that there are blind spots missed or unaccounted for when thinking about the experiences of queer FSL teachers. In keeping, learning about the experiences of other racialized and queer FSL teachers is paramount to glean insight into different complexities these teachers encounter.

A second limitation of this study aligns similarly around participant demographics, focusing on geographical context. Most participants were from urban cities and areas, whereas only two were from more rural areas. Pivoting direction to focus more acutely on the experiences

of rural and queer FSL teachers is needed. Indeed, this research is needed in part because of the dearth of research at this nexus and in part because different overlapping and interlocking factors, such as race, class, socioeconomic status and religion of people in rural areas play a role in their safety and acceptance within the wider society ((Abrahamson, 2020; Whitten & Azano, 2025).

A third limitation – and perhaps more of a tension – lies in the thesis-by-articles format. While I was drawn to the option of completing sequenced and interconnected articles to eventually publish, it dawned on me throughout the writing process that narrative inquiries, in general, tended to be longer as they embody and sketch out participants’ experiences which do not always blend well with strict journal article word counts. This tension came to light when I first submitted one of the articles in this thesis for publication. Here, reviewers had initial concerns that if I reduced the word count, then it would read more as a thematic analysis, and in doing so, distance itself from the ideological roots of narrative inquiry. To mitigate, my co-author and I discussed sections of the paper to remove and save for a different paper in order to elaborate on other narratives already established within the paper.

In the same vein, completing a thesis-by-articles meant that many stories and experiences did not make it into the final thesis. On one hand, I felt internal tension because I wanted to include all of my teacher-participants’ stories: they had given up so much of their time, walking me through many different stories of their lives and careers – both personal and professional. It felt disingenuous to exclude them. On the other hand, I am reminded of the words and thinking of narrative inquirers, like Clandinin and Connelly (2000), who assert that narratives are never truly over. This thinking brings me some relief because it means I have more time to reread, relisten, relive, and re-engage with participants’ stories beyond this doctoral study. In fact, I am currently in the process of writing an additional article focusing on participants' discursive embodiments of inclusive education as queer, trans, and/or nonbinary FSL teachers (Grant, forthcoming). I end with this to illustrate how, despite not all stories entering the fore of this particular thesis, our stories are always in the midst.

In closing, I hope to continue to work in tandem with others on ways we can counter cisheteronormative discourses in our language classrooms, striving to create gender-just classrooms (Knisely, 2022; Knisely & Paiz, 2021). In doing so, we equip all of our students with

the tools to access equitable, inclusive, and authentic language. As I conclude this thesis journey, conversations with Elm ricochet in my mind on the importance of this work, and the important role that hope plays in research of this kind:

I think maybe five years ago, it still felt like things were moving in a good, and a generally hopeful direction...and now things just feel really dark. But I need to have hope. Hope for a better world. Hope for a better tomorrow. Hope for a better place to come.

It is my hope that I can continue to embody Elm's words beyond the scope of this thesis journey, and instill hope for the future of (queer) FSL teaching, learning, and research.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Certificate of Ethics Approval

Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number

S-11-23-9552

Titre du projet / Project Title

From the margins to the frontlines: A narrative inquiry into the experiences of queer French as a Second Language teachers in Ontario

Type de projet / Project Type

Thèse de doctorat / Doctoral thesis

Statut du projet / Project Status

Approuvé / Approved

Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

20/11/2023

Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

19/11/2024

Équipe de recherche / Research Team

Chercheur / Researcher

Affiliation

Role

Robert Michael GRANT

Faculté d'éducation / Faculty of Education

Chercheur Principal / Principal Investigator

Stephanie ARNOTT

Faculté d'éducation / Faculty of Education

Superviseur / Supervisor

Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments

Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche (CÉR) de l'Université d'Ottawa, opérant conformément à l'*Énoncé de politique des Trois conseils* (2014) et toutes autres lois et tous règlements applicables, a examiné et approuvé la demande d'éthique du projet de recherche ci-nommé.

L'approbation est valide pour la durée indiquée plus haut et est sujette aux conditions énumérées dans la section intitulée « Conditions Spéciales ou Commentaires ». Le formulaire « Renouvellement ou Fermeture de Projet » doit être complété quatre semaines avant la date d'échéance indiquée ci-haut afin de demander un renouvellement de cette approbation éthique ou afin de fermer le dossier.

Toutes modifications apportées au projet doivent être approuvées par le CÉR avant leur mise en place, sauf si le participant doit être retiré en raison d'un danger immédiat ou s'il s'agit d'un changement ayant trait à des éléments administratifs ou logistiques du projet. Les chercheurs doivent aviser le CÉR dans les plus brefs délais de tout changement pouvant augmenter le niveau de risque aux participants ou pouvant affecter considérablement le déroulement du projet, rapporter tout événement imprévu ou indésirable et soumettre toute nouvelle information pouvant nuire à la conduite du projet ou à la sécurité des participants.

The University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, which operates in accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (2014) and other applicable laws and regulations, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above-named research project.

Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and is subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions or Comments". The "Renewal/Project Closure" form must be completed four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval or closure of the file.

Any changes made to the project must be approved by the REB before being implemented, except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) only pertain to administrative or logistical components of the project. Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes that increase the risk to participant(s), any changes that considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project or the safety of the participant(s).

Riana MARCOTTE

Responsable d'éthique en recherche / Protocol Officer

Pour/For **Barbara GRAVES** Président(e) du/ Chair of the **Comité d'éthique de la recherche en sciences sociales et humanités / Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board**

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Appendix B: Participants' narratives

Alex

Alex is a queer FSL teacher, teaching both in Core and Immersion programs in a rural school in British Columbia. Perhaps not obvious at the time, one factor that shaped Alex's interest in becoming a French teacher is because of their role model teacher, who also happened to be queer. Alex shares how "I mean, I hadn't enjoyed a French class for the French until I had her as a teacher. And definitely the way I teach *Sciences humaines* is very based on like, her teaching style and like doing it through theme and even the I came to teaching Français langue and Core French." Alex's queer role model French teacher exposed them to different social justice or diverse perspectives, which worked to strengthen his learning and thinking, and ultimately interest in the subject. This teacher became a powerful influence, as Alex reflects: "I got to see an adult who very clearly like most teachers has a pretty left leaning bend, like approaching these people with respect and kindness and a desire to education."

Tracing their steps throughout their undergrad and initial teacher education (ITE) program, Alex shares how they were already open with their sexuality and gender expression. For instance, they elaborate and says "by that time I'd been in a relationship with my then partner for 4 years, so most of university, and like, I'd had some queer French profs in university" which made it easy for Alex to chat about and dive deep in exploring queer-related topics, like on his trip abroad to Greece. During this time, Alex found community with like-minded peers, noting "I definitely clustered toward the queers and the queer affiliated in my cohort." It was around their ITE time, however, that Alex shared how thinking around his gender identity and expression were shifting. They share that "so many people [were using] like nonbinary pronouns that I'm like, you know what? Yeah, that's probably more the way I identify. I played with Barbies when I was a kid. Like I don't really identify with this traditional masculinity." Because of Alex's previous experiences (both professionally and academically), they didn't need a ton of explicit training on queer issues and perspectives in education. For example, when discussing whether their ITE program trained them against anti-homophobia or anti-trans rhetoric, Alex shares that "I don't think it necessarily prepared me to address it on that level, but it definitely prepared me to address it in the classroom, even if it wasn't explicitly taught to me." Diving deeper, it seems

like it might not have been explicitly taught to Alex because of their experiences in schools with great role models, like their queer FSL teacher.

One of the factors that shaped Alex's becoming a queer French teacher was that they didn't "want kids to not have a like queer adult around. And like, not one who's shoving it in their faces ... but just existing and not hiding it." Alex's presence in the school and classroom is a way of showcasing to his students that queer people exist – and as they share – always have. Alex gets to leverage his queerness and build space for all students, and particularly those who identify with the community. As Alex explains their approach, "being out and open with my students is helping them to see, just like manipulation in the media, like ways that they are 'learned' to do things by their environment, their peers, by their families."

Through discussing Alex's science humaine and français langue courses and assignments, Alex shares how their main goal with queer pedagogy and queer infusion isn't necessarily (or always) to embed queer representation or topics so forthcomingly. Instead, Alex shares how their approach is rooted in getting students to understand different perspectives that people have, explaining "I'm trying to get them to see things from an 'othered' perspective." He says "I think for me it's like encouraging them to go and find other perspectives." To do so, they "come at it from a perspective of the dominant narrative in anything that exists for a reason and questioning that dominant narrative, and so like, when I am telling them that when we're working on our like big 6 curricular competency goals of like, ethical judgment, perspective, I will use stories from my own life." Alex describes a story where he discusses nuclear families and how they were developed with his students as an example to show them how societies have the power to shape what we deem as 'normal' or not. Such pedagogical approaches work well for Alex, too. For example, he shares a few stories about how students are always eager to be in his classroom during lunch, and even how his principal described him as the "the most popular teacher in the school."

Part and parcel of the reasons Alex is adorned is because of the climate that they create intentionally with – and for – their students. While doing his practicum, he reflected on an experience he had introducing and inviting pronoun sharing. He noted: "And I remember going around the circle, and one of the kids like wanted to use they/them pronouns, and that was the first time my mentor teacher had been aware of that, because, like, they hadn't spoken up about it at all to him. And then they saw that, and so that like really

solidified for me like, even if it can feel a little awkward, especially being back in arm doing it, like it enables those kids that want to do that to do that.”

Alex delves into what it's like navigating and teaching as a queer teacher, from parent backlashes to student successes. In terms of navigating queer FSL teaching in particular, though, Alex elaborates on how cisheteronormative the teaching materials are. This cisheteronormativity – and as Alex later shares – socionormativity means that they're then in charge of "basically just making things myself," since all of the premade resources don't stem from an equity-focused place. As Alex notes, "there's a reason that I feel like I've made basically every grammar exercise that I ever did while teaching français langue." Indeed, Alex mentions how "all of the [textbooks] are really old", which also makes it difficult to lean on when equity is at the forefront of their pedagogical stance. The dearth of these materials make it difficult to fully embody an equitable spirit of inclusivity in French throughout the years of learning French for students. For example, when introducing students to gender inclusive and nonbinary French, Alex noted that there are definitely some people “grumping about it.” In response to this, Alex stresses that,

I'm like "But, here's the deal. If you don't want to do it, don't. You can write French without it, but also you don't know the gender of something, and you make the agreement by doing period. What a shock! I'm not gonna mark you wrong, because it's the non-binary. And if you learned it this way you would never have to spend more effort." And they're like... This is less effort! And I'm like, 'yeah!'

Alex does lay bare that these interactions are relatively infrequent – and that in most cases, students are happy to learn about different variations of French usage. Another perspective (or issue) that Alex contends with while teaching FSL is that the prescribed curriculum in British Columbia is quite vague, which means that they have autonomy to do what they'd like in their classes. While Alex shared the benefits of this curriculum, he also dwelled on its setbacks, namely in that people tend to "throw the baby out with the bathwater" and ignore core competencies that teachers should be teaching to help support and scaffold for their students. As Alex observes, "it's all these curricular competencies. But they're like, really vague." Alex also shares that because of the openness of the curriculum, teachers need to go looking for prescribed activities to do and have to examine them in some 80 page documents. But not a lot of people have time to parse through 80 pages. Alex makes the same connections between SOGI documents and the curriculum where he shares that such documents are just "mountains of stuff

... They're either giving us a mountain of stuff with no guidance. Or they're giving us some guide posts that are so vague as to be nearly" helpful.

While teaching FSL specifically, one issue that surfaced through some of Alex's stories was how gendered the language was. He shares how French Immersion learners might have different experiences altogether than only English students, because of the binary language system. Indeed, he notes how "for a kid in early immersion who like is going to discover at that point that they are, like queer. They might even be non-binary, they might be gay. They're not going to have the same experience of it quite as an English student" when describing the teaching and learning of nouns and adjectives in French. As Alex explains the complexity of this challenge, "it's gonna be that little bit of like, like a linguistic barrier, and also just a more deeply ingrained understanding of gender as if it's a binary between two things."

Angela

Angela has been teaching FSL (and different variations of its programs) for the last ten years. Angela identifies as genderqueer, and is out with their students and school community, although they note that they tend to be more 'out' with students in their Gay Straight Alliance programs. Currently, Angela teaches FSL in a rural setting, and despite being in an inclusive schooling environment, notices the persistence of discrimination toward the queer community for their students in their larger community. Angela shared, for instance, that "there are students in the community who experience a fair amount of discrimination. Sometimes overt. I feel like it's getting less overt as we get a little bit louder about not tolerating it, but it's still there." The idea of "getting a little bit louder" reverberates across Angela's practice, specifically in the ways that she fosters inclusive spaces. She makes sure to intervene when anti-queer dialogue is said in her class, holds space for critical conversations around genders and sexualities, and is a safe person for all of their queer students in the school community. Their safety was quickly understood, since many of their students come back to visit with updates on their (queer) lives and since she goes out of her way to show support through community in many different ways, such as with fairs and raising money for queer crosswalks.

Since Angela was navigating their sexuality leading up to her teaching degree, their queer identity didn't necessarily act as a driving force for becoming an FSL teacher. However, Angela discusses how they explore this identity – largely by being the "weird French teacher" – when thinking through what becoming a queer French teacher means. Being the 'weird French teacher'

allows for them to have open conversations with her students and to build trust with them. They have also leveraged their queer identity to create professional resources for their school and the wider school-board. For example, they described how they created “inclusive French” resources to be used, because there was a severe lack of these available resources (see Figure 1 below).

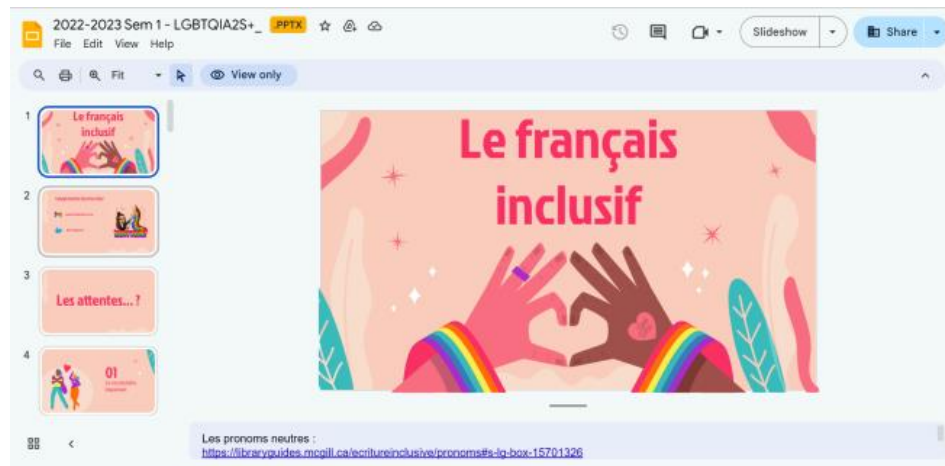


Figure 1

As we talked more about these materials – and whether queer inclusive materials existed within their schooling contexts – Angela nodded and mentioned how there “hasn’t been [any professional development or] I don’t think we have enough about it”. The lack of such materials, and the lack of training on these materials, make it difficult for students to have access to such language. It is important to think through the idea that this work rests on the shoulders of queer individuals, given that heterosexual (elementary) teachers are sometimes “too uncomfortable” to do so as Angela described.

Similarly, with the beginning of a laugh surfacing on her face, Angela exclaims “Oh no!” when asked about queer-inclusive, anti-homophobic, or anti-transphobic training in her initial teacher education (ITE) program. Despite the lack of formal training, however, Angela explored different Gender-Sexuality-Alliances (GSAs) which has equipped them to draw on these topics in her practice. Angela uses these tools, along with her overarching goal of making sure all spaces are safe, outside of the classroom too. During a PD day, Angela met with students from the GSA for Drag Storytime at a local library. They acknowledge that protestors were countering efforts for queer inclusivity, but Angela continues to fight and stand up for the community in every possible case. With pride, they recounted how “it was a wonderful coming together of

everybody and sort of like a triumph for people.” This ‘triumph’ attitude is how Angela approaches her teaching: always making room and space for students to be included, valued, and respected.

As an educator out and open with their students and colleagues about their sexuality, Angela stresses how building relationships was one key aspect that has improved their overall teaching experience. Providing context on the realities (and challenges) of Core French teaching, Angela stresses that “I build relationships with every single student ... They actually respond really well with some like genuineness. I do think that Core French teachers are often very guarded and I found this space where I don’t have to be.” These connections ultimately forged a space for Angela to feel like “I could open up or open with my queerness and then you see those success stories. You connect to those students who need you.” When diving even further into these connections with their students, Angela shared that “then realizing like the more I open up, the more I’m myself, the stronger those connections are... I come to school .. unmask[ed].” This idea of being unmasked affords Angela the space to be themselves within their school and to form deeper bonds with their students. Although a small example, Angela shared a photo of a pair of socks that they received from one of their students in the school’s GSAs so that everyone could wear them together for a “crazy sock day” (See Figure 2). These socks, although a present from a student, are also similar to Angela’s interest in “quirky styles.”



Figure 2.

Creating such lasting bonds with students also allows for Angela to play with their teaching style – including what to teach, what representation and content to bring in, and how to best meet the needs of their students. Their queerness gives them autonomy (and interest!) to make sure all of their students are represented. As Angela and I spoke extensively about how they describe and characterize their FSL teaching practice, they described how their queered approach to teaching FSL lies in being intentional and embedding throughout the course. For example, rather than have units of study that emphasize queer identities, Angela spoke about how queer pedagogy is threaded throughout the entire year. Sometimes this queered approach meant specific content they chose to bring in. Other times, this approach looked like making a difference to students' lives in a different way. "It doesn't always have to be about what I'm teaching or how I'm teaching. It can just about existing. And acknowledging queerness, sometimes making, you know what I mean, just everybody feel, making sure they're represented. And showing up for the students that need you to be there," Angela described. Spearheading this line of inquiry in particular, we shared how a queer pedagogy or queer approach often meant being a caring adult, listening and validating students, and shutting down harmful conversations. To reiterate, a queer approach can sometimes mean showing up for students and making them feel valued and seen as people.

In the FSL classroom more intimately, Angela's approach to queering the space was generally rooted in the idea of normalizing marginalized genders and sexualities and humanizing these people and their lived experiences. Walking me through their approach to teaching, Angela described how they have a "good opportunity as a language teacher to teach them like that, pronouns are just part of the language. You don't get to not believe in pronouns and that using correct pronouns is the same as using the name someone prefers." When thinking through how marginalized genders and sexualities can be at the forefront, Angela offers several different activities to do. For instance, she mentions that there can be discussions around families and relationships, using authentic material like music and movies with queer actors, having discussions around the inherently gendered aspect of the French language, and discussing injustices that exist around the queer community. However, as previously mentioned, they do describe that the state of resources in FSL in general is scarce, and even more so in terms of including queer people and identities. In Angela's case, this means that most of the resources are with "straight couples" or straight people. "They're awful!" Angela describes. The lack of

resources plays a big role in what they teach; however, Angela acknowledges beyond resources, queer FSL teachers operate in a layer of double marginalization. “I think being a queer FSL teacher is ... just hard anyway because you’re marginalized, so you just sort of embrace that you’re like, you know, an accessory teacher. And then you can do what you want, right? If you wanna, if you’re queer then who cares. You’re just, nobody cares as long as you’re like, speaking in French.” This flexibility can be both beneficial and limiting for queer FSL teachers.

Angela often circled back to her classroom practices, narrating how they bring queer identities into focus. At the same time, there were times where our conversation veered to include how heterosexual-identifying teachers in the school community interact with queer topics and issues and how students respond to these interactions. Angela mentions, for example, that their principal champions queer ideas and initiatives – even if this administrator makes mistakes along the way. Other teachers, while they also are – and work toward becoming – more inclusive, sometimes their efforts can fall short, simply because of the “lack of empathy comes like it’s such an unlived experience and they just don’t get it. Like there’s sometimes still that subconscious view, like if you didn’t act weird, people wouldn’t treat you weird. If you weren’t so flamboyant, then people weren’t going to say ... make fun of you for being gay. Like if you could just keep it quiet.” Keeping it quiet, however, goes against the ethos of Angela’s practice. Like they countlessly stressed, they are a safe person to their students. They show their allegiance to their students’ safety in many different ways, but one is through the use of queer representation, like “Safe Person” pins (See Figure 3).



Figure 3.

Even though there are some homophobic/transphobic discourses that might echo in the school, Angela hasn't dealt with homophobia explicitly, largely because of the bond they've created with their students and colleagues. At the same time, there seems to be some ambivalence. Even with their supportive school culture and established relationships, they still wonder "Am I drawing more attention to myself? Am I going to stand out too much?" These questions reveal the vulnerability that accompanies visibility. At the same time, they acknowledge the ease with which their queerness is read – or not – depending on context. Angela described how they have an "unfair advantage like the opposite of invisible illness, like invisible queerness. Like I can casually talk about my family and nobody bats an eyelash." They hold both truths: that their queerness sometimes fades into the background, and that their openness can make them a virtual resource for students who need them most.

Ay

Ay is an elementary FSL teacher in Ontario. She enjoyed learning French in school, and also had some exposure to the language because of her surroundings. Ay knew that she always wanted to become a teacher, and since she enjoyed French, decided to continue within this realm. As Ay shared, "I grew up in a small suburb that was very white – and not very diverse. And so, I was often the only racialized person in the class." This lack of representation created a foundation for how she would later understand and navigate her teaching. From early on, Ay recognized the restrictive nature of French on two levels. First, it was often forced upon people to speak and use French where she was living. If people were to rely on – or use – other languages, they were met with punishment. Second, the language itself was very strict. She described how she recalled "learning about like gender neutral pronouns and what LGBTQ means in English and not in French. It wasn't until much later." Combined, French classes became spaces where Ay "never felt like [she] could bring [herself] into the classroom. This has caused Ay to "think a lot about like erasure of queer identity in the French curriculum just by omitting certain things or not saying certain things."

When she began her career, she made the conscious decision to stay in her same community, since "French immersion is a lot more white than other subjects and it's very common to push racialized and Black and Indigenous students out of the program" and she wanted to be a safe person for her students – even if this notion of safety isn't always extended for her. Ay exclaimed that within her school(s), "I'm not out at my school because it's not safe

for me to be out.” She recalled a few stories about both affirming interactions with principals and educational leaders, but also some “really awful reactions” in response to her queerness, which has restricted her openness in being out. For example, she had “some like really gross experiences of certain schools where I’ve had principals make jokes about how it’s a lifestyle.” Reflecting on this interaction, she recalled how “it was like my first year teaching, just like, really gross. And I wasn’t out and after that I’m like, well, I can’t say anything now to you...”

These types of conversations ricocheted within administrations, but also with her wider school community as she questioned the place of her queerness in schools. Thinking about this delicate balance, she described how in 2017, it was the first time the school was planning on raising the Pride flag. “We had a meeting in the library,” Ay said. “Being like, should we even do this? Because parents are going to be upset. Maybe we shouldn’t. It was a whole discussion.” Similarly, Ay has also worked at schools where teachers have shown an interest in starting GSAs, but being told no by the principal. “The reasoning,” she sighed, “is just parents are gonna get upset. And you know we don’t want to deal with that, and it’s like ... This is human rights, and if these students can’t have a safe place, in this school, ... then *tant pis* for the parents, like you know, it’s their [the students’] safety. Ay also worked in a different school, this time seemingly more accepting of queer rights, issues, and questions. “But it was a very white neighbourhood, and so just the racism I experienced was really awful, and so I couldn’t be out at that school, even though I thought I could. Because I wasn’t accepted for the colour of my skin.”

Context matters, though. At the time of our discussions in 2023, Ay described how she had quite a different relationship with her administration. She described, in her role, the need to teach about sexual education to students, to which some parents were of course displeased. Ay described that in talking to a parent, they wanted their child to only learn about “certain” components of sexual education. Feeling tired and mired from homophobia and transphobia, Ay felt able to pass off these conversations to her principal who is “very responsive, very compassionate.” In fact, Ay’s principal explained that “you don’t ever have to deal with this. Like, if there’s any questions about sex ed, you send it to me, I’ll deal with it because we know what it’s for, like, why they’re complaining.” Ay’s principal understands the layered and complex issues at her. “She also realizes that it takes a toll. And she’ll take that on, because she’s like, you know, you’re queer.” Having an advocate for Ay offers her “a sigh of relief.”

Importantly, Ay's principal also understands that "she has more privilege in this situation," and is able to handle it accordingly.

When thinking through Ay's transition from teacher's college to the classroom, she stressed that there was no queer FSL training "at all." Even though she highlighted that "it's still very much lacking, ... I still talk about it because it's in the human rights code." This lack of training not only decreases safety within schools, but places a value on remaining silent and neutral in light of these topics. What is more, Ay described the links between being queer and racialized. "I just can't work anywhere" Ay describes, as she notes that she has to be very conscious about the schools she goes into. "I do enjoy, like, I love teaching, but it can be very draining in many ways... On top of that, being queer on top of being racialized like it can be very very heavy at times, and so finding ways to fill up my cup." Navigating the school system amid homophobia and transphobia complicates matters for Ay, and even more so because of her racialized identity. She noted how there are "a lot more slurs being thrown around, and that despite it being 2024, the climate isn't better: "I'd say it's different, but not better" for queer and racialized folks in particular.

Since beginning her teaching career, Ay has always been devoted to creating safe spaces for all of her students. Ay sheds light on this, arguing that "my classroom has always been like a political space even though they're very little." These safe spaces usually manifest through photos, posters, and intentional spoken language in the classroom. When she was coming to terms with her sexual orientation in previous years, she experienced moments of self-tensions relative to sexuality in her classroom because of degrading comments from her principal to the extent of "being gay is a lifestyle." This comment catapulted issues of queer identities a bit farther from the classroom. Now, however, Ay is a lot more likely to "push more." Pushing in terms of the content she teaches (e.g., queer-themed stories as well as gender inclusive and gender neutral language usage), conversations she's willing to have (e.g., intentionally mentioning how everyone is included in her classroom), standing up to homophobia and transphobia, passing off homophobic comments to her administrators, and challenging people, especially given that queer rights are human rights. Taken together, these experiences, especially as a queer racialized person, "fuels like the way I teach French." One way that this fuelling occurs is through being intentional about centering marginalized identities. She elaborated,

So if I'm going to be intentional about centering queer identities, how am I going to do that? In ways that I'm not going to burn out, and ways that are affirming to students? In ways that aren't going to piss off parents too much, and ways that I can protect myself? Right? Like it's a lot.

As Ay and I went further into what queer pedagogy and queer inclusive teaching entailed, we both commented on how people tend to operate under the assumption that work in equity, diversity, and inclusion should be stored in a Google drive for all to access and subsequently teach to their students without putting the work in. And, as Ay expresses, makes it seem like EDI related content is done so others can "check a checkbox". For example, in our conversation, it became clear that "When it comes to ... talking about marginalized identities, it's like this need of having like a Google drive ... and it's like, you've missed the point because it's not a checkbox."

Ay brings to attention, however, that while this could be a helpful starting point, "a lot of this work is grounded in community and building relationships. So you have to do that first before you bring [resources] in. Like students have to trust you!" We need to make sure our students know that we're safe people who are interested in their learning and development because they'll open up to us about their questions of marginalized identities. Ay similarly alluded to how a lot of work that centred around queer inclusion tended to rest on her shoulders – much like is the case with a lot of other queer-identifying folks. For example, she shared how "my union did have... like an anti-racism equity committee. And so there were quite a few people in that committee. So I found that very affirming. But again, these are like extras for my job ... I'm spending my time outside of work." In response, she stresses that administrators and other allies need to step in to support. She unravelled how, "if there's homophobia for example, like just understanding it places a lot on the queer teacher to report it and have to go over it again, and again, and so if [administrators] can do something to take they load off of us" then they should do so. Not only did Ay touch on how much of this work was shouldered by teachers, she provided an example that when she brings in equity-focused books that they're often in English and then she has to translate them while she's reading. These lack of resources point to another layer of issues that queer FSL teachers – but also all teachers – need to deal with.

In the same line of thinking, Ay described how teachers should be given resources to do their job. French teachers perhaps more so than other content subject area teachers because the language is entirely different. When resources are provided, though, they're often not setting

students up for success. Ay recounted how provided French resources are cisheteronormative, are old, and are filled with “all the stereotypes.” These provided resources, like those found in AIM, visual dictionaries, and general discourse on the gendered language make it difficult for inclusivity to occur. She is intentional and disrupts these instances when she sees them, but again, it can be exhausting maneuvering through a system that’s purposefully designed to exclude (a) group of learner(s).

Building on our previous conversation around navigating queer inclusive teaching in the classroom, Ay and I stumbled upon the topic of queer pedagogy, what it means for us, what resources are available to accompany it, and how we enact it. The conversation had different threads, but quickly focused on (a lack of) quality resources. She argued that “the lack of resources that are available and it’s just very much stuck to tradition. So when it comes to like introducing things like queer pedagogy ... I find there’s a lot more resistance in the French program than in the English program.” When prompted, she shared how this resistance could stem from issues of getting quality resources. This leaves French teachers in charge of designing, creating, or reinventing the wheel to always have fresh resources. Yet in avoiding this, the resources used tend to rest on a one-sided understanding about what ‘queer’ means. For example, Ay offered an example of how with this belief, “people think of queer pedagogy ... [as] this cis-gender, white, male, white, gay male” figure, relegating any other voices to the margin. With only this representation, this excludes many learners and their intersecting identities. This lack of diversity within the queer community also adds additional layers of resistance, though. Ay described, for example, how “people have a hard time grasping that and understanding that. And so I think there’s like resistance there too, like if you’ll use books that incorporate different kinds of identities, [teachers] are worried about how to talk about it students, push back from parents.” In other words, it became clear that we need to rethink what we know about queer pedagogy and who we purposefully in/exclude.

Ay smartly planned for some of this pushback from parents likely to arise. She co-conspiratored with other FSL teachers, and began devising ways that they could all bring in diverse voices “in ways, I’m not going to say sneaky, but strategy.” Offering an example, she acknowledged that “so, I don’t save all of my books with two moms or two dads for June. I do it all year around.” In this way, she builds in topics from the curriculum, such as ‘making connections’ to students’ lives when they read these books. She also brought up that within these

moments, she navigates contentious school environments and parent backlash through reminding them about human rights. If parents, other colleagues, administrators meet Ay with backlash, she's quick to have conversations about human rights. She shared "I always start off with that [human rights]. So when I have students say, oh on, I'm like, okay. I know that's a conversation you have at home, but this is what I'm saying at school... And so they tend to like, when I do that, they actually listen instead of fight. So that's been affirming when I do that because I feel like hopefully maybe they're listening."

Similarly, our conversation crisscrossed to implementing a queer pedagogical approach. Ay necessitated that "I would say ground it in human rights. Right? Like look at the human rights code. It says LGBTQ there. So ground it in that because if you have parents who ask if you have admin who's pushing it ... you're allowed. It's in the human rights code. And just as we celebrate all identities in the class ... it's showing them how to be acceptable." Against this backdrop, queer teachers tend to rely on policy documents and curricula (where they mandate the inclusion of all learners) as an advanced tool to include queer perspectives. In reality, this inclusion shouldn't come with such resistance.

Expressing and performing our gender expressions becomes difficult when we live in a world dictating how we should act, talk, walk, dress, and think. Such problems are compounded with intersectional identities, as Ay described. She struggled coming out to herself, because she always thought there was a need to choose *one or the other*. As if there was a binary between her sexuality and her ethnicity:

Because when I accepted that I'm a lesbian, there was a lot of fear, a lot of guilt, a lot of shame. And I would go to these support groups for South Asian queer folks. And they were talking about how, in South Asia, it was very common for people to be fluid in their gender and sexuality was a whole spectrum. It wasn't until the British colonized where it became illegal. And like, hearing that was so affirming to me. Because I'm like, 'oh, there's nothing wrong with me?' Like my ancestors knew this whole time. It's just like this colonial rule.

We need to remind ourselves, though, that we don't fit into neat boxes that can be tightly wrapped and presented. We're all different and express these differences in ways that honour how we feel.

Caleb

Caleb is an FSL and social science secondary school teacher in Ontario, and an FSL learner himself, and at the time of this study, had been teaching for roughly five years. As we began our time together, Caleb recounted some of their earlier moments learning French, sharing how they didn't recall making any specific connections between their sexual orientation or gender with French. Yet, it quickly became clear that Caleb was drawn to the language because of their natural talents and proficiency in it, as well as the cultural and travel opportunities that came with learning French. Such opportunities contributed to Caleb's "awakening." Smiling, they add that "I think I always knew I was queer well before that time, but I think maybe like that itch for like a bigger city and like a vibrant community that includes us LGBTQ people was directly related, I guess, now that I'm thinking about it." Reflecting on their interest in learning French, Caleb delves into what it was like learning French as a queer child. Even though Caleb didn't have any queer FSL teachers or role models growing up, they do recount how many of their teachers were "always very supportive and very vocal and very like, disruptive, even for, you know, a small town in the early 2000s ... like a lot of the pedagogy that we're talking about now they were doing. It's like I feel really, really grateful for that." These moments seemed to have harnessed their desire to become a teacher, and have shaped their pedagogical ideologies.

Tracing Caleb's FSL and general educational trajectory in relation to their queerness, Caleb shares how the French language can be restricting because of a lack of existing queer-inclusive language. Caleb explains that when they introduce themselves with he/they pronouns, "it's a debate right like it's not something that's widely accepted. It's still a debate in English ... And so I think that can be hard." These feelings around using the French language are intensified when working in spaces with other teachers, because they are unsure of how others are going to respond. "I start to feel nervous because there's such a debate around it and I'm not francophone ... So I always feel like they're gonna be like, woo! Like you're wrong. Like that's not right." Not only does Caleb need to think about defending their grammatical choices, but at the same time, has to consider their "identity in a front of a bunch of teachers", which can complicate their sense of identity and self among other teachers. In these moments, there are real tensions and awakenings of feeling 'fraudulent' with using the language, especially because the language is evolving and growing. While there are sometimes moments of tension with other staff and folks in their school, Caleb describes that when working with their own students, they are much more comfortable to discuss their queer identity. They contribute their comfort level of disclosure to

more control over the classroom, but also because of the climate that they co-create with their students.

When thinking about Caleb's experience in their pre-service classroom, they highlight that pre-service training kind of fell flat with queer inclusivity for two primary reasons: associate teachers didn't have proper training to deal with marginalized genders and sexualities, and then there was "nothing to prepare us as teacher candidates to navigate those situations either," which created uncomfortable situations for both pre-service teachers and associate teachers. Further, although they discussed identity in their FSL methodology course in teacher's college, queer identities weren't "something that was touched on explicitly." Such discussions should have been addressed, though, because as Caleb suggests, "FSL is one of the perfect subjects to bring forward your identity and be truly who you are able to express it in a very meaningful and wholesome way in the classroom."

Starting off teaching, Caleb wanted to keep their options open to work with both the public and Catholic board to make sure they had plenty of work options. However, Caleb quickly realized that working in Catholic schools brought forth plenty of homophobia with which to contend and navigate. He shares how they were told not to tell other teachers in the building about his sexual orientation because certain teachers in the school don't "believe that gay exist." Although Caleb had unwavering support from his vice principal, he also described how his sexual orientation was invisibilized instead of celebrated by other members of administration, which led Caleb to confidently say "that's why I can't be here because you don't see [my queerness] as an asset to this school like you don't see it as something that I'm bringing to the students that need it." Caleb's sense of autonomy has led them to make career choices that align with their goals, teaching environment, and pedagogy. At their current school, Caleb's making positive contributions to the queer and trans communities through their activism and leadership.

When thinking about navigating (queer) FSL teaching, Caleb explains the nuance that the FSL curriculum is not prescriptive – it is "anything and everything" and quite vague. While the flexibility of this curriculum is helpful in certain cases, it makes it all the more challenging to plan equity-focused lessons, especially when compared to social science-based courses – Caleb's other teachable subject. After almost five years of teaching with this curriculum, Caleb expresses how "I've become more creative and how to like, access the curriculum in the classroom... So I've gotten more confident." This confidence has transformed pieces of Caleb's teaching

practice, affording them the space to specifically work with ‘queering’ the FSL classroom content, while also paying attention and addressing intersectionality. For example, Caleb and their class examined two different musicians who identify as queer, among their other intersectionalities (see Figure 4 below) as well as designed a children’s book equity-focused unit in his Grade 11 French class. Stressing the importance of intersectional identities not being thematic, Caleb adds that “I don’t enjoy when equity pieces are just like a unit based thing anyway, like it’s like kind of the whole Black history month thing where I don’t just teach Black history in February. And so I feel the same with any sort of equity or identity based learning. So I try to incorporate it like all the way through.” Threading diverse perspectives throughout the course content is what drives Caleb’s teaching, and contributes to his anti-oppressive pedagogical stance.

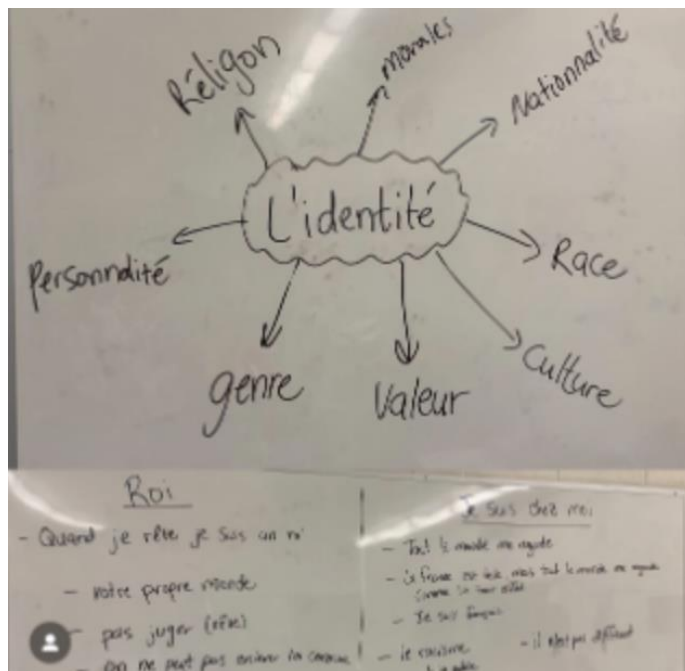


Figure 4.

Navigating queer FSL teaching as a queer FSL person, for Caleb, means disrupting and interrupting cisheteronormative norms in the French language. This disruption ranges from calling out “the BS of l’Académie Française ... like [the students] know that like I’m anti like you know and in grammar I’m very much like so this is what it is but like I know that it’s not inclusive of everyone or like might not be the best thing” to uncovering alongside colleagues how problematic and traumatic it can be to assess students on whether they make gendered

agreements about themselves. Caleb recommends that “we need to prioritize like student safety and student identity over just their grammar ... and I just don’t feel comfortable with being asked [these] questions, like I think of my own self and like I feel like it would just be like a really hard typing to grapple with all of a sudden in a stressful environment.” It seems like many other FSL teachers in the field feel the need to assess and evaluate minute and trivial details of the language – such as these agreements mentioned. However, navigating queerly teaching means making decisions about student safety and well being over grammar, since “a lot of the French teachers don’t fall under the same philosophy” as Caleb.

It is undeniable that Caleb is a champion for queer, trans, and nonbinary students in his classroom and school environment. They also do a lot for his students – from teaching a night school course on 2SLGBTIA+ students, to incorporating queer perspectives in their teaching, to changing the landscape of what’s being taught and read in his department at schools. While Caleb thrives in these roles, it’s important to note that it can become exhausting to be the spokesperson for this topic, feeling like additional waves of pressure are always being added. Luckily, Caleb recounted that “I’ve never had any negative interactions with a student, with a family, with other colleagues, but it does put a lot of pressure when you’re the only one.” Sometimes this pressure exists because there are moments where Caleb felt the need to have all the answers to support his students, especially in terms of knowing about the ever-growing and adapting queer language. Other times, however, this pressure exists when Caleb attempts to create inclusive environments for his students. Indeed, Caleb stresses that “I have really amazing colleagues. Like we have a really close and tight knit department,” but nevertheless, there are some folks who are not interested in approaching FSL with an equity-focused lens, resulting in “some really awkward and uncomfortable conversations.” So much so that colleagues “had just walked out and like yelled at me in front of everybody and like stormed off” during department meetings. Other issues also arise in terms of safety when being a queer leader. Caleb shares how, when teaching their night school course designed specifically for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, the board highlighted the growing “noise happening with you know, how the right wing is viewing” queer people. The board even mentioned that because of this noise, all stakeholders involved in this course and these initiatives need to think about their safety, because “you could get death threats” as a result of the political climate.

While thinking about the needs of queer FSL teachers in particular as they navigate the field, Caleb emphasized the need for “more inclusive language, more acceptance of teaching inclusive language, more resources for teaching inclusive language. Like all of that. I think it’s coming... More representation, I think, in the content that we teach. And in the way that we teach it, ensuring that it’s like, safe and reasonable... More preparedness is a definite piece that I’d like to see in queer pedagogy... And then I think, more queer FSL teachers. And like, or connectedness between queer FSL teachers.” The stories they offered in response to these needs illuminate the need for more work done in the field.

Throughout all of the stories Caleb has shared, they always come back to the idea of intersectionality being paramount to their work. Indeed, Caleb tries to “balance with like all types of voices as well to show like this means something to me ... All identities are important to me and exposing you to all of them is important.” In reflecting on a class they had with a professor in teacher’s college, Caleb discussed how a professor mentioned “students will take notice of like what you give air time to in your classroom and what you give airtime to then is shown to them as important. And so when you’re ignoring something, either purposefully or or like not on purpose, it’s showing them that it’s not important to you, even though it might be. And so, I really hold that like every time I plan a lesson right at the centre.”

As previously seen in Caleb’s story above, he wanted to make clear that intersectionality is important to them and their work. Identities are part of the I.B curriculum, and so they noted that “I think the buy in for those students too, it’s like, well it’s in the curriculum, I’m not just making it up because I’m queer, right? That’s always something I find difficult to navigate, sometimes where it’s like, oh, he’s just talking about this because that’s his identity.” Grappling with how to showcase identities to students, Caleb shares a lesson he’s completed several times with their students over the years through the use of comparing musician’s videos and mapping out these musicians’ identities. Then, having students complete a similar task with their own identities. These activities are grounded in language -- learning verbs, nouns, and adjectives: “It’s from a language place, like you know? And not like, it’s not like from a teaching, like, teaching queerness, which everybody thinks we’re teaching their kids to be gay, right? Like we’re teaching them language.”

In a discussion around attitudes and beliefs around queering FSL, Caleb beautifully underscored that it’s something we need to with intention and something for which we need to be

prepared. Caleb adds “It’s so much more than just having the books, right? Like you need to be prepared for the conversations that come out of that and the harmful conversations that could come out of that and how to navigate through it.” More preparedness from all educators is a key idea that emerged from Caleb’s story. Although they’ve never encountered a negative experience on this front with students, Caleb highlights that “I think there’s always a nervousness of how students would react and how like, is there going to be pushback in the creation of like, unsafe space? ... Because you want to create a safe space for everyone and then when you open up the room to those sorts of conversations, there’s always a fear of, well, like is someone going to say really harmful things?”

Presenting and expressing gender for queer folks can be both a liberating and daunting task in schools. Caleb unveils how, when they are working with their queer students in a night school program designed specifically for queer youth, they’re comfortable with using their first name. This comfort likely stems from the community building around like-minded people. However, as Caleb later shares, a similar level of comfort isn’t extended in day school, in part because “no other teacher does it ... and I don’t know how it will be received.” Caleb even “thought a little bit about like just using my last name, like not Mister [X], it would just be [X], but I also have a weird relationship with that because I feel like I’ve always associated that with like sports / bro culture.” Being a queer teacher means needing to negotiate with fluid and influx identities and expressions and remaining vigilant to what this enactment might entail. These types of reflections have also prompted Caleb to think more acutely about why they might choose to go by their first time. Caleb recounted: “I felt comfortable in that space doing that, but at my school, I don’t feel comfortable doing that because no other teacher does it.” In this respect, there seems to be an element of towing the line with respect to how to act and be in different places in schools.

An important part of gender identity and expression (for all people), but more explicitly for queer identifying people is the notion of pronoun disclosure. Caleb underscored how “I use my pronouns in my email. I have my pronouns written on my board. I use he, they, or iel, and I just kind of present it as that. It’s never like a big deal and I never like to make it that sort of thing where it’s another thing. So it’s not something we’re at the beginning of the year ... I’ll introduce myself with my pronouns, they’re on my board, and then I just use it in conversation because I wanted to normalize that this is just a piece of how we interact with people as opposed

to it being an “other”, right?” What shines through with Caleb’s stories is his comfort with his gender identity and expression, and his desire to normalize nonnormative genders (and sexualities!). This is important in all courses, but even more important in French courses where students are learning about sociolinguistic aspects of the language, how people interact, engage in conversation, etc.

Throughout our conversations this past semester, Caleb reiterates his comfort with himself around his students – more so than with anybody else in the school building. This comfort – and safety – makes it so they can engage in critical conversations, ask questions, probe, and ultimately, be himself. An example of some of these activist and comfort stances occurs through displays and queer representation (see Figure 5 below).



Figure 5.

Such comfort isn’t always extended when working with adults in the building, though. For example, Caleb shares how “I think where it becomes difficult is when, and I don’t know if we’ve talked about this before, but it becomes difficult now when we’re talking a lot more about gender-inclusive language. It makes me feel unable to be in those spaces sometimes. Like, with colleagues because I find there’s a lot of harmful things that can be said, right? Like [they say] this isn’t necessary, or this isn’t really. I’ve heard all of those things and the more that I have accepted my gender identity, the more I feel like I don’t want to be in these spaces when these

conversations are happening.” As Caleb continues to share, they’re often the ones pushing the critical need for more inclusivity. However, such work can be draining: “I’m also tired. Like I’m very tired of hearing these things and pushing for it every day and like with the teaching that night school course and being the Rainbow Nation teacher and like protecting and defending my students in all of those spaces. Now I don’t want to have to protect and also defend my teaching style. Like you know what I mean?”. Caleb endlessly fights for his community, but it is also important to rest and recharge to keep showing up for their students. Throughout the many moments we both shared together, it becomes clearer each time that Caleb is committed to social justice, equity, and above all, supporting their students.

Elm

Elm is an Ontario-based K-12 FSL teacher, teaching for roughly a decade within the elementary panel. Not only do they teach in both major FSL programs – e.g., Core French and Immersion – but they also have held instructional coaching positions as an early literacy screener in their board. Elm grew up around the French language because of their bilingual family, and enjoyed learning French because of its communicative purposes. They recounted how they loved their French teacher because they “were speaking, ... reading books, ... talking, ... went out into the community, ... did field trips, ... did like a big scavenger hunt at a mall”. While teaching, Elm mirrors these communicative approaches in an effort to instill a love of French, and at the same time, encourages inclusivity to their students.

While learning and using French, Elm recalled how French was different based on their “two coming outs.” For example, they noted when they came out as gay in university, “French was a non-issue” because the language stayed relatively the same for them and didn’t necessarily seem to interfere with their queerness. It wasn’t until they came out as trans, however, that more issues persisted because “French is not easy to navigate if you’re non-binary.” Elm described how in English, people tend to understand ‘they/them’ pronouns. Yet in French, Elm feels as though they need to say “it’s phonics” to Francophone folks who can’t seem to grasp how to pronounce queer-inclusive language, like ‘iel’. Outside of pronouns, Elm also expresses how, at the confluence of transness and French, learning has been a journey. They say it’s “like figuring out like who I am linguistically in French then in English because like I had to really think about like what feels right? ... And at the same time, being in Francophone spaces was what really pushed me over the edge of like ‘I need to actually address this’ when it came to my gender”. In

this sense, Elm noted how “French was both limiting and also like liberating” because it afforded them a space to sit with and through their gender identity and expression.

Completing teacher’s college in 2014-2015, Elm was one of the co-leads of their university’s GSA and felt equipped to take on this role because of their previous experiences working with queer folks through workshops, queer youth leadership programs, and peer groups. However, Elm suggests that people still aren’t being adequately trained on issues relative to homophobia and transphobia in teacher’s college, which is instilling fear in some teachers. Elm adds that “people are scared and they don’t know what to say and especially now that so much of it is rooted in religion. And loudly so. People are worried about a phrase that I hate, *competing rights*.” Ignoring queer topics in university settings translates to a lack of knowledge about the topic in teaching practice. Instead of offering training to support queer, trans, and nonbinary people holistically, Elm adds that “PD was offered by my board last year but it was after school and optional.” When it is during school time, Elm finds that they’re actually the ones who are in charge of “running a training during one of our staff meetings on like how to respond to homophobia and transphobia.” (See Figure 6). Such training is necessary, yet it is important to question why it was void in their teacher education program initially.



Figure 6.

As we met and chatted via Zoom for a few times throughout the 2023-2024 year, Elm tells a story about what it’s like being a teacher in general education. Sometimes, students are “so

sweet”: embracing, respecting, feeling adorned by their gender. Elm describes how a student was so excited to introduce them to the student’s parents on teacher parent night. The student kept referring to Elm as a nonbinary, and it appeared as though the parents had a solid grasp on this idea, too. This student’s excitement was cultivated because of the classroom environment that Elm creates. For example, they honour and validate students’ myriad identities, always striving to make the spaces as inclusive and equitable as possible. One way they do this is through having posters in FSL, marking their allegiance to this safe space (see Figure 7).



Figure 7.

Although some students are captivated by Elm and their presence in class as a trans and nonbinary human, Elm spent some time describing how this excitement isn't the same for all students. Especially religious students. Some find it hard to process Elm's queerness and spur transphobic rhetoric, saying for example, that they approach "to tell me that it's Haram to be trans." Elm shares how some people (students, parents, community members, etc.) have been emboldened to do and say whatever they want without thinking about possible ramifications of their words, especially in light of conveys and protests following the COVID-19 pandemic. Although some students make these remarks, Elm also understands that such discourse is likely cultivated at home or by student's environments outside of school, and acknowledges that the students often do not mean to harm them. Instead, Elm sees this as an opportunity to educate. For

example, Elm gave a bit more context, noting that when talking to their students, they describe that “no one’s telling you that you have to be trans. No one’s telling you that you even have to think it’s okay. All we’re saying is you do have to learn. You can’t opt out of listening to a book or something.” This idea of opting out or avoiding certain topics is very important, because as Elm also details for us, there is a renewed sense of urgency to this work.

For example, Elm’s approach to navigating teaching FSL as a queer human, generally, has shifted in terms of the urgency in needing to teach about queer, trans, and nonbinary people. Elm recalled a few stories about why this ‘urgent approach’ was so necessary, stemming from political transphobia across provinces to making sure that their students know that there is more to the world than the binary of male/female. Elm’s teaching hasn’t necessarily changed as a result of this urgency, but Elm shares how “there’s a renewed sense of purpose and necessity.” When Elm first began teaching, they noted how it was certainly difficult. For example, Elm recapped how “I think 5, 10 years ago ... like it still felt like things were moving in a good and a generally hopeful direction”. Now, however, “things just feel really dark.” People are dying from the backlash of homophobia and transphobia. One of the school leaders in Elm’s school board, who is trans, noted that their moral compass and philosophy as an educator was that of “no dead children.” When one of the school’s main goals is to keep students alive, there clearly needs to be more work done in the education system. And, even though schools are performatively moving toward inclusive educational spaces, Elm explained a story how on June 1st (e.g., the first day of Pride Month), the “school last year had 400 students absent”. Clearly, students feel threatened by queer, trans, and nonbinary people and celebrations, and instead of embracing and learning about one another, have taken a political stance by choosing to be absent from school.

In terms of Elm’s approach to actually teaching FSL queerly, Elm shared how their teaching is intentional and threaded throughout their units – it’s not a singular unit of study, for example. Specifically, Elm noted several activities related to queer, trans, and nonbinary musicians in French that affords students the opportunity to see a temporary window into the lives and experiences of queer people (see Figure 3). Along the same lines of keeping the queer momentum up throughout their units of study, Elm discussed how they purposefully try to teach students to think critically about their words, sharing how students will often start FSL by saying things like “oh, je vois un garçon, je vois une fille.” In response, Elm questions “pourquoi est-ce que tu dis ça? Like on ne sait pas si c’est un garçon ou une fille. On verra. On ne sait pas en

regardant quelqu'un. Des personnes ont des cheveux longs, des personnes qui ont des cheveux courts." Such conversations do indeed transform students' thinking around people. "And then like, what I notice is like for the first month-ish of school, kids are very much like, oh yeah, je vois un garçon, je vois une fille. And then as we move through the year, it becomes less and less and they start talking about who they actually see. Like, je vois quelqu'un qui joue un ballon-panier, je vois quelqu'un qui porte une robe. ... So that's a really neat shift that I start to see."

Rae Spoon

Rae Spoon est artiste, compositeur, producteur de musique et auteur non-binaire.

Rae habite sur le territoire des peuples Lekwungen à Victoria (Colombie-Britannique).

Rae donne du soutien à d'autres artistes.

Rae a fait des tournées autour du monde et a reçu des nominations pour le Prix Polaris (deux fois) et le prix Western Canada Music Award.

En 2015, Rae a créé Coax Records avec le but d'utiliser ses expériences en tant qu'artiste marginalisé pour faire plus d'espace dans l'industrie de la musique. Rae vise à bâtir une communauté où des artistes venant de vécus différents peuvent partager leur musique tout en s'encourageant.

"Rae Spoon is one of the most important musicians working in Canada today." - Now Magazine

"One of Canada's best songwriter." - Aesthetic Magazine



Figure 8.

Elm has worked in many classes and with many colleagues. While some teachers tend to have solid approaches to inclusion around queer, trans, and nonbinary people (such as their kindergarten colleagues), sometimes efforts of queer inclusion fall short. In hopes of promoting more equitable students and in hopes of shifting mindset, Elm said they navigate queer FSL teaching by also sharing content with their colleagues. In doing so, the hope is such that "they'll actually use them and then their classes will be a little more queer too." Elm shares a story around their introductions on the first day of school to their students, and mentions how "most elementary school students have no idea what non-binary is until they meet me, in my experience. And even then, a lot of them need reminders throughout the year. Because they forget. Because I'm the only non-binary person they know." In this way, Elm is able to expand students' thinking, certainly around normative assumptions of who people are, what they should do, and what they may look like. Elm described, for instance, that when teaching French, they

always make a priority of exposing their students to different variations of families (see Figure 9). This is because not every student will have the same family, and providing students with the tools to express themselves, as well as the representation of their potential family members, gives them even greater access to the language.



Figure 9.

As Elm described their FSL teaching, they shared how one of the goals of studying FSL, and languages in general, is to equip students with the tools to use the language authentically and organically, which often culminates by having the capacity to communicate in real-world scenarios. This is through introducing general neutral pronouns in French, like *-iel*, to give them the freedom to explore themselves in the language. Elm explained how the French language in particular can be limiting, but by showing options and different ways of circumventing a strict language, then students can begin to see themselves and others. The resources to do this pedagogically, however, are scarce, and Elm does have to make the bulk of them themselves. As Elm mentions, the heteronormativity, but more importantly, cisnormativity “pretty much goes unchecked” by resources that are available. Tasked with creating resources for themselves and others can be a daunting experience and rests on the shoulders of Elm in order to make strides toward more inclusion in their school. But, at the same time, Elm spent a lot of time talking about how these materials are paramount and required. “I think it’s just my approach to teaching

FSL [is to] make sure that kids know that there are options in French. And then it's not necessarily as limiting as it seems on the surface," Elm reflected.

As we pivoted to thinking about how the French language is gendered, often existing in a binary vacuum: nouns, adjectives, and objects in French are always presented as being *either* feminine *or* masculine, Elm and I discussed how such a presentation of the language is limiting for everyone. To avoid this, Elm uses their own gender identity to create inclusive French spaces. This inclusivity is done through, for example, "giving options, like even in Grade 2, like we talked about "je suis allé" for our weekend journals and we talked about how you know, some people, generally people who are boys but not always, just use the E. Some people, generally who are girls, but not always, have the two 'e's. Some people do like é (e accent aigu). And you know, it's kind of up to every single person to decide what feels right for them... And I think the way that I phrase that and the way that I explain that is informed by who I am." Infusing conversations about grammar, as Elm shows, can be easily done to honour the voices of all students in the classroom. These conversations need to happen in French, because as Elm describes, "the cisnormativity and the binarism is so much more prevalent in FSL than anything else. Like obviously, the gender binary is the default no matter what ... [but] we're gendering and talking so like it just reminds kids constantly that there's male and female even for objects, there's male and female."

As a trans and nonbinary person who is navigating the French language themselves, Elm describes how all of their students at the elementary school now know that they use the -iel pronoun in French. Elm is ready to have wider conversations with their students about cis-normativities. For example, Elm shares a story about how a kindergarten student assumed that Elm was a boy teacher because they were wearing a dinosaur t-shirt. Such conversation prompted Elm to note how "we had to like unpack that a little bit... About both A) not being a boy teacher and B) dinosaurs are for everyone." Elm's gender expression and identity, as they have noted, also act as a conversation starter in schools: "I think the way that I perform my gender and present my gender in school also is a conversation starter," Elm described, "because even once the kids have figured out who I am like I'll often use myself as an example like when we're reading books or something and they go right to like, we've talked about picture walks before, and when they go to like "oh, je vois une fille" and then I'll be like "oh, pourquoi?", and they'll say "parce qu'elle a des cheveux longs" and I'll like right away be like, well do all les

filles ont les cheveux longs?” And that was actually before I came out.” Centering themselves, Elm is able to help pinpoint – and nuance – some deeply ingrained thinking about gender for their students.

Throughout Elm’s stories, grounded in their experiences as an elementary educator, Elm began to reflect on a conversation with a high school colleague. Elm shares how “I was thinking about how, as an elementary teacher, there’s privilege in invisibility. In the sense that the kids know like they know who I am, they know my pronouns, they know what that means, but those are the kids who I teach. Like other random children in the building, they don’t tend to read me as anything other than a teacher.” In this capacity, being a trans and nonbinary person still comes with its own host of issues (as described in previous interviews), but for the most part, encompasses, as Elm shares, a “safety that’s afforded to me that I think would be very different if I was in high school.”

Isabella

Isabella is a queer FSL teacher, administrator, and program coordinator in Western Canada and has taught across various programs – such as Core French and Immersion – in several Canadian provinces. Isabella is a lifelong learner and is always interested in improving her language teaching and pedagogy. She loves being near the Ocean – and in water – and living in close proximity means that she can jump into the water as frequently as she’d like. When beginning to learn French in elementary school, Isabella described that the experience “was awful. Like totally awful. I remember starting in Grade 5, and I just like, listening to a tape and filling in sheets ... And so there was like no part of me that wanted to learn French.” She shares that the Core French course was meager because, looking back, the teacher may not have had a thorough proficiency in the language, translating to less engaging classes for all of the students. While she didn’t love Core French, she did have the opportunity to explore Intensive French in Grade 6, and describes feeling energized and renewed because of French. This program in particular altered her thinking around languages, sharing that the program “was like cracking the code just like being able to learn, I think, like I was always a kid who needed a challenge. But I had no – no knowledge of that.” Soon after, she realized how beneficial it was to learn the language when she was travelling, specifically to Québec. These experiences further ignited her passion for wanting to speak and use French, and as she reflects on her decision to pursue French education, she notes “it’s the best decision I ever made, like due to like peer desire.” Indeed, her

peers were ones that challenged her to explore French speaking parts of the world and to use the language.

Throughout our conversations, discussions around the French language's inherent binarism and sexism that pervades kept recurring. She shared how these rigid structures can have damaging impacts on students. At the same time, she offered a bit of alternative perspective on how it afforded fuller possibilities to explore her identity and embrace herself. She explored how, in her experience, the French immersion teachers tended to be younger and more liberal; they were keen on social justice and environmental initiatives. These teachers ended up becoming her role models – some of whom she's still in contact with today, and have helped to shape the way she teaches. These French immersion teachers, importantly, "showed [her] that like adults don't have to like take themselves too seriously." Reflecting on her experience with these teachers, Isabella explains that "while the language itself is really restrictive ... I definitely felt like, ah! Like ... it was easier to be who I was, especially with those teachers."

Perhaps in large part because of these role models that Isabella had, but also because of her general interest in languages and teaching, Isabella enrolled in teacher's college. The experience there, however, left her deeply disappointed. She described teacher's college as being "largely terrible ... Like I would say. The poorest quality education I have had in my whole time in school," emphasizing that "it was awful. It was truly awful." When describing why it was so terrible, many different factors and conversations surfaced. She shared how professors were likely tenured and uninterested in engaging with and teaching students, some were unethical with the content they presented, and others appeared to lack proficiency (even in the FSL methodology course!). For example, she recounted a story about a how a professor had shared one of her assignments to the class that was personal – and did not ask her permission. She felt a bit flustered – and annoyed in response. The FSL methodology course in her teacher training, as she noted, did not have any assignments or projects geared toward spotlighting equity, diversity, or inclusion in French. This dearth of content, she felt, put her at a disadvantage – especially when talking to peers who attended different teachers' colleges. Not every course was bad, though. For example, she shared positive stories with her social justice and assessment course that have been instrumental in her success in her teaching now.

Isabella is committed to activism and making her French classes more inclusive. In terms of what it means to be a queer French teacher, Isabella explained how it often equates to being

what she calls a "quiet champion," explaining that "I think it's a quiet champion sort of thing. So I think, like a big part of it is just like being like slightly visible for those who are looking." She would come out "when it comes up when they're asking about things, or they're navigating their own thing that I might share." Isabella doesn't feel the need to come out in every occasion; however, she has markers and symbols that inexplicitly link her queerness in the French classroom (e.g., Pride flags, queer-inclusive verb charts, etc.). Isabella further attests how this type of sharing (e.g., a quiet yet strong force) helps to create moments where students feel comfortable 'coming out' to her. Specifically, she described a story where a student wrote a wonderful poem for Pride month where they talked about their experiences as a queer student. The student may have only written such a poem and felt comfortable sharing because of the classroom environment and community that Isabella has cultivated alongside her students. As an administrator, she also gets to be a quiet champion because, as she shares, "I actually get to make the rules." Isabella shared how this quiet championship meant that she advocated – and implemented – gender inclusive washrooms. Although this is outside of French generally, it demonstrates her commitment to being inclusive for all students and their needs.

Tracing Isabella's experiences of what it means to her to navigate teaching FSL as a queer French teacher, she described how her pedagogical approach is generally rooted in including all folks. This queer inclusivity typically manifests for Isabella when teaching about subject pronouns (e.g., incorporating the pronoun *iel*), adjectives, and when engaging in speaking activities. For adjectives in particular, Isabella reflects on some lessons that she received from a colleague where they taught students about different adjectives to avoid placing gender on a word (e.g., *épicienne* words; using "sympatique" instead of a variation of "gentil.le"). Moreover, she advocates for her students in the ways that she normalizes using gender inclusive language, because she never wants people to feel like they have to lie or that the language can't fit their identity category. As she explains the challenges students face, Isabella notes that "you have to put *ma* or *mon*, and like, you know. And so there's like, you have to essentially 'out' yourself unless you're going to lie." Because of this, she often ends up making her own resources. As many people in education know, a major hindrance to FSL teaching in general, but adopting or using a queer pedagogical approach in FSL contexts more specifically, is resources. Isabella explores this idea and says queer inclusion is more possible "because I'm not using ancient resources ... We're not stuck with the textbook that we had for years, because we're just not

using that one anymore. We're not waiting for the next funding to come through." Although this places much of the ownership to 'queer' or to create inclusive classroom spaces on the teacher, Isabella believes that "I don't find it so bad, but maybe I'm just like naïve. I don't know ... But I really see, like a lot of teachers building their own resources, too." Much of this resource building, for Isabella, is built around vocabulary, games, and movements, which helps bolster her students' engagement and participation in French, too.

Isabella elaborates through several stories on how her philosophy of being and teaching aligns with the policies in her board and with her school. Unlike many others, Isabella experiences relatively few challenges. As she reflects on her motivation for entering education, she shares: "initially, I entered education with the idea of like supporting change ... and like fixing parts ... And there's like, not much here, like this is like the day to day obviously, but like in terms of systemic stuff, ... but in general, I agree philosophically with the policies." There are some issues that arise, but in general, "there's not much here" that goes against her ethos. Her administrative team is supportive, the curriculum she uses is regularly vague, which she leverages and uses to advantage, her students feel comfortable and supported by her, just as her wider community is, too. For Isabella, this makes both teaching and being an administrator a healthy place to work and grow. We discussed how this may have been partly due to the environment in Western Canada, where people tend to be more relaxed and progressive. She highlighted "I think the fact that people are really connected to the outdoors, it just makes like, you know, the ecological messages easier, which makes just general taking care of the environment, taking care of others, like go hand in hand." In any case, Isabella is proud and happy to work where she does – and connects well with students, parents, colleagues, and other administrators as a result.

Jade

At the time of our meeting, Jade was a queer secondary FSL teacher in Ontario, while also teaching other subjects, like history and civics. She had recently been hired as a long term occasional teacher (LTO) – which we celebrated together! True to 'queer' roots per se, Jade initially discussed how when had her first teaching position, "all of [her] experiences, like with the students, and [her] practicums were out of the norm, or the expectation, so [she] learn[ed] to go with. This type of ease and flexibility seems to have carried throughout Jade's career to date.

As Jade introduced herself to me, she began by sharing that she's not "super overtly open in [her] sexuality ... [and is] a little bit more subtle in [her] approach." Yet throughout her stories and retellings of her journey in becoming an FSL teacher, reproaching topics of marginalized identities was generally at the fore, in part because of her own identity, but also because of the lack of content made available to her when she was learning French. For example, as an FSL learner, she expressed how much of the content in the FSL classroom (e.g., books, representation, discussion etc.) didn't include any marginalized groups (e.g., BIPOC and/or queer, among many others), which played a role in how she learned, engaged with, and negotiated the language learning process. "I found very much that my identity or really any sort of queer identity was not really shown within the class" Jade recounted. Reflecting back, she uttered "it is very much the same stories day in and day out that weren't really diverse."

Jade described how this limited her understanding around the idea of who French was really for. At the same time, Jade described that she collided with some tensions when learning other languages, like German, because she discovered how German had a third neutral option that didn't exist in French. This language learning experience helped to illustrate the rigidity of the French language – and particularly its grammar. She explained this, stating that French is "a lot more rigid, so I very much ... find it's like *hétérosexuelle*, *homosexuelle*, *asexuelle*. There's not really these short form terms that we have now that better represents peoples' identities. It's almost clinical in its use. And I also found that within my time learning French and trying to find a more inclusive language, for example, like learning more about neo-pronouns, that French was still far behind in developing it as it's such a gendered language."

Circling back to her youthhood, Jade described how coming to terms with her sexuality was made difficult because she was surrounded by exclusionary discourse about asexuality. For example, Jade explained how she was part of the GSA in her school, but ran into some conflict when she stood up to bullying that occurred among its group members. "You know, from my perspective, [these groups] are much supposed to lift each other, not tear each other down," Jade detailed. Teachers in these leadership roles didn't seem to interrupt any of the bullying either, which spiraled into creating a bit of "negative interactions from people in leadership positions," which ultimately meant that Jade "never really had a queer role model." Together, these moments and experiences within her school kept Jade a bit cautious with whom she shared information about her sexuality: "so I found that like, again, I was just very quiet and very

reserved in being open. I was very selective on who I told. So of course all of my closest friends who I still I've kept in touch with over these years. They're all aware of it. There was a few people who I came out to in high school and they kind of made the joke of like that would explain why you never realized I was hitting on you. So it was, kind of fun to you know, let people know. But..." She continues to share how even within the queer community, she sometimes feels as though she struggles with being accepted, meaning that there was "sort of a risk" to telling people in the queer community. These experiences have also shaped the way that she chooses now to engage with queerness as a beginning teacher.

Progressing through our conversation, we kept coming back to what we learned in teacher's college and what it meant to be in these spaces as queer FSL teachers in particular. Jade described how, even though teacher's college promoted inclusivity and encouraged antiracist pedagogies, there was still an underlying message that "in teacher's college, they were very much like don't share anything at all about your life. You don't exist outside of school. Keep it on lockdown. Find ways to be inclusive without ever linking it back to yourself." 'Keeping it on lockdown,' however, is hard to do when it's your life in question. In this light, there seemed to be a bit of neutrality and subtlety that teacher preparation programs wanted their students to embody: "Find ways to be inclusive without ever linking it back to yourself," Jade described, as being a way to recap their time there.

Moreover, within these spaces Jade shared how there seemed to have been "a flavour of the month" in terms of approaching inclusivity (e.g., antiracist pedagogies). In response, Jade acknowledged that "while I learned in school about anti-racist education, I have to bring in my own queer identity for how to deal with LGBTQ voices within the French classroom, but then my continued education is focused on reconciliation and how do we focus on reconciliation within the classroom. So these are all different things that we have to juggle, but the onus ends up being on the teacher to follow through with more education." Just like Jade suggested, if we want any changes to occur as queer educators, it seems that there is some underlying pressure for queer teachers to "do the work."

'Doing the work' for Jade in her FSL teaching often means operating from the assumption that all identities matter and that representation is needed to span across these identities. Specifically, Jade showed how in her class, conversations of gender and sexuality work really nicely within music units "because it's a good way to bring in culture, but we're also

encouraging kids to hear language from outside of France or Québec ... But we also get to have different representations through music. So, when I was teaching music, I had an artist like Balal Hasani, who is gay and also tends to be very gender fluid with their identity, and how they present themselves.” When describing how pieces of this unit unfolded in practice, Jade highlighted that students get the opportunity to see a variety of musicians, and learn about how such peoples’ identities shift, how they play around with pronouns and language, and how it opens the floor for authentic conversations about gender. In the classroom, this type of representation is key for Jade, because as she explained, “having sort of that authentication ... so that way it’s not, I don’t wanna say forced, but not tokenized.” Deviating from these tokenized representations of humans allows for deeper conversations with her students. Such representation is also present in her classroom, which is clear from the posters designed alongside students (see Figure 10).



Figure 10.

Jade also shares that while queerness appears in music units, the focus of such units aren't specifically on queer people. Instead, she argues, queerness is something “that shouldn't be a unit. Because like I exist outside of that unit. So that way, like I want to make sure that they're like, this is ongoing.” To do so, she builds in authentic and humanizing approaches and language

tasks, like letter writing to supply teachers, using TikToks, among other multimodal forms of knowledge creation. These approaches also help to curtail issues of “ticking off the boxes” when it comes to questions of equity, diversity, and inclusion, since inclusion is widespread. (See Figure 11 for an example of general representation present in her classroom).



Figure 11.

Although queerness is validated and presented in her classroom, Jade does still recount how she had a few initial fears of what these conversations might resemble in FSL. “I was a little worried about it,” Jade exclaimed, “especially as we’re sort of in a position where people are becoming more aware and accepting, but also like, the other side is becoming more intolerant. And so having the ability to say, ‘no, like I’m not taking this sort of attitude – we’re going to be accepting of all within the classroom,’ like, that sort of attitude needs to be put in. On day one.” Holding an allegiance to uplifting queer identities, despite any possible nerves or potential backlash, helps to crystallize Jade’s stance as an activist and equity-oriented teacher. Some of the ways that equity and diversity become lost within FSL classes, as Jade and I mulled over, was through the vague FSL curriculum in Ontario. As she argued, “it’s vague, so I can kind of do whatever I want. I can have whatever voices I want in the classroom, because the curriculum doesn’t really tell me that I have to have these certain voices.” Interestingly, Jade alluded to how

she uses this vagueness to her advantage, because so long as she's completing reading, writing, speaking, and listening tasks in French, she's ultimately touching on curriculum expectation. In this way, the curriculum gives her power and lets her diversify her materials as she sees fit. She often adapts or creates stories, uses authentic materials like TV Monde 5, uses articles from her alma mater's university journal, etc. to bring in diverse voices in her FSL classroom spaces.

A thread that tied together pieces of Jade's queer pedagogical approach in FSL was the idea that she embeds it throughout her units and throughout the year. In this way, students aren't 'surprised' per se when questions, discussions, and conversations of queerenss appear in the FSL classroom. Instead, her students "accept this is what's happening." To provide a little bit more context, Jade offered a story about a conversation she might have with a student giving her pushback: "You may never use this, but you're still going to learn it. You may still see it, like, come up. So it's important that you understand that this exists. This identity exists in the world. You may never identify with this term, and that's okay. But there are other people who may identify with this, who you may need in your life. So it's important for you to know that these identities exist, and that we need to know how to properly address these people." Such a statement and framing of responses can be helpful for all FSL teachers to help address negatives that spread in the classroom as a result of queerness.

Jason

When Jason and I first met, he was a gay elementary music and French Immersion teacher (previously teaching Grades 5 and 6) in British Columbia. Jason has a passion for both of these subjects throughout the bulk of his life. He recounted that he knew he always wanted to be a teacher, so combining both music and French offered him "the best of both worlds." Enchanted by music, he had spent a lot of his time – Saturday morning's in particular – with his tutor preparing for an audition as part of a scholarship to get into a university in Ontario. Jason studied and worked tirelessly. He accredited some of this work ethic to his queer identity. He recalled,

I just completely did not want anyone to know that I was gay. Even though I probably knew by age 12, maybe 13 with all the inklings that I was different. Like many people those things were often highlighted by my peers even in elementary school and so I learned quickly to kind of be closeted and mask a bunch of things. I think I eventually hid myself in my studies - I didn't want to be known as gay so I needed to be highly performing at these other things. So I became very competitive, especially with the other academic girls, because I always did relate better to girls.

Subsuming himself in his studies meant he put a lot of pressure on himself to prepare – and perform! Jason alluded to these feelings, highlighting that “I constantly felt behind and inadequate,” which was compounded by his “internal dialogue of not wanting to be seen as gay, and there were moments, you know, like people would ask me if I was gay and I would completely deny it.” Not wanting to be seen as gay was the result of the negative discourse around queerness that percolated in our society growing up in that time. These combined moments of both pressure and the need to conceal his identity shaped the way he navigated within his schooling system, and ultimately shaped his interest in becoming a teacher. Usually, this hiding manifested in working incredibly hard in school and actively seeking out leadership roles in his community (like through his local church, summer camps, and later with music education). Even though Jason understood the crucial need for representation when he was younger in hindsight, he remembers going to an United Church event “where they had a queer gay man come in and talk about coming out... Like I remember sitting and listening to that and well, I’m never gonna do that!” As Jason got older, however, he realized the importance of coming out and being his true, authentic self.

This journey from hiding his identity to eventually embracing it would significantly shape Jason’s path toward becoming a queer educator. As he moved from student to teacher, the educational landscape around queer issues was also evolving. By the time Jason established himself as a music and FSL teacher, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) policies were being implemented. While information and advocacy relating to queer people and their experiences were gaining traction in British Columbia, Jason noted that there was also an uprising in fear for many different people in this community, especially regarding angry parents. Jason recounted a conversation he had had with his principal who approached him because of the increased level of fear and backlash around SOGI. His principal shared, “it’s not you. It’s just the parent community.” Jason’s principal had to remind him that “it’s kind of a friendly conversation to be like, you’re great, it’s not you. If you hear anything, it’s because of this parent community” in terms of his gay identity as a teacher within the school. Having this type of support from his administration meant that he was also better able to hold conversations around himself and his queerness – ultimately forging space for critical and insightful conversations among his students.

Luckily, Jason explained that he didn't receive any specific parent resistance or questions regarding teaching about SOGI, but felt uplifted and supported by his administration in any case.



Figure 12.

classes specifically, and Jason nodded that he initially didn't have any specific goals about teaching gender and sexuality explicitly, but instead, his goals were to "be a music teacher... [I wanted to] blend my two passions and I was like well my ideal one day would be to be a French immersion teacher." Although not focused on gender and sexuality in French specifically, part of his interest in becoming a French immersion teacher stemmed because he didn't want to be a prep coverage teacher throughout his career. Instead, he wanted to build long lasting connections with his students and help them think critically. These lasting connections are deeply important to him as an educator.

Although Jason described how moments of preparedness, especially related to interrupting homophobia and/or transphobia were meager in teacher's college, Jason explained that "what was transformational in my year was I was one of the first years where there was a mandatory Indigenous education course...[I learned] so many people have been oppressed like that was my kind of awakening of like, holy moly, our country has very much oppressed so many people." Leveraging his Indigenous Education course, he was awakened to the need for social justice in education and to find out ways to support a variety of oppressed people, including Indigenous and queer folks, that he's able to bring into his classrooms that act as a catalyst for change in his practice.

As a queer White teacher in British Columbia, we reflected quite extensively on the power and privilege that whiteness holds. Queerness, for Jason, "does not really affect [his] job in any way that [he's] aware of," although he does recognize his hyperawareness that he's explained before – especially related to his work ethic. However, he stressed that "my intersectionality affords me the privilege to probably not have as negative of an experience as probably others." With his privilege in hand, he recounted a story about how he feels comfortable and confident to discuss his queerness in school, because conversations tend to come from a "place of curiosity ... and so I'm always like, yeah, and I'm happy to answer it, or, if not, then I just change the topic."

Throughout our conversation together, Jason and I kept going back to the idea of queer pedagogy and what it meant and how it looked in his practice, or in FSL specifically. Jason shared how there are many links between his music education pedagogy (based on Kodály) in conjunction with BC's First People's Principles of Learning. While we discussed what these two pedagogical approaches looked like in practice, we uncovered many instances where queer

pedagogy would interlace as well, namely with the idea of being able to see other peoples' perspectives. A focus of Jason's teaching is based on inquiry and learning about other people. Indeed, he shared a story about how he hoped to buy a few pairs of glasses that he could wear while teaching, representing different lenses (or perspectives). This way, students can break apart and analyze various ways of thinking.

Another moment of 'queer pedagogy' that came to life for Jason in his stories was the idea of advocating for students. He explained how he had his students work through a research project, "either art or action." As he spoke to the school's resource teacher about the project he was running with his students, he thought about how "it would be amazing ... to apply to have a rainbow crosswalk installed somewhere." Excited, the resource teacher yelled "oh my god! We're going to do that! Oh my god!" As the two of them (e.g., Jason and the resource teacher) were on the same page, he argued that "it needs to come from the students. I don't want to push anything. Like I wanted it come from the students." Shortly after, a student approached Jason and asked "can we advocate for a rainbow crosswalk?" "Oh my gosh! What an amazing idea!" Jason tells his student. Together, they went through the process of putting together a timeline, creating proposals, and presenting about the need for the rainbow crosswalk. As a class, they all wrote letters to the city to try to get them involved in putting together the crosswalk. Eventually, "the principal said, 'okay, well, know what? The city said no. But we can install it on our property, because it's our own property.'" Jason started to get emotional, and shared that "the district had to actually create some policy around it [the crosswalk] because we weren't the only ones at the time wanting this. So one of the pictures I sent you is me sitting on the rainbow crosswalk at the school. And it was, yeah, a really great moment." (see Figure 13).



Figure 13.

This successful advocacy project represented a tangible manifestation of Jason's approach to creating inclusive spaces. This crosswalk stands as a physical symbol of the values he embodies in his teaching – values that sometimes face structural challenges in his FSL instruction specifically. Returning to the unique considerations of FSL teaching, our conversations shifted to the linguistic challenges of creating queer-inclusive spaces within a gendered language. As Jason recounted, “everything is still gendered.” The gendered nature of the language makes it difficult to fully represent all people. At the same time, Jason expressed a bit of luck and happiness, since his “district has been very good about getting more books with representation ... and in French as well ... We got a grant, I think, 2 years ago to stock our classroom libraries with a lot more books that have queer representation including Black and Indigenous representation as well.”. This grant has afforded his school community a surge in representation – “more representation than there ever was, as in physical books, than ever”. However, making parallels to music education, Jason cautions that “there's risk at times of throwing the baby out with the bath water for getting rid of all songs that are heteronormative” if people are completely removing heterosexual content from their classrooms. We also need to remember that all heterosexual folks exist, too.

Pryor

With over a decade of experience in education across both public and private sectors, Pryor has found themselves teaching French across all three major French as a second language (FSL) programs: Core, Immersion, and Extended in Southwestern Ontario. Out and proud throughout most of their high school experience, Pryor has always been viewed as the “token queer gay.” This tokenism shaped their experience through high school, undergrad, teacher's college, and into the profession itself, meaning they were often called upon to respond to queer-related issues, teach about queer-related content, and provide formal and informal training to non-queer colleagues. While Pryor tended to agree to invest in the queer community and teach others about queer joys and pitfalls, he laughed while highlighting that “there should be reparations” for such teaching.

Pryor's initial career trajectory wasn't actually to become a French teacher – instead, they wanted to teach math. However, with their French qualifications, they ended up spending the bulk of their teaching career within various FSL assignments among his "dog breakfasts" of possible timetables, as Pryor chuckles. While their queerness may not have been a driving factor to teach French, he now imbues his queerness throughout his teaching. When thinking about how Pryor came to be an FSL teacher and their journey from start to now, they described two main areas of growth: their physical appearance and their approach to students. Pryor admits they "would say I was a little more prim and proper with how I did things" when they first started teaching. Back then, they had "a button up, a white collar shirt, and I'd have a tie. I had dress pants, the dress shoes. My hair was always styled correctly." Ten years later, however, Pryor dresses in a way that better matches and embraces their personality and identity.

Their approach to handling difficult situations has also evolved significantly as they've gained more and more experience in the classroom. Pryor mentioned how "back in the day if the students had said something homophobic I might be a little more, like, I would tread water on how to handle the situation. Now being older and wiser, I just fully toggle it." This approach they've harnessed over time has afforded them the opportunity to "read the kids" more, enabling conversations around the importance of marginalized genders and sexualities and standing up against anti-queer rhetoric in their classroom – sometimes explicitly, other times implicitly.

Throughout Pryor's initial teacher education (ITE) program, they discuss how queer inclusivity and anti-homophobia or anti-trans conversations were scarce (except, ironically, in their FSL course, where they had a queer seconded teacher). Because of this scarcity, Pryor was often left responsible for teaching his colleagues and peers. Sometimes, especially with Catholic-training colleagues, Pryor describes wanting to "thunder out" heated discussions around the queer community, feeling that "it's about to become untucked in here." Without these critical conversations, Pryor worried that these colleagues in particular "would do such a disservice to teaching that at the end of the day, people are going to question [their] credentials." When hearing phrases like "not this shit again" from colleagues during discussions about queer issues and identities, Pryor, with humor, informs that they wouldn't need to listen to these presentations or professional development sessions if they were "just doing their jobs correctly."

Although we zigzagged in our conversations about "doing their jobs correctly," we also circled on the idea of the gendered nature of French in general and how it can be limiting – and

liberating for people. From Pryor's perspective, the language is quite restrictive. Commenting on how antiquated French is in terms of gender, especially in terms of choosing adjectives, agreements, etc., Pryor touches on how the prescriptive side of grammar makes it challenging for queer people to decide if they're going to add an "e," an "x," use certain pronouns, or use words such as "mec" in French. Pryor acknowledges that as a queer anglophone, French "is still restricted today in terms of how we express ourselves," which plays a role in how they teach and use the language.

Outside of French grammar specifically and its restrictive roots, Pryor chuckled, thinking about how, in the teaching profession, "there's an assumption that typically male language teachers are queer. Let's run a stat on that!" While Pryor does indeed fit into this stereotype, they use it as a teaching moment through building empathy and creating responsible, knowledgeable, and well-informed students. For example, they described a story where some students displayed a bit of backlash, noting how Pryor had a "gay agenda." In response, Pryor laughs, assuring their students that his agenda "does not want to sleep with other agendas. It's just kind of existing as an agenda." Laughing together, Pryor explains how promoting empathy helps combat much of the backlash he faces from both parents and students.

Sometimes promoting empathy is the only way forward in terms of FSL teaching, Pryor described, because of the overwhelming heteronormativity that exists in schools.

"[Heteronormativity] is everywhere," Pryor adds – and is a part of the very fabric of our school's makeup: from washrooms to how people act, to what's in the curriculum, and even the resources being provided. Pryor describes working tirelessly to get their grade 9 students to unpack their ingrained conceptions of gender roles that ultimately led to heteronormative behaviours and assumptions: "I find that dismantling heteronormativity requires a lot of tearing apart gender roles or gender association." Pryor recounted how they've collaborated with their students to

get them out of the heteronormative bubble, because they came in Grade 9 and I can tell you that it was off the walls. The boys all thought that they had to be jocks and the girls would come into class and they'd like they'd be sitting in class with, hair like a blowout.

Teasing apart these gender norms helped students differently about who they "should be" and "do." But in the FSL classroom specifically, they noted that heteronormativity is prevalent in resources, "French resources are always being very heteronormative, very masc – they're like, I have yet to find a source in education that wasn't overly like 'the boys play hockey, the girls go

shopping. The boys go camping. The girls go sailing on a boat.' Also, like, mood, I'd be on that boat with them." Taking time to look at how resources dictate what learners should do with the language is a big part of Pryor's practice.

In a different light, this maneuvering of resources requires "queer people [to be] extra knowledgeable," Pryor described. This is because "people [will] hit you right, left, and center with something to say no" and to counter queer inclusive strides that teachers make. Particularly in FSL, Pryor notes that "especially with such a diverse curriculum, you're going to find it more often than not" that other teachers might stick to their script of what they know and want to teach. However, in Ontario, education acts and curriculum support the inclusivity of all learners with an emphasis on promoting intercultural understanding and awareness. Having policies on their side works in queer teachers' favor to incorporate dialogue around queer and trans people and their lived experiences.

Moving beyond the superficial approach where "[students] are always like, yeah, gay people love rainbows," Pryor describes how their approach to queer pedagogy is rooted in dismantling and unpacking, with a focus on inquiry. When teaching any FSL-based course – be it Immersion or Core – the focus of the content doesn't need to be explicitly about queer people to be queer-related in Pryor's work. Instead, their work focuses on troubling and problematizing different identities and thinking about who holds power over others. For example, in their marketing unit for a business class, they have students "make ads for Pride Month" for two reasons: "Number one, it's to understand or have an understanding that everyone has this belief that everything that has a rainbow is associated with queer people and one thing is to get them to look at is false marketing." In their personal finance unit, they have students consider how "some of us may be okay living where we want in the world, but some of us have limitations due to identifying or identifiable elements to ourselves. Me, as a person, I'm not going to go to a country with zero queer rights to live." In their Core French clothing unit, they draw inspiration from RuPaul's Drag Race and have students complete a competition where they make clothing and walk the runway afterward.

Pryor discusses how the resources available in FSL programming can be scarce, Eurocentric, and heteronormative. As such, he explains, "I take the resources and I kind of like, we go on an adventure with them." He does this because of a desire to understand "how we push people into these boxes and how do we construct that in terms of a less homogenous society."

Sometimes these adventures meet with resistance from students, parents, and teachers. Pryor shares that when he's used a queer-based film in one of his courses, "parents have complained so we've kind of moved away from it and I don't agree with it per se, because again, I think that it still is representation of queer identities."

Apart from parents, Pryor experiences backlash from students: "I do have some resistance sometimes for male students, particularly who believe that gender roles are supposed to be followed." Male-identifying students in his experience have cemented certain stereotypes as true and factual, so Pryor needs to spend time deconstructing them. Ultimately, Pryor hopes that "if I'm going to teach you anything while you're in my classroom and it's not going to be French, it's going to be the fact that life has hit you hard"—in other words, he equips his students with life skills throughout their French classes. As a racialized queer person, Pryor discusses how identity factors are paramount in their classroom. When they think about "queer identities, I think about mainly intersectionality and how can we bring that intersectionality across the field." One of the problems that surfaces in FSL teaching, resources, and content is the lack of intersectionality. Pryor adds: "I think it's a big miss if we do not include all the identities. Not just queer identities, but also for example persons of colour, like for example, including our like, you know, Black community, Indigenous communities, including like the Asian community. How can we further allow for the representation of those different diasporas?"

Pryor is wholly aware that they navigate FSL teaching with their identity in mind: "Yeah, so I take that into account, like I use my identity as a queer person mixed in with my Asian identity to further be able to deliver on the learning." This thinking also guides and shapes the relationships they share with colleagues and administrators in the school. These lessons and conversations around identity aren't the same for everyone in Pryor's department and school who teach French. Pryor recognizes that "as a queer person, I'm more apt to actually put in queer oriented content than my non-queer peers." He shares how a colleague and themselves went to the library to pick out children's books for a Grade 9 Core French assignment. Their colleague chose a story about dinosaurs, while he chose a queer-related storybook. When Pryor asked if their colleague wanted to read the book on same-sex families, he was told "oh no, I'm okay you know, like, I can't teach this book." When further prompted why not, the teacher revealed: "Well, like, what do I do when kids ask questions?"

Pryor shares that these types of conversations "happen a lot more than I think we'd like to admit." Indeed, "when non-queer teachers are asked about queer content, they typically tend to shy away from it or to move on really quickly if they can. Because they feel ill-prepared, they don't feel like they have the knowledge to be able to properly respond. And they're also worried because they perceive it as a contentious topic that it's going to spiral and they're going to lose control of the path." Losing control of "the path" is an interesting point to consider for all teachers, as Pryor explains.

Expressing gender is done by everyone, but it only becomes an issue when people relegate what 'traditional' gender presentation resembles. Pryor elaborates on this idea and gives examples from their teaching that repudiate what a 'normal' gender presentation looks like for a teacher, largely through wearing nail polish, having piercings, and extensive tattoos. When they steer away from typically masculine or feminine qualities, it brings forth good conversations with students, though Pryor notes it "sometimes can get a little intense, especially if students are very devout to particular cultural, if you will, cultural religious followings," or if they feel that in their upbringing, "this is what a woman should look like. This is what a man should look like. You kind of have to debate that with the kids and you're gonna have to push back where needed."

Pryor is committed to building culturally and linguistically competent users of the language. Presenting their gender allows for conversations around what gender is, how it fluctuates, and how it differs for each person. Pryor uses these moments as lessons in French specifically, arguing that "it helps them to be able to explain or be able to use their French in a way that is more expressive—like talking about themselves, about their association with their gender, emotions, you know, and sometimes that even ties into their sexual identity." They also add that discussing "what we're seeing societally, how we use pronouns in French, how we do the grammar—it's also an opportunity to build vocabulary and other areas that are associated through discussion."

Pryor's practice is rooted in setting their students up for success, recognizing that "by having these conversations with students, I'm not only thinking about them in the present but also them in the future." To not discuss queer identities and perspectives ultimately fails his students and creates an illusion where queer people don't exist in French spaces. They share a story about how beneficial his instruction can be because it creates spaces where students can see themselves. For example, a straight student in their class asked if she could bring her queer-

identifying sister to one of Pryor's classes because "she doesn't have a role model I would love for my little sister just to know somebody who has, who's like a successful queer person, face-to-face." In essence, spotlighting variations in their gender expression at school helps build more equitable, tolerant, and empathetic students. Pryor's approach doesn't just benefit queer-identifying students—it serves all students, preparing them for a diverse world where understanding and empathy are essential life skills.

Rob

Growing up in a conservative household, attending Catholic school, and constantly overhearing homophobic and transphobic comments from his dad, Rob knew from a young age that 'coming out' while being at home wasn't possible. He didn't even know what 'coming out' meant, but he was well aware that he would eventually have to describe all of the ways in which he distanced himself from the norm. These attempts often manifested through having opposite sex relationships and trying his very best to be one of the "boys." While he attempted to conceal his queerness, especially in schools, other students saw through his masking. As Rob shared in a few instances during his interview conversations, many students would approach him and ask, "Rob, we have a question for you – are you gay?" Despite proclaiming, "no! I'm straight!" he was nonetheless met with the waves of questions around his sexual orientation and identity.

During his time in high school, Rob was better at dodging these questions. He found ways to make light of the situation, and instead, tried to imbue these interactions with humour. This worked well, for the most part, Rob described. However, not all students were equally as receptive. Thankfully, despite some light bullying, Rob made it through. At the end of his high school years, he knew he wanted to link his passion for French and for community to find a job. Taking these two together, he decided he'd become a French teacher.

Throughout university, despite a clear understanding that his differences from other men were all-encompassing, he remained in the closet. It felt easier. At the same time, he was quickly growing out of this ease – and it was starting to make him itch from growing pains. Feeling stuck in his university town, he opted to move to a more urban city for his teacher education program. It was not long after he arrived that he started to feel the ease of being himself – especially around other queer, like-minded people. He began dating men, and those earlier mentioned growing pains evaporated. Rob was quite close with his mom at the time, and he knew he needed to – finally – tell her. He mentioned that "she wouldn't be shocked. She must have seen this

coming from a mile away!” While she wasn’t shocked per se, she did have a pointed fear: “how are you going to teach and be gay? It’s going to be so hard for you.”

“Truthfully, I hadn’t thought of that.” Rob explained. He’s an adult now, and he assumed moving through life as an openly queer person would be made easier because of his age. Especially at school. Yet Rob carried these thoughts into his program and into his teaching practice. In one instance of his practicum experience, he remembered that, although he had a fantastic mentor – he described her as being “open,” “friendly,” and “calm” – he couldn’t bring himself to ‘come out’ to her. He could fill the tension build inside when he avoided questions about who he had spent time with during the weekend or what he was going to do after school. Often, his responses were minimal. “Nothing too much” he might have responded. The thought of any backlash that *could* come his way was excruciating. Even though Rob hid the truth for quite a long time, he did eventually ‘come out’ to his mentor teacher. She was elated to hear the news!

Rob formally started his teaching journey abroad, and while there were ebbs and flows there, his queerness didn’t obfuscate his inclusion in his school. When he came back to Ontario, though, he felt some noticeable differences. He recalled being labelled as the “queer champion” and having to spearhead all queer-related initiatives, even if he didn’t necessarily possess the knowledge to do so. There were times during such initiatives that other students had some negative reactions to presentations, events, and activities. For example, he described a time where one of his students described their homophobia, citing fear of queer people. During his time teaching, he enrolled in a Masters of Education program. In the program, he was shocked to have read about the injustices queer teachers and learners alike experience in the L2 world. At the same time, he related wholeheartedly. It opened his eyes to the ways in which L2 classrooms operated. They tended to be mechanical and focused more on form than on communication. When they did focus on communication, they prioritized cisgender and heterosexual people, offering snippets of heterosexual interactions. Rob described feeling as though once his eyes were open up to the ways that queer people were silently sidelined throughout his own learning and teaching, he never looked back.

Vi

Vi, at the time of this study, was a third year FSL teacher in Southwestern Ontario. Vi has taught in both the Core French and French Immersion programs at the secondary level. Growing up in the Catholic system, Vi recounts how FSL had little impact on shaping or forming their

queer identity. They share how “I feel as though that was never really, like a thing that was part of my life in high school. I just liked French. I was okay at French, and I kind of just kept going with it.” When asked whether they received any queer-related instruction while learning French, however, they laugh, nodding that “When I was learning French? No. Not at all! ... That was not really a thing!” Without any exposure, Vi concludes that their queer identity wasn’t necessarily a driving force for becoming a French teacher. Instead, they “kind of just fell into it.” Falling into teaching FSL, though, led them to think more about the language itself and how it coalesces with their identity.

Thinking through the French language itself as a queer person, Vi discusses how the language can be pretty restrictive, noting that “it’s probably more restrictive than anything else,” largely because queer identities didn’t seem to have a place in their learning. Vi notes that they “feel as though like because in high school, I never really learned the vocabulary to talk about it, and even in university I never really learned the vocabulary to talk about it.” Even when traveling to French speaking parts of the world, the lack of vocabulary made it difficult for her to “express myself or even just to like, see what other people’s stances on it were.” Instead, Vi describes how they had to learn the bulk of their queer information through media (e.g., music, TV shows) and queer icons, like Adam Lambert.

Although Vi graduated recently from their initial teacher education program (e.g., 2020), they highlighted how queer topics were never “really addressed in the teaching FSL course. So I feel like my contact with it was limited.” The first time Vi had proper exposure to this topic was during a one-off professional development session in their practicum, and since then, exposure to the topic has been limited. Vi discusses how learning about queer inclusivity as well as anti-homophobia and transphobia is crucial, especially when students come to realize that their teacher is a safe person. She extends and says how “But I do notice that, like especially the students who identify as queer, uhm that they they’re kind of like, okay, I feel a lit bit safer, a little more okay.”

(Re)tracing her stories, it became clear that Vi thought that queer identities could sometimes be better infused in other courses, like an Introduction to Sociology, Anthropology, and Psychology course that they taught. This is because in the FSL curriculum, Vi stresses how they read the curriculum “like front and back. Sideways. Like nothing. I feel as though there’s really nothing. And I think that really links well into the lack of resources. Right. If it’s not in the

curriculum, the chances are is that there isn't really going to be any resources made for that purpose." When the curriculum is vague and watered down, Vi explains that it's difficult to find places to discuss queer topics.

Vi recounted how they approached conversations around gender and sexuality in their practice with a clear philosophy: "queerness is not just in white culture. Queerness is everywhere," and they treat it as such. With this in mind, Vi's FSL instruction and pedagogy doesn't necessarily have thematic units of study that center the voices of queer people; rather, they attempt to thread notions of queerness wherever they best fit. Often, Vi notes, these conversations lend themselves to be more fruitful in social science courses, where the focus can be dissecting and deconstructing societal norms and attitudes, like what Vi completed with their David Reimer case study.

Learning about Vi's intersection between her queerness and her French teaching, Vi discloses how she tries to make her classroom spaces where all learners – and their identities – are recognized and validated. Sometimes this means making explicit calls to include queer people and their lived experiences. However, Vi does note that her queerness and sexuality aren't at the forefront of her teaching, explaining that "it's not something that I'm like eager to insert into everything." Rather, she's more than comfortable to talk about it as it comes up organically and naturally. It seems like this might be the preferred route, because as Vi acknowledges, students sometimes "don't care" and have their "heads in their phones" during class or when conversations arise around queer identities. In this way, it's difficult to discuss queer identities and people when students shrug off any conversation related to it.

Interestingly, in Core French specifically, and location dependent, Vi highlighted that "in terms of FSL, a lot of, well, I mean, at the last school I was at, there wasn't too much I could do. Just because they're kind of still learning their bare bones, they're learning the basics, but I did take some time to talk about gender neutral pronouns, especially in French, just because I feel as though even like when I was like I know that it's like something that just recently." In this case, even though the Grade 9 Core French students that Vi worked with had quite low language proficiency, Vi still made a concerted effort to infuse queer dialogue and knowledge into this class.

One issue that Vi is confronted with when navigating queer FSL teaching in high school is the idea of students feeling afraid or being scared to say the wrong thing. Even if Vi attempts

to hold space that circles around queer people, she notices how students can remain relatively unbothered. Vi observes that "I think that because a large majority of my students, they're cis, het, white. They're scared to say the wrong thing." In Vi's words, "they knew that like if they said something wrong maybe like someone would they would get canceled," which added another layer of difficulty for Vi when discussing queer-related topics.

Vi continues to share how the students at the school she worked at were very smart. Yet "they are also shut out from the real world and they don't really like, engage too much in some of these things that are going around them. Just because they feel it doesn't apply to them. It doesn't pertain to them." Interestingly, too, this disengagement or disinterest also exists in Vi's students' actions. Specifically, Vi briefly told a story about a time where she asked students in her class if they were going to attend the Pride March, with some students asking what it was, and others said no. Regardless of whether Vi's students know about their sexuality, it's disheartening to learn that they're not eager to learn or to participate in an event derived and created for queer people.

A lot of the stories Vi shared in regards to their gender and sexuality and its intersections in the FSL classroom were rooted in their covert sexual identity. Vi noted that they're "out but I'm not like, I'm not very, you know, loud in my expression. I'm not so, like, overt with my sexuality. You know, I kind of keep it low key. I think that reflects into the way that I teach as well. I kinda try to also like have things, have those conversations be a little bit more subdued, a little bit more one on one." When hearing the stories of Vi's experience, it was made clear that flying under the radar was a mechanism she uses in schools.

One reason to conceal their identity is likely because she's bouncing between different schools in different semesters. Once Vi's more established, there seems to be space for them to "find ways to be more involved, and to like affirm my identity more." Much like with other research and documentation of FSL teachers feeling isolated and lonely, Vi echoes these thoughts, questioning how to navigate "this myself, like, you know. How do you feel less alone in taking on those kinds of challenges and making sure that you're advocating not just for yourself, but for the queer community. And how to, you know, make sure that you have the support you need, especially as a newer teacher... Where are the groups of people that like, can help us through this and like we can share our stories with?" Perhaps community is a step forward for supporting and helping Vi.

Yannick

Yannick is a language enthusiast, speaking English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and German and has taught each of these in Toronto public high schools. He's also a language educator and leader with almost 20 years of teaching experience. Alongside secondary teaching, he is also a guidance counsellor, university instructor, curriculum developer, and language board member. As a product of the core French (CF) program himself, Yannick is proud to teach in these programs, as well as in immersion and extended French as a second language (FSL) programs.

The foundation of Yannick's teaching philosophy can be traced back to his own experiences as an FSL learner. When reflecting on his passion for language, and French in particular – Yannick shares how “I really enjoyed it ... I had teachers who really just pushed our butts really hard and were supportive. So I was very lucky to really enjoy French.” These formative experiences as a high-performing student who felt “motivated to want to be able to communicate with others” would later shape his approach to creating inclusive, challenging environments for his own students. With his love for French from the outset, partly due to his teachers, Yannick explains how he wants to emulate this teaching, especially with a CRP and equitable lens in mind. His current work centres on “breaking down barriers and trying to use authentic sources as much as possible to challenge students, and if it's not done in the target language, then that's totally okay ... So really positive experiences I'm trying to emulate, and you know, involve student voice and break things up and lots of differentiation hitting all four strands.” In his stories, Yannick demonstrates his commitment to equity work in every facet of his teaching.

The commitment to equity was further nurtured during his teacher education program in the early 2000s. Reflecting on his time in this program, Yannick recounts positive experiences that would prove foundational to his later work with marginalized students. Being part of a language cohort and having the chance to take ‘queer’ based content courses throughout his initial teacher education (ITE) program also provided him with both community and tools to enact change. As he recalls, “being around other queer adults in the “Inquiries into Education” class and allies was a really, of course a positive experience for me”. This course allowed him to work on creating queer-friendly material, read queer plays, and collaborate with other queer and allied folks. In his ITE program, he was also equipped with a few tools to discuss homophobia –

especially, as he shares, “how to handle harassment in 3 steps”. He adds, however, that it’s also through his privilege as a white person, experiences as a queer person that helps him address these issues. For example, he shares “I, you know, got a lot of privilege in my background, right? So, open to a lot of things, but mostly from a queer bent, because it’s my lived experience and what I’m comfortable with.”

Despite this preparation and his commitment to equity, Yannick’s entry into the FSL field was marked by some personal struggles. Tracing his first years in the FSL field, Yannick recounts how, although he was out with others and had a wealth of experience working with and alongside the queer community, he wasn’t entirely out with his school. He shares, “in my first five years teaching, I was not out, which in retrospect [now], you know, is stupid.” He thought about how being in the closet was “was extraordinarily frustrating,” largely because he “volunteered with community organizations, worked with queer youth organizations for a long time ... There were lots of queer people around me. So it was frustrating to not be able to sort of do and not feel my most authentic self in my first couple years of teaching. My classroom always felt like a safe space, but the rest of the school was where I was didn’t always – I didn’t always feel safe.”

The resolution to this internal struggle came through a change of context and personal growth and development. When Yannick moved schools, the shift in environment joined with his own development, making it “very easy to be – not honestly a different person, but someone who’s a little more self-assured. And also, I was 29, so a little bit older and more teaching experience. I was the department head, you know, and I came to the school, still a white guy with a lot of privilege ... It seems like a safer environment too. I would say again because of the white privilege perspective, it seems like a safer environment.” Yannick takes very seriously the privilege he has as a white, cisgender male and uses his privilege to disrupt deficit thinking patterns with his students. For example, he shared a story about how he didn’t embody traditional masculine qualities “just in terms of my physical appearance, my voice, my mannerisms,” but acknowledged that within the classroom, he was able to address these gender norms and binaries with his students -- and feeling confident to do so because of his privilege.

This growing confidence in navigating complex identity discussions was tested early in his career that require quick thinking and respectful responses. Yannick recounted a time where he was teaching a Grade 9 academic class in 2010-2011 and told his students that “it doesn’t

have to just be husband and wife ... and very generic language about all people and relationships are valued.” Not long after this discussion, one of his students “piped up and she said, ‘it’s always Adam and Eve - not Adam and Steve,’ and I was totally taken aback by this ... I had to be like, what do I do? And it was just something along the lines of, well, that might be the case in some circumstances, but not the case in our classroom, and in our school, and in our community.” As Yannick reflected on this situation, he noted how this moment in particular stands out as visceral because this discussion was interconnected with his students’ belief system. With more experience teaching in this class, he feels “much more competence in anticipating potential circumstances and challenges around multiple identities, around queer folks, but also around a variety of other intersectional perspectives, right, and acknowledging experiences.”

These experiences of navigating identity in the classroom have crystallized into concrete pedagogical practices that permeate his language teaching. In terms of his FSL teaching (but also language teaching practice generally), he has made a commitment to presenting “trans affirming language, nonbinary language in all of my classes. So whether it’s French or German ... This is a reminder that, you know, your work represents everyone’s identities and the entities of people whose voices are absent or silenced in the classroom, right?” This type of teaching is paramount for Yannick, because we need to “explore and make meaningful connections with our students,” and one way of doing that is by providing students the necessary tools to make use of the language in a way that honours, validates, and authenticates students’ lived realities and experiences. Among this language, Yannick also sheds light on the idea that we need to teach “people to be accomplices, not just allies” moving students toward active engagement rather than passive support.

Sometimes, this commitment to inclusive pedagogy comes at a cost, particularly around resource development. For example, Yannick recognizes that a lot of this work comes from within, “I create much of my own [resources], which is a lot” he noted. In mainstream texts and textbooks, “we don’t have a lot of texts where queer people are present, normalized. You know, trans folks are absent, a lot of identities are absent ... Canadian textbooks in particular have been very good about ensuring that there’s cultural, some linguistic, certainly differences, a wide variety of folks with visible disabilities. But queer people, it’s rare.” Yannick continues to describe how creating these culturally responsive materials is a lot of work, but it needs to be

done. The bottom line for Yannick, as he shared, is that “we all need to make sure that students’ lived experiences are present.” Retracing his steps as a new teacher in his practicum, he offered a story that illustrated the need to attend to students’ lived realities:

My second practicum for Spanish on the second day was at a downtown Toronto school. I was there the first day, and I got to know the students and I saw that there was diversity ... I saw a group of diverse students representing the city of Toronto. So I went home. I did my homework, and blah blah, you know, I was like, let’s get to know each other. I asked, ‘Oh what languages do we speak?’ Like, ‘yo hablo inglés, francés, español, portugués’. And I put up an overhead. It was many years ago. And I knew the word for Amharic was in there, because my host teacher made sure that she told me about her students in this grade 11 class ... and a girl literally screamed, and she’s like ‘THAT’S MY LANGUAGE!’

While reflecting on this story, Yannick explains how thrilled he was that even for a small moment in class, a student felt so visible without a lot of work on his part. He also understands that being an FSL teacher is complicated, with many overlapping factors at play that make it challenging to be an FSL teacher. He shared, “in FSL it’s so hard. Especially if our French is not super strong. If we’re not confident. If we have less support. If we’re being removed or asked to be invisible as a result of parents, guardians, principals. Whatever, right? We’re being devalued. It’s all the things that are *not* common realities for many other educators.” Taken together, Yannick lays bare the many problems that FSL teachers face that make it difficult to do their jobs as effectively as possible.

Drawing from his experiences as a teacher trainer, Yannick also observed how these pressures manifest in new teachers’ approaches to diversity and inclusion. He notes that some beginning teachers don’t feel comfortable addressing queer identities, among a list of other marginalized realities. This lack of comfort sometimes translates to FSL teachers feeling the need to “tick a box” when it comes to bringing in different identities. “Core French teachers are told, ‘okay, Bonhomme Xarnaval!’ Okay, check. There’s my culture,” Yannick recounted, illustrating how cultural education can become tokenistic when teachers feel overwhelmed or underprepared. Instead of engaging in meaningful conversations about culture and language, as well as the connection between the two, many FSL teachers feel tired and mired by the role (and demands of the role), leading to many who feel like “we’re fighting for survival,” Yannick noted.

To address these systemic challenges, Yannick advocates for a more realistic and incremental approach to building inclusive practices. Rather than expecting all teachers to

become immediately comfortable with all aspects of equity work, he suggests focusing on foundational steps: “it’s not necessarily being fully comfortable, but being at a starting point to equip students with the facts that they’re represented, they’re welcome, they’re present. They’re not absent.” While acknowledging that it’s impossible to make all teachers comfortable, “even if two more teachers are just like, ‘oh, okay, I’ll talk about this, and yeah, I know that if a student uses they/them, I could also say ‘iel’” in French. These small victories can help boost student success in the language and can make FSL teachers feel more assured about the ways they’re engaging with equity-focused work.

Appendix C: Research Protocols

Interview Protocols

Interview 1

- Introduce yourself/say hi
- Explain the project: looking at experiences of queer FSL teachers, how they navigate FSL teaching, especially within cisheteronormative confines, and how your gender expression impacts your FSL teaching.
 - Explain that this interview is organized around your ‘becoming a queer FSL teacher’.
- Expect 30-60 minutes for the interview (it could be less or more depending on the discussion!)
- Participant can withdraw or stop at any time
- Anonymity will be maintained throughout any publications that result from the project (unless you wanted to write something with me!)
- Make sure they have reviewed and signed the consent form and see if there are any questions about it, remind of recording
- What pseudonym do you want?

Childhood:

1. Tell me a story about your childhood and French. Did gender or sexuality play a part in that at all?
2. Tell me about a time where you felt like the FSL class was embracing or restrictive to your language learning (with your queer identity), if at all.
3. Were there any particular role models or significant experiences during your childhood that shaped your understanding of your queer identity and its intersection with language learning?

Learning French:

1. What drove you to learn French?
2. Can you share a pivotal moment or experience during your French language learning journey that stands out to you in relation to your queer identity?
3. How did your experiences as a queer individual impact your interactions with your classmates or your teachers while learning French?
4. How has your queerness influenced the way you engaged with learning the language?

Deciding to teach French:

1. Can you tell me about the process that led you to decide to teach French, and how did your queer identity factor into this?
2. Did you have any aspirations or goals to explicitly teach about gender and sexuality in French?
3. Tell me a story about any joys or concerns (or any emotions/feelings in general) that you might have had when thinking about becoming a French teacher.

Teacher’s college

1. Did your teacher training impact any experiences you have as a queer FSL teacher?

2. Reflecting on your time at teacher's college, how did the program address or overlook the intersectionality of your identity as a queer individual preparing to teach French
3. Were there any specific courses, discussions, or experiences during teachers' college (specific to FSL) that shaped your approach to teaching French as someone who's queer?
4. How did your interactions with peers and faculty at your teacher's college contribute to your sense of belonging or isolation as a queer teacher in training?
5. In what ways did the curriculum and pre-service training prepare you to navigate the diverse needs of students, including those from the 2SLGBTQ+ community, in terms of teaching FSL?
6. Did you feel prepared to address homophobia or transphobia?
7. Do you have any other stories about FSL/teacher's college/ student teaching etc. that relate to FSL and gender/sexuality.

Interview 2

Welcome back!

- Hello, nice to see you again, Happy New Year!
- Previously, we talked about your becoming a queer FSL teacher (e.g., queer youthhood, learning French, using French queerly, deciding to teach French).
- The focus of this interview is on your experience teaching French, specifically on how you navigate teaching the language.
- Like last time, this interview will likely go for about 60 minutes.

Personal and Professional Experiences:

1. After you obtained your first teaching job, what kept/keeps you in the classroom?
2. Tell me a story about how you've changed from your first year to now?

Teaching practices:

1. Tell me a story about how you work around and incorporate conversations around sexualities in class, if at all?
2. How do you use or infuse queer pedagogy in your classroom, if at all?
3. Describe a time where you intentionally designed a lesson to be inclusion of marginalized genders and sexualities. Tell me about the impact this had on any students, if at all?
4. Have you experienced any challenges or obstacles in your FSL teaching because of your queerness?
5. Can you think of any examples where cisheteronormativity exists within FSL teaching in general, and within your contexts more specifically?
6. How do you address heteronormative assumptions or practices in your FSL teaching, if at all?
7. What is your relationship to queer issues and perspectives in FSL? Do you address them, ignore them, embrace them?
8. Tell me a story about being a queer FSL teacher and how this impacts your teaching?

Interactions and Relationships:

1. Tell me a story about how being a queer FSL teacher impacts your relationship with others in and outside of the building (e.g., students, teachers, administrators, parents, etc.). Have you been met with positivity or resistance by any of these stakeholders?
2. Do you have any stories about how your queerness is seen or viewed by others? If so, how do you handle these thoughts/feelings?
3. Do you collaborate with other teachers to ensure programming is inclusive of all genders and sexualities?
4. Tell me a story about any parent conversations you may have had come up regarding your approach to inclusive teaching?

Personal reflections:

1. How has being a queer FSL teacher influenced your own understanding of language education and its role in shaping societal attitudes?
2. How do you balance your identity as a queer individual with your role as an FSL teacher? Are there times where these aspects intersect in any way?

Interview 3

Gender Expression in the School Setting:

1. Tell me about a story of how you present your gender in schools.
2. Describe a time where you've wanted to perform your gender differently than you normally do.
3. Explain what it means to be a French teacher and perform your gender expression at the same time?

Intersectionality and Challenges:

4. How do you navigate the intersectionality of your gender expression and your role as an FSL teacher within the educational system? Are there specific challenges or opportunities you've encountered?
5. Can you share any experiences where your gender expression has influenced interactions with students, colleagues, or administrators? How do you manage these interactions while staying true to yourself?
6. Have you faced any obstacles or discrimination related to your gender expression in your role as an FSL teacher? How have you addressed or overcome these challenges?

Advice and Support:

7. Reflecting on your experiences as a queer FSL teacher, what advice would you offer to other educators who may be navigating similar intersections of identity and profession? What would you tell someone who felt like they may have troubles or obstacles to face because of their gender expression?

8. What could you share about surviving (and thriving) as a queer FSL teacher?
9. This whole project is meant to highlight the experiences of queer FSL teachers in their particular contexts. Were there any experiences or additional insights you wanted to share that weren't part of the three prongs we looked at (becoming, navigating, performing?).
10. Why do you think learning about queer FSL teaching or gender and sexuality in FSL is particularly important over other subjects, if at all?

Recruitment Poster

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

From the margins to the frontlines: A narrative inquiry into the experiences of queer FSL teachers

DO YOU:

- ☒ Identify as a queer, trans, or, nonbinary person?
- ☒ Currently teach French as a second language (FSL) in Canada?

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

 I'm a queer PhD candidate and FSL teacher in Ontario. I want to speak with other queer FSL teachers to learn more about their experiences in the classroom and how they navigate teaching (queerly).

WHAT WILL YOU DO?

You will participate in 4 interviews over the 2023-2024 year in person (if in the GTA) or over Zoom. In our meetings, we will discuss what led you to the field of FSL teaching, what queer FSL teaching resources and strategies you employ, and how performing your gender expression impacts your teaching.

INTERESTED?

If you're interested in being part of this research, please scan the QR code or go to <https://bit.ly/queerFSL> and fill out the form. If you have

Statement of Informed Consent

Consent Form

Title of study: From the margins to the frontlines: A narrative inquiry into the experiences of queer French as a Second Language teachers in Ontario

Principal Investigator:
Robert Grant
Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa

Supervised by:
Dr. Stephanie Arnott
Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the above mentioned research study conducted by Robert Grant by his doctoral thesis supervised by Dr. Stephanie Arnott.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to explore how self-identifying queer FSL teachers navigate teaching and perform their gender expressions within their schools.

Participation: My participation will consist of participating in four 60 minute interview sessions -- either in person if in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) or on Zoom -- led by the principal investigator, who is also an FSL teacher. During these meetings, I will be asked to discuss the experience of becoming a queer FSL teacher, how I navigate queer FSL teaching, and how (and if) I perform my gender expression that reflects my gender identity in the classroom or school. I will be video and audio recorded in these sessions in addition to sharing photos for each session, and an artifact for one session. Once the principal investigator has begun the transcription and the writing stages, these drafts will be shared with me as an opportunity to clarify or nuance what I shared during our sessions together. I will be able to provide feedback on the principal investigator's interpretation of my narratives.

Benefits: My participation in this study will give me an opportunity to reflect on my experiences as a queer FSL teacher in Ontario. It will allow me to uncover some of the strengths and challenges, and will provide insight into what supports might be necessary to (continue) succeeding in the field.

Confidentiality: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for various forms of dissemination, such as the principal investigator's dissertation, related presentations (at the Faculty of Education or at conferences), or journal articles and that my confidentiality will be protected. Any physical data collected will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the principal investigator's workspace. All raw electronic data collected during this study (e.g., audio recordings, transcripts) will be kept on password-protected computers accessible only to the principal investigator. If conducting these sessions in person or online, it is possible that someone close to me will hear what I have to say. It is therefore important to plan my participation in a place that provides me with a minimum of privacy.

Anonymity: I understand that I may choose to provide a pseudonym that will be assigned to me during the transcription process and will be used to name files and in all forms of dissemination (e.g., faculty or conference presentations and journal articles). Since I will provide photos related to my queer FSL experience, I understand that my anonymity cannot be guaranteed if I choose to include identifiable (e.g., my face). Due to the nature of some of the sessions (i.e., photos and artifacts), my participation may be identifiable. I understand there will be opportunities to co-present or co-publish with the principal investigator findings, meaning my real name will appear related to this study. While participation in this component is external to the research project itself, I understand that these outputs may include identifiable information.

I understand that I am able to choose a pseudonym or appear in this study as myself. I understand that I will have until the last interview to make my decision known by emailing or verbally confirming with the principal investigator.

Conservation of data: All audio and video files of the interviews and transcripts made from the recordings will be retained indefinitely. The data will be stored on a password-protected computer. An electronic copy of all of the data collected throughout the study will also be saved on a password-protected external hard drive, locked in a filing cabinet in the principal investigator's workspace.

Compensation: I understand that I will receive a \$50 electronic gift card for compensation for my time in this study. If I choose to withdraw from the study, I will still receive this compensation.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I withdraw, I understand that all of my data will be removed.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or their supervisor. If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity via email (ethics@uottawa.ca) or telephone (613-562-5387).

It is recommended that I save a copy of this consent form for my records.

Acceptance: By signing my name below, I agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Robert Grant in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa.

Participant's signature:

Date :

Researcher's signature:

Date :